An Appreciative Inquiry of Factors Within a Primary School that are Perceived to Support Children Who Are 'At Risk' of Exclusion.

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Abstract

This research is set in a time where 'exclusion' is still deemed an acceptable response to children who need empathy, support and understanding. Within this context, this research seeks to not only embrace positive psychology, adopting a solution-focused approach, but places social justice at its core, fully embracing the rights and views of the child. The systematic literature review conducted highlighted research on secondary schools' exclusions and pupil referral units (PRUS) primarily after the exclusion had taken place focused on a 'problem saturated' narrative. The review therefore revealed a distinct lack of research focusing on preventative measures and how such measures can be employed within a primary school setting. Accordingly, this research uses Appreciative Inquiry (AI) within qualitative methodology to explore how factors within a mainstream primary school enable success for children who are at risk of exclusion (or have experienced fixed-term exclusion), according to the views of children, parents and staff. The research incorporates experiences of four children in KS2 who are at risk of exclusion, four parents/carers of those children and four members of staff within one primary school. Through the AI, underpinned by the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), the research identified a number of inter-related factors within the child's environment, which were perceived to work to prevent exclusion. The data was analysed using deductive Thematic Analysis (TA). The findings were applied to eco-systemic theory highlighting the complex interacting systems around the child working together to prevent exclusion. These include a nurturing school ethos, a restorative approach to behaviour, a learning environment to support emotional regulation and - perhaps most crucially - the importance of relationships. The thesis concludes by reflecting on the researcher's journey and the implications of these findings to inform future practice for Educational Psychologists when working with children who are 'at risk' of exclusion, with an aim to contribute to better outcomes.

Declaration

I declare that while registered as a research degree student at UEL, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award of this university or of any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University of East London, School Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within this thesis.

 I declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own and has been generated as a result of my own original research.

Signature:

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
ADHD	Attention Hyperactivity Disorder
BPS	British Psychological Society
DfE	Department for Education
EP (s)	Educational Psychologist(s)
FTE	Fixed Term Exclusion
HPCP	The Health and Care Professionals
LA (s)	Local Authority (Authorities)
RCT	Randomised Control Trials
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
TA	Thematic Analysis
UEL	University East London

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Chapter

This chapter sets out the context and provides an introduction to this research thesis, which focuses on primary school children who are at risk of exclusion. The researcher is primarily interested in discovering what are the successful factors in preventing exclusion within a real-world context. The researcher's position, personal and professional interests are explored, followed by key definitions. The current context of primary school exclusion is discussed at national and Local Authority level. The questions of who the excluded pupils are and the reasons for their exclusion are examined, highlighting the central issue of social justice and outcomes for this vulnerable group of children. The constructs surrounding 'behaviour' are critically addressed, related to school exclusion. The historical nature of exclusions is assessed, together with the changing landscape of legislation, political agendas and government reports. Finally, it ends with the aims of this research and its relevance to Educational Psychologists.

1.2 The Researcher's Position – Personal and Professional Interest

School exclusion has been a longstanding professional interest to Educational Psychologists and concern of the researcher for a number of years. Having worked as a learning support assistant, learning mentor, class teacher, SENCo and Assistant Head at schools in central London, the researcher has gained a wide range of experience with children who have been deemed 'at risk of exclusion.' Through these experiences, the researcher noticed a vast inconsistency of support, interventions, and the constructs of language that were being attributed to children. The problem-saturated 'within child' narrative dominated these cases and often led to the oppression of the children and their parents as a voiceless group within the process.

Through learning on the doctoral training, the researcher's position on the research has been grounded due to the familiarisation of the core values at the heart of Educational Psychology with social justice being central to practice. The doctoral training highlighted the importance of encompassing these core values, which are needed to work as an EP, into every day practice, within the central themes of social justice and human welfare, placing particular emphasis on oppressed and vulnerable groups (excluded children) and altering the 'status quo' of society (Prilleltensky and Fox, 1997), thereby challenging mainstream psychology. Reflecting on the researcher's previous career in education, this was an area that particularly resonated due to poorer outcomes associated with excluded children.

The researcher was influenced by a small-scale research project undertaken in Year 1 of the doctoral training course, which involved interviewing children in alternative provisions who had experienced exclusion. Although this provided insight into the children's narrative around exclusion, it was felt the preventative measures in their mainstream school had not been successful, resulting in the exclusion. Due to poor outcomes associated with children who experience school exclusion (Gill, Quilter-Pinner & Swift, 2017), a decision was made to adopt a positive psychology stance. This embraces a solution-focused perspective, moving away from a 'problem-based' child-deficit model, placing social justice at its core and taking the rights and views of the child to the heart of the research.

1.3 Definitions Surrounding Exclusions

The definition of a permanent exclusion is when the child or young person is refused re-admittance to school and is therefore required to seek alternative educational provision (DfE, 2017a; Munn, Cullen & Lloyd, 2000). The Education Act 2002 states that "a head teacher may exclude a child from school either for a fixed period or permanently" (Education Act 2002, 52.1).

A fixed-term exclusion (FTE) is when a child is reinstated to school after a defined period of time, under several set conditions. The child is not allowed to attend school for a limited amount of time during the exclusion. This can be no longer than five days and the school must provide work for the child to complete at home during this time. If this exclusion lasts longer than five days, the school has a legal responsibility to organise appropriate full-time education from the sixth day. (DfE, 2017a).

It is worth noting that additional to these two definitions, 'informal and unofficial exclusions' should be included within the terminology as unfortunately these are still widely used across the education system. These exclusions are not officially recorded because of recognition by the DfE designating them as illegal, they are described by the DfE (2017) as,

> *'Informal' or 'unofficial' exclusions, such as sending a pupil home 'to cool off', are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents or carers. Any exclusion of a pupil, even for short periods of time, must be formally recorded.*
>
> (DfE, 2017d, p10.)

Exclusion figures must be viewed with caution as they fail to take account of alternative measures adopted by schools that amount to unofficial exclusions, such as managed moves and internal exclusions despite the legislation. Once these measures are considered, the true figures could be significantly higher (Timpson, 2019).

Throughout this thesis, the term 'at risk of exclusion' will be used to describe children who have not been excluded from school but have been deemed by the school to display continuous disruptive and challenging behaviour that may lead to a permanent exclusion. They may have also experienced fixed-term exclusions. It is important to note that the researcher understands this term may be different depending on the individual's constructs and beliefs around exclusion. The term 'children' will be used to describe the children within

the research as this was the term that was widely used by the participants, which was in line with the emancipatory aspect of this research.

1.4 Primary School Exclusion Nationally

The majority of exclusions occur in secondary school (DfE, 2017), but Daniels, Cole, Sellman, Sutton, Visser and Bedward (2003) recognise a disproportionate number of children who are permanently excluded within secondary school had experienced difficulties whilst at primary school. This suggests a link between the two phenomena, signifying that early intervention and prevention ought to have replaced steps towards exclusion.

The rate of exclusion is calculated by 'the percentage of the total number of sole and dual registered pupils on roll on the January census day during the academic year,' (DfE, 2017a, p9). The rate of primary school permanent exclusions rose nationally for the first time in four years in 2016/17 to 0.03%. The most recent figures (2018/19) state that the rate of permanent exclusions in primary schools has reduced slightly from 0.03 to 0.02 (2 pupils per 10,000). Primary academies had a higher rate (0.04 per cent compared with 0.02) compared with Local Authority maintained schools. Looking at longer-term trends, the rate of permanent exclusions followed a generally downward trend from 2006/07 when the rate was 0.12 per cent (12 pupils per 10,000) until 2012/13, and has been rising since then, although rates are still lower now than in 2006/07.

The number of fixed period exclusions across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools has increased by 8 per cent from 381,900 in 2016/17 to 410,800 in 2017/18. The rate of fixed period exclusions in primary schools increased from 1.37 per cent to 1.40 between 2016/17 and 2017/18 (140 pupils per 10,000). In 2018/19 the rates increased again from 1.40 to 1.41 between 2017/18 and 2018/19 (141 pupils per 10,000).

It is worth noting that while primary school exclusions appear to be relatively rare, overall an average of 40 pupils per day are excluded. (0.1% of 8 million children in England

were permanently excluded in 2017). The very word 'exclusion' tells children from an early age they are not allowed to be part of a school community, they are the 'other' and should be outside. Indeed, in 21st century Britain, with so much focus on tolerance, acceptance and inclusion, the very use of the word 'exclusion' contradicts this notion.

1.4.1 Local Authority Context

Within the Local Education Authority (LA) where the researcher works, the rate of fixed term exclusions has been increasingly rising; in 2015/2016 it was 0.94 per cent (132 pupils), which has increased to 1.19 per cent (142) in 2018/19. This mirrors national trends (DfE, 2017a) which sees fixed term exclusions continuing to rise. However, the rate of permanent exclusions has significantly fallen. In 2015/16 there were ten permanent exclusions which rose to 15 in 2016/17 but in the following two years it dropped significantly to three in 2017/18 to one in 2018/19. Due to the rate of fixed term exclusions rising both locally and nationally, schools may be using this more frequently as an alternative to permanent exclusions, or unfortunately not recording unofficial exclusions. Either way, the hope is that 'exclusions' in any form will cease to exist. This research therefore is timely and pertinent to the LA and at a national level, addressing a priority issue of preventing both fixed term and permanent exclusions, and promoting equality and social justice for this vulnerable group.

1.4.2. Exclusion – Defining 'Behavioural Difficulties'

When considering exclusion, social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEND Code of Practice, 2015) are recurrently used to describe pupils and their behaviour. The most common reason for exclusion is disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2019a) attributing for 35% of all exclusions. The act of exclusion appears to be implying that the system see's excluded children as 'incompatible' with the normal world or rules of the classroom (Waterhouse, 2004; Orsati and Causton-Theoharis,2013). There is a continuing need for society to attribute reasons for exclusion to a 'within-child model', resulting in a complex process of labelling (Waterhouse, 2004).

Focusing on this model absolves those responsible for the child, resulting in failure to explore individual needs or examine the social world in which the child reside. Billington (2001) stated that we live in a culture whereby children are removed from school if their differences are believed to be unacceptable. Sadly, this continues to be the case 20 years on. Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013) argue against this deficit model, adopting a systemic model, suggesting the idea behaviour is a social construct that is entirely dependent upon the context. Apland, Lawrence, Mesie and Yarrow (2017) interviewed children who had previously been excluded and the language that had been used such as 'naughty' and 'bad' had remained with them, impacting their whole experience of education.

1.4.3. Who are the Excluded Pupils and What is the Impact?

The most recent report commissioned by the UK Government (Timpson, 2019) confirmed a fact society has known for almost two decades: the most vulnerable children in our society disproportionately experience school exclusion. Recent statistics (DfE,2018, 2019a) state that 78% of pupils who are permanently excluded either have Special Educational Needs (SEN) (despite representing 14% of the population) or are classified as eligible for free school meals (14.1% of the primary population). Students with SEMH needs have the highest number of exclusions (rate of 1.09%). Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift (2017) state one in two children who were excluded pupils were recognised as having SEMH needs.

Another worrying statistic is that boys are three times more likely to be excluded than girls (DfE, 2018a, p6). Pupils from Black Caribbean backgrounds had an exclusion rate that was three times the school population as a whole (DfE, 2018a, p7). School exclusion has been linked to mental health difficulties, substance abuse, antisocial behaviour, crime, low educational achievement (1% of excluded pupils obtained five GCSE grades, DfE, 2018b) unemployment and homelessness. The Ministry of Justice (2012) also concluded from a longitudinal study that 42% of prisoners have experienced school exclusion. Exclusion has a

wider cost implication, with the educational cost being £370,000 for a child across their lifetime (Gill et al., 2017).

1.5 Exclusion Since the 1990s

Dominating the last 20 years of political educational landscape has been an agenda for educational and social inclusivity, aiming to reduce exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003: DfEE, 1999b: Code of Practice). Policies have encouraged schools to retain and support children who are at risk of exclusion. School exclusion rates were at their highest during the 1990s. During this time, the government proactively worked to reduce exclusion, providing adequate funding for sufficient support work. Cole, McCluskey, Daniels, Thompson and Tawell (2019) state that when the government works collaboratively to reduce exclusions, providing adequate support, exclusion rates fall. This was evident by figures from 1999, when the number of exclusions started to fall for the first time. When the Labour government came into power in 1997, reducing exclusion was a significant policy area. Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2004) aimed to reduce social exclusion and had national strategies on attendance and behaviour emphasising social inclusion, working systemically through services, working jointly to affect change.

Interestingly, there was a decrease in exclusions by 15% between 1998 and 1999 and 1999/2000 (Ofsted, 2005). There was an increase in research into primary exclusion carried out during this time (Hayden, 2003). The researcher will therefore use this timeframe in the literature review as a source of evidence for preventing exclusion. Unfortunately, in 2010 the Conservative/ Liberal Democrat coalition moved away from ECM policy resulting in the rates starting to increase in 2012. Cole et al. (2019) interviewed key stakeholders over four jurisdictions and the reasons cited included: the change of curriculum; government reforms; stress on teachers and league tables; and pressure on results and data. The SEN Code of Practice (CoP, DfE, 2015) also changed the criteria for SEN pupils and the register decreased

27.95% from 2010-2016. Cole et al. also identified a strong link between exclusion and unidentified SEN needs.

1.5.1. Key Legislation

"Exclusion from maintained schools" (DfE, 2017), provides extensive guidance around the key legislation relating to exclusion. The legislation broadly informs and includes the issues related to primary exclusion, including the reasons and purpose of exclusions. The purpose of exclusions is justified as being part of a school's behaviour policy whereby exclusion is the definitive response to behaviour, consequently removing the child from their school setting (Education and Inspections Act 2006). The Education Act (2002) states that the reason for exclusion needs to be around disciplinary grounds. This is clarified by the DfE:

- In response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy:

- Where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or other in the school.' (DfE, 2017a, p.10.)

This legislation uses terms such as 'respect' and 'acceptable', which lend themselves to different interpretations, consequently accounting for fluctuating rates of exclusions between schools, depending on the head teacher's constructs around the meanings of these words. Unfortunately, references to exclusion throughout the legislation focus on a behaviourist response to disruptive behaviour, advocating the 'within-child' medical model. This research is interested in examining positive influences that prevent exclusions, focusing on ecosystemic factors moving away from the traditionally problem-saturated language which the legislation is laden with.

1.5.2 Relevant Inquiries and Government Reports

The Timpson Report (2019) was commissioned by the Government in response to the concern over increasing use of exclusion since 2012/13. This report was overdue but has been

criticised for not reflecting conflicting legislation concerning league tables, national statistics and Ofsted inspections, factors contributing to increased pressure on schools to focus on academic standards instead of adopting a social and mental health orientation. Bogdan (2015) argues that these academic pressures and increasing demands lead to greater disadvantage for vulnerable children, resulting in contradictions between exclusions, children's rights and their welfare and protection. Spring (2000) highlights that children in the United Kingdom have a legal right to education, a factor often overlooked in the exclusion debate.

Persistent themes highlighted by the Timpson Report (2019) to prevent exclusions were based on minimising disruptive behaviour. These themes were related to values, collaborative multiagency involvement, policy, adequate funding, local and national level, and whole school, targeted groups and individual interventions (Cole, 2019). The focus is on minimising 'disruptive behaviour', as this is primarily the highest stated reason for exclusions. However, is minimising the behaviour going to address the underlying causes, creating better long-term outcomes for the children?

Ofsted's (2009) survey of 69 primary schools reported that effective management of low-level disruptive behaviour was a key feature in reducing the use of exclusions with children at a young age in all schools. These schools were led by head teachers who viewed exclusion as a last resort and placed great emphasis on valuing the individual, forging strong relationships with the families.

1.6. Theoretical Frameworks and Psychological Theory Underpinning this Research

1.6.1. Positive Psychology

Historically, Educational Psychology has been dominated by a deficit model. However, there has been a steady increase away from this focusing on strengths. Due to the nature of exclusions, this research will be underpinned by positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which aims to see strengths focusing on what individuals need in

order to be successful. Positive psychology is consistent with the emancipatory aspect of this research, aiming to promote positive change for the children within the research. Positive psychology has been used with positive results (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), including increasing confidence and obtaining goals. Psychologists (Chafouleas & Bray, 2004) have studied how to incorporate positive psychology into schools, highlighting the need for a systemic framework that builds in a positive school environment.

Positive psychology favours strength-based solution focused approaches, aiming to see people's strengths and capacities. When selecting the method of data collection, it was imperative to the researcher that it would benefit the children and the system they reside in, bringing transformative change consistent with the social justice agenda. Therefore, this research will use Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008) as a method of data collection. AI is a solution-focused approach to organisational change (in this case the school) (Cooperrider et al., 2008), seeking to bring about positive change through the act of inquiry, building on the school's existing strengths. (Hammond, 1998).

1.6.2. Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs. Anderson, Boyle and Deppeler (2014) state that Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory provides a framework for identifying, organising and understanding the factors within these environments, and the relationships between complex systems, in this case children who are 'at risk' of exclusion. Therefore, this framework will underpin the present research as it acknowledges how settings and relationships affect individual development rejecting the 'within child' model. It investigates institutional structures (in this case, schools) focusing not

solely on the individual, but rather the interaction between individuals and their

environment, supporting the solution-focused positive psychology nature of the research.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that "the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next," (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). These are as follows:

- **The Microsystem**: this system sits directly around the learner with the child at its core. It contains the factors within their environment that the child directly experiences on a daily basis. This includes interpersonal relationships with teachers, non-teaching staff, peers, learning spaces, classrooms, resources and the playground. Within this system, values and beliefs held by others can impact the child, and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

- **The Mesosystem**: this system differs from the other systems promoting the idea that factors in the microsystem do not sit in isolation, relationships constantly change and evolve and are not static. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

- **The Exosystem**: within this system, the child is not actively a part but yet the interacting factors still have influences over the child's experiences of school and learning. For example, this can include school leadership structure, culture, ethos, policies and resources allocation which all have a direct impact on the child. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

- **The Macrosystem**: this system is outside the direct physical environment of the school but influences the inner systems within the framework. Within a school context it relates to systems in which the school exists in relation to social, political, educational systems and current agendas such as school performance and change in assessment and curriculum. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

1.7. Relevance of Reducing Exclusions for Educational Psychologists

This research is relevant and current to the Educational Psychology profession. Educational Psychologists are committed to limiting the effects of barriers to learning and promoting the inclusion of children (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). However, exclusion rates continue to fluctuate (DfE 2016a, DfE, 2017a). The Health and Care Professionals (HPCP) Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2016) and the standards for the accreditation of Educational Psychology training in England (BPS, 2017a) include the EP's role to reduce exclusion. Therefore, Educational Psychologists have a professional obligation to support schools in reducing exclusion and contributing to better outcomes for this vulnerable group.

1.8. Research Aims and Contribution

This chapter has highlighted the multiple issues surrounding exclusion, yet exclusion continues to be used on a daily basis with often catastrophic consequences for the child and their family. There is an urgent need to end this perpetual negative cycle of poor outcomes for this vulnerable group, altering the status quo. The current research draws upon positive psychology, embracing a solution-focused perspective promoting transformative change for children who are at risk of exclusion within primary schools. This research aims to provide an innovative contribution to this area by embracing an ecosystemic approach in a 'real world' setting. It will aim to do this by incorporating all stakeholders' views, empowering the children within the process and promoting social justice.

In chapter two, a full systematic and critical literature review of current research into what works to prevent exclusion of primary aged children will be conducted with the aim to identify current gaps in the research concluding with defining the research aims and questions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter critically analyses existing literature, looking at successful interventions or strategies for primary school aged children who have been identified as 'at risk' of exclusion. Central to this research is a solution-focused, positive psychology approach, therefore the primary goal will be to assess what has worked in a 'real-world' context. The research is underpinned by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1996), which acknowledges how settings and relationships affect individual development. The literature review examines the complex systems around the child, including interventions, whole school strategies and multi-agency involvement, seeking to obtain views from all stakeholders (pupil, parent and the school). The synthesis of the literature is discussed and presented with key themes from the systematic literature review. These themes are then used as part of the rationale for this piece of current research and research question. Additionally, the psychological theories discussed in chapter one that underpin this research were explored throughout the key themes in order to provide further insight and support the methodological framework of this current piece of research. As part of the systematic literature review, the researcher's aims were to critically discuss current literature and to consider the following question:

- What does previous research tell us about what is effective in preventing primary school exclusion from the perspectives of the children, parents and teachers?

2.2. Literature Search

2.2.1 Search Strategy

The researcher identified potential search terms that would be used. The research is focused on primary schools (children aged four to eleven), due to extensive studies that have

already been conducted in secondary schools and the context within the local authority discussed in chapter one, so the search terms "primary school" AND (exclusion or expulsion) were used. These terms were selected based on 'primary school' and 'exclusion' or 'expulsion' having to be present within all the papers. The wider search terms are congruent with ecological systems theory as they allow a range of 'systems' to be identified within the studies.

2.2.2 Details of Systematic Literature Review

On 02.07.2020, a systematic literature search was carried out, critically reviewing the research on preventative interventions and strategies to support primary school children who are 'at risk' of exclusion, with a specific focus on children, parental and the school's perspective. The databases that were searched were Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Abstracts (H.W. Wilson), Education Research Complete, Educational Administration Abstracts, ERIC, APA PsycInfo, Teacher Reference Centre. The final search terms that were used were "primary school" AND (exclusion or expulsion). The parameters were set to include 'peer reviewed'. The timeframe selected was 2000-2020 due to the historical nature of 'exclusion' and the researcher wanting to access a broad range of studies reflecting the fluctuating rates of exclusions and changing political landscapes and agendas. The Prisma 2009 Flow Diagram (Appendix A) presents the results from the systematic review.

Articles and abstracts were reviewed (n=198) and exclusion criteria applied, resulting in 31 records for full screening. A further 14 articles were excluded after the full papers were read (Appendix B) leaving 15 studies included in the review. A further two articles were identified via hand search through the literature review (identified through reading the references from selected papers). The total number of articles that were selected for review was 17, and these can be found in Appendix C. A summary of the strategy used for the literature review is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of systematic literature review strategy

Date	02/07/2020
Timespan	2000 - 2020
Search Language	English Language
Databases	Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Abstracts (H.W. Wilson), Education Research Complete, Educational Administration Abstracts, ERIC, APA PsycInfo, Teacher Reference Centre.
Search Terms	"Primary school" AND (exclusion OR expulsion)
Parameters	Peer-reviewed, English Language
Results	**N= 455** (duplicates removed) **N=198**
Exclusion Criteria	• Studies that do not have a focus that relates to an intervention or strategy to reduce the risk of permanent or FTE from school • Research that does not relate to primary aged children • Not in English language • Conducted before 2000 • Not peer reviewed • Studies that focus on permanently excluded children • Studies that are based in PRUs
Inclusion Criteria	• Studies involving parent, pupil or teacher views • Primary aged children aged 4-11 • Studies in mainstream school • Pupils who have been identified as 'at risk' of exclusion or have experienced fixed term exclusions. • Intervention or strategy that that has had some success to prevent exclusion.
Articles selected	N=15 (from systematic literature review) NB - A further two articles were identified to include via hand search. **Total number of papers selected: 17**

Three studies that were identified focused on therapeutic group interventions (Renwick & Spalding, 2002; Cullen-Powell & Barlow, 2005; Costello & Lawler, 2014). A further two studies concentrated on group interventions that focused on communication (Law & Sivyer, 2003; Rechten and Tweed, 2014). One of these papers included views from parent,

teacher and child. Three papers focused on interventions specifically targeted at parents (Waters, 2015; Smith, Jackson & Comber, 2013; Day, Kowalenko, Ellis, Dawe, Harnett & Scott, 2010) and included views from all stakeholders. Five whole school studies were identified (Hatton, 2013; Hallam, 2007; O'Connor & Colwell, 2002; Bevington, 2015; Evans and Cowell, 2013). Three studies focused on multiagency intervention (Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot 2007; Maguire et al., 2001; Rose, Stanforth, Gilmore & Bevan, 2018). A meta-analysis of preventative studies (Cole, 2015) was also identified and included in the review.

Based on the identified studies, selected themes were pinpointed. To provide a framework for the literature review, the articles were ordered into relevant themes, exploring parental, teacher and pupil perspectives (when included) throughout the review using a solution-focused, positive psychology lens. Themes are congruent with the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), which acknowledges how settings and relationships affect individual development and have been used to structure the literature review. The themes are as follows:

1. Targeted approaches with children at risk of exclusion involving group interventions.

2. Targeted approaches with parents of children at risk of exclusion.

3. Strategies involving school systems.

4. Strategies involving the local authority.

2.3 Targeted Intervention Approaches

Primary school one-to-one intervention focused on individual school-based counselling. The issue identified by Cole (2015) with such interventions is that the majority of schools (quantified by Cole, 2015, as 72%) finance such interventions themselves, potentially meaning some children may not access this support due to funding, highlighting the power imbalances between systems. The use of school-based counselling was also

referred to in The Children's Society (2018b), which helped to reduce levels of school exclusion by around 31% (Banerjee, 2010). Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Trotman, Tucker & Martyn, 2015; Spink, 2011) was cited primarily in preventing exclusions in secondary school. There were no studies in the literature search that were identified that explicitly evaluated the impact of one-to-one individual intervention in primary schools.

2.3.1 Therapeutic Group Interventions

Earlier studies involving interventions for primary aged children were principally interested in providing nurturing environments (Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001; O'Connor & Colwell, 2002). The 'Quiet Place Project' coincided with the social inclusion agenda outlined by the Department for Education and Skills in England and their Excellence in Cities Programme (DfES, 2001). Renwick and Spalding (2002) evaluated the programme. It was delivered to 172 children across seven primary schools, including a control group attempting to strengthen/validate the findings (which the majority of studies within this review omitted). A room was set up within a school or a community and a six-week therapeutic intervention with a psychotherapist was provided with two, 45-minute sessions per week. The pupils, parents and teachers were interviewed throughout to monitor the process. The responses were described as 'favourable' and parents wanted the intervention to continue. 86% of the parents and teachers interviewed suggested that improvements had been identified.

The study produced some statistically significant short-term promising results compared with the control group (tests revealed that the overall change in behaviour was (p< .001), with both qualitative and quantitative results indicating a significant impact on what they describe as 'negative' behaviours decreasing. The programme claimed to build on existing strengths, activating inner resources (congruent with the researcher's solution-focused paradigm) rejecting the 'deficit' model of psychotherapy. However, the very nature of the intervention is about changing the behaviour of the child, which contradicts this. One

behaviour was described as 'obeying instructions', which raises questions what the priority actually was for the children and how behaviour was being socially constructed within the study. The author claims that due to a reduction of these behaviours, the children's likelihood of exclusion would decrease, however this claim is not quantifiable, but it is interesting to consider the social constructions of desirable behaviours that suggest a child is less likely to be excluded.

The Self Discovery Programme (Cullen-Powell & Barlow, 2005) had a similar focus to the 'Quiet Place' project focusing on increasing children's awareness of their cognitions, emotions and behaviour by providing children with practical skills such as positive touch, yoga, breathing and relaxation. It was established in the theoretical framework of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988). Children (n=126) aged 8 to 11 participated in the study, who were deemed to be at risk of exclusion. The intervention consisted of 12 sessions weekly for 45 minutes. Sensory awareness, peer massage, communication and relaxation were delivered during the study. Cullen-Powell and Barlow (2005) found that pupils who attended the intervention achieved higher scores of pro-social behaviour, as well as decreased hyperactivity levels. This was measured by teachers completing a nine-question behavioural profile and Goodman's (1997) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, combined with observations by a researcher. Pupils' perspectives and parental perspectives of the intervention are omitted from this research making the results dependent on views of one stakeholder (teachers) as to the construction of behaviour, contradicting the ecosystemic approach.

Cullen-Powell and Barlow (2005) concluded that there is a need for early interventions supporting wellbeing, self-esteem in a safe environment with less emphasis on academic achievement. Comparable to Renwick & Spalding's work (2002), this was a small-scale study, and the changes could have been due to other factors rather than specifically the

intervention. Longer term monitoring and evaluation of a wider range of implications of these effects in terms of cost, benefit and social impact would have been beneficial.

More recently, the focus of much of the research has shifted to alternative interventions such as mindfulness. Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment, which can be developed through the practice of meditation and other training. These studies indicate that mindfulness has a positive effect on children from a low socio-economic background (Black & Fernando, 2013; Klatt, Browne, Harpster and Case-Smith, 2012). However, it is notable that these studies focused on quantitative outcomes and did not focus on children's perspectives, only teacher and parental reports. Despite the apparent correlation between lower socio-economic background and exclusion, assumptions that children in the study were at risk of exclusion should (again) be treated cautiously.

A study involving 63 primary schools evaluated a five-week programme using mindfulness-based therapy (Costello & Lawler, 2014). The sample comprised of children who were deemed to be at risk of exclusion and utilised a qualitative methodology involving n = 16 children and n = 2 teachers. The study recognised the lack of pupil perspective and reliance on quantitative outcomes in previous studies (Burke, 2010; Greenberg & Harris, 2012). The children expressed that mindfulness enriched their understanding of thoughts and feelings enabling them to deal with stress more effectively. It should be noted that two participants found the first sessions upsetting, citing that they gained more awareness of their 'sad' feelings. However, they chose to carry on.

There were improvements, including communication with teachers (p < .001) and contributions in class (p < .001). The findings supported the incorporation of mindfulness into the curriculum as a means of empowering children addressing stress in their lives. However, the evidence to support this claim appeared to be far from conclusive. The authors

concluded that the application of mindfulness therapy improved full participation in the education system, albeit this claim appears to be quite generalised with no longitudinal data to support it. The study omitted a control group, questioning whether the findings can be generalised outside the study participants.

2.3.2 Communication Interventions

Attwood, Croll, and Hamilton (2003) emphasise the importance of good communication and positive relationships within the school environment, noting that poor relationships at school can exacerbate children's problems. The relationship between emotional and behavioural difficulties and language problems has been well documented in the literature (Benner, Nelson & Epstein, 2002). There is also a concern about the under-reporting of speech and language difficulties (Cross, 1997), which can present in behaviour that may be deemed as 'problematic' such as inattentiveness or social withdrawal.

Law and Sivyer (2003) reported that a course of communication skills teaching for children at risk of exclusion had a profound impact on the language, social communication skills and self-esteem of those children, together with some indication of an impact on emotional wellbeing. The sample was n=31 children aged 8 - 11 and included a control group; however, at its conclusion the study only comprised n= 20 children due to absences and children being excluded within the time of the intervention.

The study refreshingly encompassed parental, teacher and pupil perspectives, taking a systemic viewpoint. An interesting point to note is the significant difference between parents' and teachers' perceptions of the pupil. Consistently, parents viewed their child in a more positive light. However, the intervention was successful in changing teachers' perspectives of children. Parents viewed the intervention as 'less threatening' compared to social services and felt their children were less stigmatised. Pupils expressed positive views; the benefits they described were having fun, making new friends and listening more.

Rechten and Tweed (2014) conducted an exploratory study investigating staff opinions using a communication and feedback intervention for children who were at risk of exclusion. The Maguire and Pitceathly model (2002) utilised role-play to improve communication skills with children aged 4 - 18. The principles of this model are underpinned by Carl Rogers' approach (1957) using a person-centred approach to intervention with unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence. Five workshops with 32 participants were established so staff could express their opinions on whether this intervention would benefit children who are at risk of exclusion; the majority of views articulated were positive. This is similar to the view expressed by Coad, Pontin, Smith and Gibson (2010), who reported that simulated role-play is an effective strategy. These studies did not gain children's views, citing ethical reasons for precluding them from the research. Potentially this would have enriched the relevant findings and bolstered the claim of success.

2.3.3 Nurture Groups in Schools

A well cited intervention for children at risk of exclusion is nurture groups (DFES/DoH 2004, Hallam, Rogers and Castle, 2005b, DFE, 2014a). This is a small class of up to 12 children, within a mainstream school. Bennathan and Boxall (2000) stipulate the core principles needed for a nurture group and the children who are targeted are often children with insecure attachments. Nurture groups are grounded in Bowlby's (1965) attachment theory, suggesting that the adaptation to school is determined by the quality of the interaction between the caregiver and the child. A nurture group aims to provide a secure, predictable environment where children can develop a trusting relationship with the member of staff facilitating the group. Nurture groups have been recommended as a method to reduce exclusions (Ofsted, 2009a; Scottish Government, 2011). However, Bennathan and Boxall (2000) state that if the nurture group is not set up in a 'classic' way, then it may not have the intended outcome. Schools need to have resources, space and funds to establish a group

effectively. This intervention still sees the children removed from their mainstream class and what could be interpreted as segregated from, rather than included within, the school.

O'Connor and Colwell (2002) used the Developmental Diagnostic Profile to evaluate a nurture group in three primary schools with n=68 children over a period of two years. Their findings provided support of the use of nurture groups in the short-term, with significant improvements noted in each sub-stream of the profile. However, the long-term outcome showed a relapse in four areas (connect up experiences, insecure sense of self, negativism towards others, disregarding others) which could have been due to the fact they were reintegrated back in a mainstream environment having to navigate social interactions, academic expectations and different relationships. There was a small improvement on ten sub-streams (not statistically significant), demonstrating no significant improvement in the long-term for half of the sub streams. This intervention aims to address attachments; however, it is omitting the parents/careers which is perhaps why the improvements were not sustainable long-term.

The therapeutic group interventions signified some short-term success (with some improvements related to specific scales of behaviour) (Cullen-Powell and Barlow, 2005). However, there was an emphasis on trying to change behaviour, pre-supposing that there is a problem within the child, rather than focusing on positive, solution-focused interventions. (Renwick and Spalding, 2002; Costello and Lawler, 2014). Law and Sivyer, (2003) and Rechtena and Tweed (2014) focused on developing communication skills. Law and Sivyer (2003) provided the most comprehensive example witnessed by the researcher in the review of student, parent and pupil views which were positive with parents feeling supported.

2.4 Interventions in Partnership with Parents

The benefits of schools working closely with parents whose children are at risk of exclusion have been widely recognised. (DFES/DoH2004; Ofsted 2011a; Porter, 2014).

Building positive relationships with parents can help reduce exclusions in primary schools (Ofsted, 2009). Unfortunately, the DfE annual survey of NQTs conducted between 2012 - 2017 reported that half of teachers (54%) did not feel confident or prepared when communicating with parents (Ginnis, Pestell, Mason and Knibbs, 2017). Another important point is the potential for 'power struggles' within these relationships, with schools primarily dictating the scope, extent and nature of relationship with parents. (Gazeley, 2012).

Waters (2015) evaluated Story Links, which is a group intervention for 6 to 11-year-old children who are deemed to be at risk of exclusion and have been identified as having literacy difficulties. It is a ten-week intervention (20 minutes per week) that co-creates stories, addressing pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs by projecting their own emotions into the story; the project ran for 20 months. An educational professional undertakes a three-day training course. The model has a systemic structure so additional professionals can also be invited to attend the sessions.

The evaluation of the project includes both qualitative and quantitative measures to increase in-depth data from all stakeholders. Individual case profiles were included. The Goodman's SDQ was used to ascertain the pupil's emotional anxiety, which was completed by their teacher and parents and indicated an improvement in children's emotional and social wellbeing at the end of the intervention. The theoretical background draws upon Bowlby's (1988) concept of attachment (similar to nurture groups), highlighting the importance of parental involvement and academic achievement by engaging in a mutually enjoyable activity.

There was a reduction in pupil rates of exclusion: during the intervention there were no pupils excluded from school; prior to this, 11 of the 12 students had been regularly excluded. However, there is no longitudinal data to show lasting impact of the intervention. Parental attendance within the intervention was high, with the majority attending all sessions

despite previously having no regular contact with the school. This was supported by pre-intervention meetings, phone calls and text reminders. The attendance indicated that they viewed the intervention as beneficial, however, there was no qualitative data confirming this.

Smith, Jackson and Comber (2013) evaluated three therapeutic early interventions set up to prevent exclusion and truancy and which were evaluated by the Office for Public Management (OPM) in March 2011. The word 'truancy' highlights the period in which the research was undertaken as this terminology is out-dated and has many different implications and connotations. One of the interventions focused on secondary aged children but 'Learning 2 Learn' and 'Family Group' were both based in primary school. The common theme of these interventions is the claim to move away from the deficit model, working with families and students to recognise strengths, resilience and skills. The interventions have resulted in a change in the way that the schools understand and interpret behaviour, and the constructs around language. The author attributed the success of the interventions to establishing a power-dynamic with the support worker that differs from the usual 'teacher-parent'. It may have been useful to look at the success of this relationship and how this could be transferred to creating it with the teacher.

Both quantitative (exclusion data) and qualitative measures (interviews with pupils, parents and teachers) were used to evaluate the interventions. The author advocates for both methods as quantitative data has to be interpreted with caution when considering exclusions due to wider context. This could be the result of an isolated incident and therefore not reflecting the previous progress of the children and the systems surrounding them.

SWIFT family group is a targeted intervention working with children and parents in a school-based multi-family therapy session using the Marlborough model. Sessions take place in school for half a day a week. Therapeutic support is provided by a therapist and a school-based member of staff. It aims to reduce the risk of exclusion by working with the whole

family to address any issues that are rooted in family dynamics, diverting away from punishing disruptive behaviour but placing an emphasis on why the behaviour is occurring. The impact of this intervention was universally positive; parent-child relationships improve because parents feel more confident and empowered in their parental role, and children feel more supported and secure, often leading to improved attendance, behaviour and attainment at school. The schools reported improved relationships with parents and children, and fewer disruptions in class. All three participating schools continued with the intervention when the funding ceased.

Learning 2 Learn (L2L) is an intervention that was run across six primary schools. The project had a base in one of the primary schools where the majority of the support took place. It is underpinned by the THRIVE approach, which draws on current thinking in neuroscience, attachment theory, child development, and research into the role of creativity and play in developing emotional resilience. The aim is to enable children to develop their self-awareness, empathy and reflective capacity, and the ability to express their feelings.

An overarching theme of the interventions was the engagement of parents. Parents felt the therapists were empathetic, non-judgemental and created a genuinely caring, nurturing environment, which Waters (2014) also attributed to the success of the story writing intervention. It was similarly reported that there was an increase in emotional wellbeing for the children and a reduction in exclusions. Parents felt a sense of 'belonging' and welcomed the chance to support others in the group.

'The Helping Families Programme' (Day, Kowalenko, Ellis, Dawe, Harnett and Scott, 2010) is an intervention grounded in an ecological framework seeking to address parental behaviour, cognition and emotion, parent, child and school relationships, social support and managing life events and crisis. It was aimed at families with children aged five to 11 who were at risk of exclusion and demonstrating severe and complex social and emotional and

mental health difficulties. The intervention was directed by the Medical Research Council (MRC) framework for complex interventions (Campbell et al., 2000). It was piloted with ten families and qualitative and quantitative data was collected. The measures used were the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, Meltzer, & Bailey, 1998), Overall Rating Scale (ORS) (Miller et al., 2003) and the Session Rating Scale (SRS) (Duncan et al., 2003). 80% of parents and 70% of teachers reported positive improvements in their child's behaviour. 100% of parents reported that their overall wellbeing had increased and 90% reported improved relationships with teachers. This programme is available for families to access now based on the evidence from the pilot study.

This intervention is solution-focused and strength-based as it focuses on making changes and is action-orientated rather than historically focused. The narratives explained by families suggested that, historically, assessments had focused on extensively talking about past experiences and that they had perceived practitioners to be hostile and reluctant to take their viewpoint into account. The original plan was to have two to three sessions per week, with families wanting one contact with whom they would deal (one family had had 28 workers across 14 agencies work with them). However, the criterion for the children to be involved is 'severe conduct disorder at risk of exclusion'. By its very nature, it lends itself to a more child deficit medical model as the child has already been given a label to explain their behaviour.

Cole (2015) cites the Incredible Years programme in his review for preventing exclusion. It is delivered to children by educational psychologists and takes place in schools avoiding any difficulties with home accommodation, which reduces the dropout rates (Brown, Khan and Parsonage, 2012) and reduces stigma associated with mental health intervention (Brown et al, 2012). It is a three-pronged programme working with children, teachers and parents. It draws upon a range of approaches: Bowlby's theory of attachment, by

nurturing relationships between parent, teacher and child; Bandura's self-efficacy, focusing on self-management, cognition and self-control; and Patterson's (1982) social learning model, emphasising the importance of teachers and parents changing their behaviour to meet the needs of the child. It aims to support children's SEMH needs, contributing to school achievement and employment, and preventing crime. It is delivered to groups of around six children in 18-20 sessions of two hours' duration each by two practitioners.

Webster-Stratton (1998) considered how to make optimal family engagement with interventions more accessible by considering points such as accessibility for hard-to-reach parents (with a focus on close proximity, cost effectiveness, a non-clinical setting and flexible timing). One strand of the programme is 'Dinosaur School', which develops social skills of children from three to eight years old, with the second strand aiming to develop parent-child interactions. NICE (2013) recommended it through the years of Coalition Government. The Home Office also recommended it as one of the evidence-based interventions for anti-social behaviour. In fact, the two most vigorous evidence-based interventions were conducted in the USA. However, both studies using Randomised Control Trials (RCT) have identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child outcomes.

` Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1996) conducted an RCT with 97 families who had children aged four to eight. They did a pre- and post-measure and a 12-month follow up. They reported improved social competence with peers and improved behaviour. Ramchandani & Iles (2014) acknowledge the changing roles where mothers are returning to work (differences remain culturally and globally) and the impact of fathers on children's long-term social, emotional and educational development is complex and undeniable.

2.5 School Systems, Culture and Policy

The Timpson Report (2019) (introduced in chapter 1.5.2) identified a number of whole school systems and school culture contributing to reducing and preventing exclusions.

Cole (2015) highlights that values and policy at a whole level should shape ethos, transferring into the classroom, relationships and individual children.

2.5.1 School Ethos

Cooper et al. (2000) stated that the ethos of the school influences its inclusivity, as does the use of disciplinary exclusions. Munn et al. (2001) described school ethos as underpinning all practice. Hatton (2013) studied the influence of school culture and highlighted a need for whole-school preventative approaches in primary school, as well as further investigation into successful practices for managing exclusion. Hatton (2013) acknowledged that the majority of school ethos studies have taken place in secondary school as this is where the vast majority of exclusions take place (DfE 2012a). Daniels, Hey, Leonard, and Smith (2003) stipulated that the children who are excluded from secondary have often experienced difficulties in primary, highlighting the ongoing need for early intervention.

Hatton (2013) identified 20 schools in her study, each categorised as socio-economically deprived by using the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). In the first stage of the study, six head teachers were approached, five of whom consented to a focus group. The school educational psychologists were approached to verify whether school practices reflect exclusion rates within the school. Five schools consented (three from excluding schools and two from non-excluding schools). After the data collection started it was only the non-excluding schools that included head teachers in the focus groups and interviews. One possible hypothesis for this is that they were reluctant to take part in a study that named their school as 'excluding school', potentially having a range of connotations for them as a leader. Themes were gathered using inductive-semantic thematic analysis seeking meaning from the complete data set. Thirteen themes were identified and organised into

different elements of the school's ethos. A questionnaire was then distributed to 16 out of the 20 schools that were initially approached.

The main themes identified were having a clear behaviour policy; positive relationships; a culture and ethos of respect; and staff beliefs. There was a disparity between how the various schools managed exclusion, supporting the hypothesis that exclusion can be a result of the school's ethos, not the student's behaviour. Hatton's (2013) research indicated that schools with a high level of social deprivation can be successful at including children with a range of needs and some elements of school ethos supports this.

However, this study had a number of limitations, including changing of the Senior Management Team (SMT) during the study, some of the 'excluding schools' had as few as two exclusions recorded and, most significantly, the lack of pupil voice. Steer (DCSF, 2009) highlights pupil voice as central to creating new policy and practice. There is the comparable aspect to studies of this nature of 'hidden exclusions' and 'unofficial exclusions' highlighted by Vulliamy and Webb (2001), which is not included in the data set.

This area is well cited, with a number of studies supporting the view that school ethos and teacher's beliefs play a central role in creating an inclusive environment (Reiser, Loeken and Dlugosch, 1995). An approach of dealing with exclusion on a purely individual basis, without a broader policy or culture, may be indicative of the school not taking responsibility for an in-school ethos issue (Docking, 1996). Cefai and Camilleri (2015) looked at the risk and protective factors of school exclusion and concluded that the literature has consistently shown that effective whole-school interventions need to start in primary school in order to have an appreciable effect.

2.5.2 Whole School Approach

In general, whole school approaches described in the literature focused on earlier intervention and prevention for all children and on embedding these in the school philosophy,

curriculum and culture. Evans and Cowell (2013) evaluated a whole school improvement programme (Solution Oriented School (SOS) (Rees, 2005) over one year, that was run in 26 primary schools by educational psychologists. The aim of the research was to reduce exclusions and absenteeism by addressing teaching and learning methods, supported by a consistent behaviour policy and a nurturing environment, prompting the wellbeing of all stakeholders.

Qualitative (interviews) and quantitative methods were used to evaluate the data. The author's aim was to include all stakeholders in the improvement process. The theoretical constructs of this study are based in cognitive and organisational psychology (Morgan, 1998; Schein, 2004), as well as being solution-focused, which is underpinned by social constructivism and systems theory (Stobie, Boyle & Woolfson, 2005).

The SOS programme provided three days' training for school representatives. A solutions-based approach was applied at all stages. LA data was used to look at fixed term exclusions over a four-year period. Fixed term exclusions significantly decreased ($p < .001$) and pupil (aged four to 11) self-esteem ($p < .05$) and staff self-esteem increased ($p < .05$) Some key factors in the success of the programme were the head teacher delegating and staff responding in a solution-focused way, rather than problem-focused. The programme had high level of dropouts (with 18 schools remaining in the evaluation stage). This had not been anticipated in the research; therefore, the sample size was less than 25 (which is what Cohen (1988) recommends for a true statistical analysis to have power to avoid a 'false negative').

2.5.3 School's Approach to Behaviour

Ofsted's (2009) survey of 69 primary schools reported that effective management of low-level disruptive behaviour was a key feature in reducing the use of exclusions with children at a young age in all schools, which is cited in the Timpson Review (2019). Schools incorporated head teachers who viewed exclusion as a last resort, placing greater emphasis on

valuing the individual and forging strong relationships with families. These schools also placed a strong emphasis on National Strategy's social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL).

Hallam (2007) reviewed a school improvement programme focusing on Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) and its role within the Behaviour and Education Support Teams (BESTs), looking at how it contributed to reducing exclusions and the factors that contributed towards its success. An important aspect of the work highlighted establishing effective relationships with parents, developing internal procedures and polices where emphasis was given to change at a whole school level. Hallam (2007) acknowledges that there are external factors that can contribute to exclusion rates between school (DfES, 2004). However, there are schools with high-risk populations with low exclusion rates which supported Hallam's (2013) findings. The study produces no direct correlation with reducing exclusion in primary schools, which the author claims is 'unsurprising' due to the low level of exclusion rates to begin with.

Restorative practice (RP) has been increasingly adopted in schools with an emerging evidence base reporting on its impact. It is based on a humanistic model of behaviour and support. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) report that staff perceive it as less an approach to behaviour and more of a philosophy of life. Previous studies of RP have focused on quantifiable data as concentrating on variables such as rates of attendance and exclusion rates (Kane et al., 2008; Skinns, Du Rose and Hough, 2009; Youth Justice Board), which as previously discussed can be problematic. Restorative practice in schools focuses on a common language around harm, with staff and pupils seeking to understand what has happened, who has been affected and what is needed to move forward and learn from this.

Bevington (2015) conducted an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (the only study in this review to use this as an evaluation method) in a primary school with 355 children on roll,

aiming to increase the evidence base highlighting the impact of restorative approaches in schools. It was one of the 20 primary schools that had been categorised as the most deprived in London. Six staff members engaged in the four stages of AI. The findings highlighted why staff felt this approach is not always possible and the importance of congruence between values, outcomes and members within the school community. The restorative values need to be in line with the school's values for the approach to be fully embedded. The AI methodology encouraged staff members to be honest, drawing on some potential limitations of the study as due to the positive nature of the methodology, a theme of 'guilt' surfaced, demonstrating that they should have been using this approach more. This arguably contradicts the philosophy of AI, which is grounded in positive psychology.

2.6 Multiagency Interventions

Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot (2004) set up a Home and School Support Project (HASSP), commissioned by the Department of Health, providing early interventions for children at risk of exclusion from primary school. There were two papers (Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot 2004a, and Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007) related to this; the first was a small study to understand how the intervention affected outcomes for pupils at risk of exclusion. The authors concluded that staff believed there was a necessity for a multi-disciplinary team working closely with schools, and staff needed to have a more holistic approach to school exclusion and emotional and behavioural difficulties, which was consistent with Hatton's (2012) findings on school ethos.

Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot (2007) conducted a second study that encompassed a formative evaluation of the effectiveness of the HASSP multi-disciplinary team with children, parents/carers and teachers. This was conducted through a randomised control trial featuring n=124 children who had had an FTE aged between four and 12 and had been assigned to an intervention. The study included interviews with children and teachers. The

results showed no statistical difference between the two groups. However, it did demonstrate a positive correlation in relation to the home-school support, thus highlighting the need for early intervention (Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007). Despite the study's authors claiming to look at cultural and social issues, the work tended to take a problem-based approach, stating that involved parties needed to 'accept the problem' and 'assess the child's difficulties', rather than taking a systemic approach.

Including Primary Aged Children (IPAC) (Maguire et al., 2003) was a government funded project established in primary schools with a high exclusion rate. It was a three-year project based in one LA looking at a case study using qualitative data collection. There are a number of issues with funded state projects such as this. For example, there is often little time for evaluation, and when the support team withdraw, there is a potential for the children to go back to being at risk if the practice has not been fully embedded. Three primary schools participated in the study. Interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders, SLT, parents but not the pupils. Approaches such as circle of friends (Newton and Wilson, 1999), worry boxes and school councils were most successful as it was felt that they empowered the children (when perhaps they feel 'powerless' with a multitude of adults making decisions), rather than more formal interventions where the children were a knowing participant. Due to exclusions often being related to poor peer relationships, interventions conducted with a whole class often have more success. Two schools felt that they could manage difficulties better and in one school there was no impact reported.

Maguire (2003) highlighted difficulties working with 'at risk' children individually as it could indirectly signal the child is to blame, thereby reinforcing the child deficit model discussed previously. The children could be missing out on other potential learning opportunities. There can often be a difficulty in recruiting parents, who can be reluctant to engage for fear their child is being labelled, which is evident in previous studies.

There appears to be a plethora of challenges related to inter-agency work, which is highlighted by Milbourne (2005). These can include time constraints, increased pressures on individuals and the focusing on individuals and families where the school system may be attributing the risk of exclusion to a deficit with the child or parent.

Parsons (2010) set up the project: 'Strategic Alternatives to Exclusion from School' to look at how local authorities can eliminate permanent exclusion. Rose, Stanforth, Gilmore, and Bevan-Brown (2018) built on this research and suggested that inclusive systems can develop across primary schools, incorporating a system of 'Transferred Inclusion' (TIs). This is where the child is transferred to another school (with a behaviour support worker), rather than having an FTE. Originally, six schools were involved, but this figure rose to 18. The number of FTEs decreased over the four years with the number of TIs also decreasing. This raises a question of how truly inclusive this system is, as the child is not participating fully in the school experience. The child is not in the same building and is therefore not 'included' in their classrooms, as suggested by Visser and Stokes (2003). The only viewpoint that was included in this study was that of the head teachers. This also sounds dangerously close to the 'managed move' system (Harris, Vincent, Thomson and Toalster, 2006) with the child being moved from one environment to another. These attempts to reduce exclusion do not necessarily indicate improved inclusivity and can be problematic as this 'fresh start' can often be delayed, resulting in significant time out of any setting.

2.6.1 Limitations of Review

Morrison (2009) recognised the issues with identifying methods to measure the effect of interventions in a real-world context within educational research. The studies within this review that are based on exclusion rates as their quantitative evidence for evaluating preventative initiatives are limited due to the individual nature of exclusion and the disparity in how it is used between schools (Hallam et al., 2005; Pavey and Visser, 2003). There is also

the well documented issue of hidden and 'unofficial exclusions', highlighting further difficulties with using this as a reliable evaluation tool. (Vulliamy & Webb, 2001). A further broader issue is that the consequences of interventions can be delayed (and therefore may remain unseen) for years (Little, 1996).

A large percentage of the literature cited in this review used qualitative measures with small sample sizes, which is limited in its transferability across different settings. As a result of this, the evidence of the impact of the intervention can potentially be limited. Gill et al. (2017) analysed data on exclusions and qualitative research and concluded there is inadequate robust evidence concerning 'what works' for preventing exclusion. Gill et al. (2017) also highlights that cuts in funding for services have contributed to the lack of preventative measures for reducing exclusion. A recent review of the SEBD inclusion literature highlighted a glaring lack of participatory action research conducted in this area (Willmann & Seeliger, 2016), which is evident from this review.

2.7 Rationale for the Current Study

2.7.1 Summary of Current Literature

Cole et al. (2019) highlighted the wealth of reviews, case studies, qualitative and quantitative studies that look at preventative initiatives for children who are at risk of exclusion. Many of these studies have focused on secondary schools and have been carried out after the children have experienced exclusion from their mainstream schools and are in an alternative provision (Martin, 2015). Due to the nature of these studies, they concentrate more on a deficit model focusing on negative school experience (Cefai and Cooper, 2010). Studies of parental views at primary schools have occurred after the children had been excluded (Macleod, Pirrie, McCluskey and Cullen, 2013) which often involve re-telling a problem saturated narrative.

The studies included in this review have focused on preventative measures for reducing exclusions with an emphasis on 'what works' from an ecosystemic perspective, focusing on positive and solution-focused psychology. The studies that have been included have resulted in differing levels of success in respect of changes to social, emotional and mental health and reduction of exclusions for primary aged children.

The literature review identified that school ethos, values, policy and collaborative working (shared by staff and parents) were important components contributing to the success of preventing exclusion, coupled with early identification and intervention. Addressing the ecosystemic nature of children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties working closely in partnership with parents (Smith et al., 2013) can all contribute to positive outcomes (Cole, 2018).

2.7.2. Objectives and Unique Contribution of the Current Study

Children who experience school exclusion have remarkably poor outcomes (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift, 2017). This systematic review has highlighted the lack of research in looking at what works to prevent exclusion from primary schools, with a distinct absence of pupil voice and participatory research. Listening to pupil and parent views is similarly encouraged by statutory guidance such as the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) (DfE, 2015; HM Government, 2014).

There is continuing need for society to attribute reasons for exclusion to a 'within child model', resulting in a complex process of labelling (Waterhouse, 2004), which is evident throughout the literature review. Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013) argue against this deficit model and instead adopt a systemic model, suggesting that the idea of behaviour is a social construct that is entirely dependent upon the context. As a result, this research will use a strength-based approach (AI) methodology to look at what works within a primary school for children who are at risk of exclusion, to punctuate the perpetuating cycle of

exclusion within the education system. A systemic approach to facilitate organisational change will include the perspectives of all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students) within the setting. This is of particular relevance owing to the researcher's current placement in a LA which is experiencing high rates of primary fixed level exclusions. Owing to the exceptionally poor outcomes for excluded children, this research is extremely pertinent. It will seek to move away from a 'problem-based' child deficit perspective, placing social justice at its core and taking the rights and views of the child into the heart of the research.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review set out to critically evaluate the research on what works to prevent exclusion from the perspectives of the children, parents and staff. Studies that involved targeted group interventions, interventions in partnerships with parents, whole school systems and multi-agency approaches were identified. The gaps in the literature that were identified included the lack of participatory and action research in the studies, including the voice of the children, limited studies looking at 'what works' to prevent exclusion from primary schools, and the use of solution focused techniques such as Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate positive change for children within a school system. As a result, the identified gaps have informed the research questions stated below.

2.8.1 Research Questions

What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion?

a. *From the perspective of the children?*

b. *From the perspective of the parents?*

c. *From the perspective of the staff?*

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction to Methodology

This research was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, with government restrictions still in place. Accordingly, in line with guidance published by the British Psychological Society (BPS), the government and the UEL research committee, the research has been adapted to be conducted remotely in a safe and controlled manner.

This research aimed to identify what factors support children who are at risk of exclusion in primary school, thereby successfully contributing to positive outcomes. Consistent with the conceptual theoretical framework of this study (outlined in 1.6.2.) ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1996), the research has been underpinned by perspectives of all stakeholders, acknowledging how settings and relationships can contribute effecting individual development. The appropriateness of the selected methodology (AI) congruent with the research aims and the ontological and epistemological orientation of the research will be justified and considered. The outline of the AI and data collection approaches will be defined, detailing the different stages of the study. Concluding the chapter will be the consideration of ethics and the validity and reliability of the research.

3.2 Research Paradigms

3.2.1 Research Paradigms

According to Kuhn (1962), a research paradigm is a common, shared belief between scientist about how problems should be understood. A research paradigm comprises of four elements: epistemology; ontology; methodology; and axiology. Denzin, Lincoln and Guba (2005) define four major research paradigms: positivism; pragmatism, constructivism; and critical/transformative paradigm. The differences in these paradigms and their context within this research project are outlined and discussed.

Positivism represents the belief that there is one reality, with 'absolute truths', which can be measured and known, lending itself to a quantitative approach to research (Clark, 1998; Denzin, Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Pragmatism recognises the existence of a single reality, whereby individuals have their own interpretation, rejecting the notion of social scientific inquiry requiring a single scientific method. The importance of the pragmatic view has been acknowledged in this research as "pragmatists believe that there is an external world independent of the mind as well as that lodged in the mind," (Creswell, 2014, p11). Though this research is qualitative, it has considered statistics related to primary school exclusion. The researcher's position is that these statistics tell us something useful about educational settings and their use of exclusions.

Constructivism rejects the belief that there is a single reality or truth, instead advocating the position that reality is interpreted and socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative methods are most likely to be used to understand these multiple realities. Emphasised is understanding the individual and their world around them, which is closely aligned with this research. The researcher acknowledges that language and discourse are powerful creators of reality. However, the researcher believes that there is a 'truth' for the children (e.g., they are at risk of exclusion as a consequence of their behaviour in school).

3.2.2 Transformative Paradigm

Positivist and post-positivist, constructionist and interpretivist approaches have been dominant in social research. Those who question these approaches are more aligned with the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010) as it addresses social justice, social and economic issues, social oppression, conflict, struggle, and power structures at differing levels. As previously stated, and discussed in chapter one, the children who are excluded are often from marginalised groups and have very poor outcomes (Timpson, 2019).

The researcher's values are consistent with the transformative paradigm as it reflects a connection between the research findings to promote the principles of respect, beneficence and social justice. Transparency and reciprocity are core values within this paradigm. These values connect the research outcomes and the social justice agenda (Mertens, 2010).

The transformative paradigm focuses on the strengths that reside in communities, which experience discrimination on the basis of their cultural values and experiences (Mertens, 2007, 2010). Another key objective of this research was to incorporate the views of children as far as possible, so as to ensure they can 'share power and responsibility for decision-making with adults,' (Shier, 2001, p.115). Action research and the application of participatory research is also central to the transformative paradigm and thereby is central to this research.

3.2.3 Ontology and Epistemology

Willig (2013) describes ontology as the nature of reality by asking the question, 'what is there to know?' Epistemology focuses on the meaning of knowledge and has been described by Guba and Lincoln (2005) as, "the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known" (p.201).

The researcher adopted the ontological position of critical realism. Critical realism provides a 'third way' between positivism and relativism but fulfils the emancipatory purpose of social research providing a platform for change, incorporating features such as valuing the perspectives of participants and promoting social justice (House, 1991). It is therefore consistent with the transformative paradigm. This framework also sees social transformation as an essential outcome of research, prioritising real-life experiences.

Bryman (2001) states that epistemology is guided by the ontological position of the research. Central to critical realism is the assumption that accounts of research participants (students, teachers and staff) are valid social scientific data that can lead to consequential social transformation if properly interpreted. Events take place in these 'real world' contexts, such as schools, that social actors (children) form part of and are inseparable from the complex open systems in which they operate. The aims of the research sought to promote positive systemic change through engaging a marginalised and powerless group (children at risk of exclusion and their parents) as active collaborators in the process.

Adopting a critical realist approach when devising hypotheses with stakeholders (pupils, parents and teachers) and then evaluating them in reality has been demonstrated to be an effective method for individuals working within value-based professions (Educational Psychology) and in complex 'open systems', like schools (ref, 2002). Taking a critical realist focus means that the aim of this research is not simply understanding but promoting change through understanding.

3.2.4 Axiology

Axiology refers to ethical issues that are considered within a research project, minimising harm and considering values (Finnis, 2011). Transparency and reciprocity are essential values within the transformative axiological position (Mertens, 2010) as there is a clear link between research outcomes and social justice. Within the current research, a key aim was to have the children participating fully and equally so they "share power and responsibility for decision-making with adults" (Shier, 2001, p.115). A key aim of the current study was to offer feedback on the research outcomes to the school community as a means to develop practices to support positive outcomes for students.

Within the transformative paradigm, Mertens (1995) describes the methodology as having a focus on systemic transformation throughout the research. The researcher has

adopted a methodology that adheres to this, as Appreciate Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008) contributes to systemic change. The ethical implications that Mertens (1995) also identified are consistent with the researcher's values. Mertens (1995) states the traditionally silenced voices must be included (children and parents of children at risk of exclusion who have previously not been heard), ensuring they are equally heard in the research process which is a fundamental part of this research. Mertens (1995) also believes that the outcome of the research should be linked to social action, with those least powerful (the children) taking a central role, empowering them to make change.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Action Research

The concept of action research seeks to bring a voice to those who taken part in research projects, by working co-operatively with them and thereby ensuring their commitment and involvement within the project (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), with a view to creating positive, transformational change. This method was deemed appropriate for this research as it seeks to instil positive change through a collaborative approach with stakeholders. Action research is a methodology congruent with the transformative paradigm.

The current study is 'second-person action research' as it enquires with others about how issues of concern are addressed (McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The purpose of action research is to produce useful and practical knowledge for people through engagement with participants in collaborative relationships, thereby empowering them in the process (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Early on in the research, the decision was taken to adopt an action research approach due to the transformative nature of the research.

3.3.2 Appreciative Inquiry

AI is a form of action research used for answering the research questions. AI is classed as 'second-person' action research, aiming to investigate, in a consultative and

collaborative way, issues of shared concern and how they can be addressed (McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Traditional action research tended to focus on a problem-solving approach, whereas AI focuses on what works and attempts to build on that (Hammond, 1998).

AI shares features of emancipatory action research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It involves all participants and collaborates in the change process (one of the important features of emancipatory research) (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). It is a solution-focused approach to organisational change (Cooperrider et al., 2008), seeking to bring positive developments through the act of inquiry (Hammond, 1998). Focusing on positives, it can support an organisation (in this case, a school), investigate and build on their strengths (Hammond, 1996).

AI assumes that language creates our reality (McAdam & Mirza, 2009). Mertens (2010) has criticised AI for focusing too much on the positive, not acknowledging the problem. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) argue that AI restricts the problem-solving and idea generation which can arise through discussing issues and difficult experiences. The literature and language constructed around exclusion remains problem-saturated and the researcher felt that a solution-focused approach is therefore most appropriate.

3.3.3 Rationale for AI in Current Research Study

AI was selected as the methodology for data collection in this research for several reasons. It was important for the researcher that the chosen methodology to answer the research question was used to benefit the participants and the system (school) in which they reside. AI was used for this research as it is consistent with its participatory, transformative and epistemological nature, offering a solution-focused approach to supporting children who are at risk of exclusion. The systematic framework of AI is consistent with the ecosystemic nature of this research. AI has been successfully used in educational settings to make changes

at the micro-level (e.g Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Burkhalter, K, 2010). The 5-D model (Cooperrider et al., 2008) of AI includes defining the topic within the first stage. However, the researcher felt that the topic was clear, and the 4-D cycle fulfilled the requirements for answering the research questions and was more time effective. Reed (2006) states that AI is an approach that overcomes power imbalances. AI empowers the participants by making them co-constructors of change within the organisation (the school in this research) (Nicholson & Barnes, 2013).

3.3.4 Appreciative Inquiry Process

AI primarily has a progressive design with transformative aims (Cozens, 2014). It involves a four-step process recognised as the '4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry' (Cooperrider et al., 1995). The 4-D cycle is presented in Figure 1 below and explained in table 2.

Figure 1

Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle
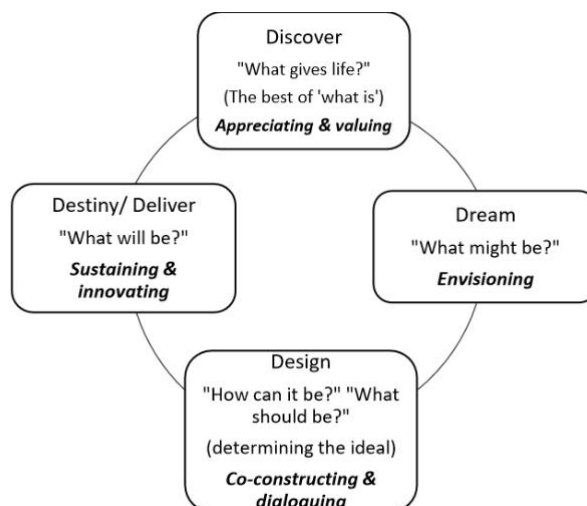
Adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008, p.34.

Table 2

The Four Stages of Appreciate Inquiry

Discover Phase	This phase identifies the 'best of what is' through investigating the organisation (within this research the school) best experiences using positive questioning.
Dream Phase	This dream phase involves expanding and building on the organisations past strengths and envisioning what could be possible.
Design Phase	The design phase involves the creating 'provocative propositions' which are statements describing an ideal set of circumstances to do more of what is best about the organisation (Hammond, 1998). These are based on the discover and dream phase.
Deliver/Destiny Phase	The organisation (school) delivers on the future plans. This involves action planning and carrying out these actions.

3.3.5 Philosophical Underpinnings of AI

Hammonds (1996) believed that something within every organisation works and, by building on past experiences and focusing on strengths, creates confidence and comfort. Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros (2005) stipulated five philosophical underpinnings of AI which are listed in Table 3. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) added the 'wholeness principle', the 'enactment principle' and the 'free-choice principle' at a later date.

Table 3

The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005)

AI Principle	Definition
The Constructionist Principle	Language and discourse are powerful creators of reality and the possible.
Simultaneity Principle	Inquiry is intervention. In asking questions we bring about change.
The Poetic Principle	An organisation's story is constantly being co-authored, there are endless interpretative possibilities.
The Anticipatory Principle	Imagining the future guides current action. Positive images of the future lead to positive actions.
The Positive Principle	The more positive a question we ask, the more long-lasting and successful the effort for change.
The Wholeness Principle	Bringing groups together stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity.

| The Enactment Principle | Positive change is created when change is a living model of the ideal future. |
| The Free-Choice Principle | Free choice stimulates positive change, commitment and better performance. |

3.3.6 Case Study Methodology

Yin (1994) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry exploring a subject within its real-life context. This study explores what is working for children within the school system which is 'contributing to our knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomena'. (Yin, 2009, p.4). The strength of a case study is the ability to conduct an enquiry within its real-world context without the requirement to duplicate the study within an experimental setting, strengthening the application within this study. AI advocates a strength-based emphasis on positive experiences, so an exploratory, single-case study design was used in this case.

There are many criticisms of the case study methodology, including a potential lack of stringency applied by the researcher (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) also suggests that a lack of generalisation can be criticised within a case study, however Yin states the purpose of a case study is not to make generalisations (congruent with the purpose of the current research) but to develop and generalise theories.

3.3.7 Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodology was considered most fitting for this research, aiming to give marginalised groups a voice (Willig, 2001) (children who are at risk of exclusion) and is congruent with the researcher's ontological and epistemological position of critical realism. Qualitative approaches are consistent with action research (Mertens, 2010) and the transformative paradigm. Within the AI methodology the researcher is an active representative, not witnessing the research but being the author (Willig, 2001). AI characteristically relies on interactive approaches such as group discussion and interviews.

Given the researcher's position, this study will use a qualitative approach incorporating individual interviews and focus groups.

3.4 Research Participants & Setting

3.4.1 Participant Recruitment Procedure

The researcher originally attempted to recruit a primary school by emailing (see Appendix D) a range of primary schools within the LA in which the researcher is currently training, as the research is designed to look at a specific group (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The primary schools were given the inclusion criteria that the children will have experienced FTE or be at risk of exclusion. The researcher was conscious of the impact of COVID-19 and the additional pressures placed on schools and participants. The EPS works closely with the local primary school pupil referral unit, given that this provision worked with a range of schools who had children that were identified as at risk of exclusion. Again, due to restrictions during lockdown, the researcher was unsuccessful in recruiting through email, so contacted the primary PRU to discuss recruitment procedures and primary schools that could have been potentially interested in the project. A school was identified that was interested in taking part and the researcher emailed and set up a telephone call with the head teacher to discuss the project during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Following this phone call, the researcher emailed the head teacher, providing further information about the research and the process. The head teacher agreed to participate in the study.

3.4.2 Research Setting

The research setting was a primary school for boys and girls within the LA in which the researcher works. It has 420 pupils on roll and nearly all the pupils are white British. The school has a higher proportion of SEN than the national average and also a high proportion of free school meals.

3.4.3 Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was used (Sarantakos, 2005) to select participants. The inclusion criteria were primary aged children in KS2 who have been identified as at risk of exclusion or have experienced a fixed term exclusion. Additionally, the children would have also received extra support and provision in school. The sample was not restricted or based on needs or SEN needs as the researcher wanted to create a 'real world' picture of the children experiencing being at risk of exclusion. When identifying students at risk of school exclusion, Kerka (2003) highlighted that labelling students in this way contributes to their risk factors so therefore the researcher adopted a sensitive approach by making sure that this terminology was never used with the children.

3.4.4 Parents/Carers

The head teacher identified four potential participants. The parents/carers recruited all had parental responsibility for the children selected. The researcher requested that the school initially contacted the parents and carers before the initial phone call, in order they were prepared. The researcher contacted the parents/carer of the participants via telephone initially (at this point the researcher was not aware if computer and video access was available). The researcher explained the nature of the research. The term 'at risk of exclusion' was addressed in this initial telephone call, addressing the delicate issue of the term and that it is included in the title of the research. At this point, there were concerns from the parents/carers over the engagement of the children on a video call. The parent/carer was given the option for the children to have the interview at home or at school depending on what they felt most comfortable with.

All parents and carers were sent via email an information sheet and consent form for them and the children (Appendix E and F) outlining all the details of the study and how the data was to be collected and used. As the participants were under 16, consent forms needed to

be signed by their parents or person holding parental responsibility. The consent forms specified that they have read and understood the 'right to withdraw' without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. It confirmed that they could also request to withdraw their data even after they have participated, provided that this request was made within three weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

3.4.5. Children

The children selected to take part in the study received an information and consent form via their parents/carers. The parents and carers were asked to read them (the researcher confirmed with the school that the parents did not have any literacy difficulties) and explain the study to the children, confirming that the children wanted to take part. The researcher deemed that this was the most appropriate way to explain the study to ensure a fuller understanding rather than through a video call. The researcher was aware of the sensitive issue of identifying 'at risk' children and was sensitive to this and mindful throughout the process, for example, not using the term 'at risk' with the children and always being respectful and solution-focused, reflecting the researcher's values and ethical principles. The study and consent forms (Appendix F) were adapted to eliminate the phrase 'at risk of exclusion' when addressing the children. At the beginning of the interview, the study was explained again, and verbal consent obtained. Three of the participants lived with their maternal mother and one with their grandmother.

A brief profile is provided of each participant to give the reader some context in Table 4.

Table 4

Children, Parents and Carer Participants

Children	Year	Gender	Profile	Parent/Carer
Participant 1 (Luke)	Yr 6	Male	• EHCP • ASD Diagnosis	Participant 5 (Mother)

			• Moderate Learning Difficulty • Joined School in Reception	
Participant 2 (Finn)	Yr 5	Male	• LAC child (with Grandma) • ADHD • Reactive Attachment Disorder	Participant 6 (Grandmother)
Participant 3 (William)	Yr 4	Male	• EHCP • ADHD • Social Communication Difficulties • Language Disorder • Previously Attended a Pupil Referral Unit on a Managed Move	Participant 7 (Mother)
Participant 4 (Ben)	Yr 3	Male	• EHCP • ADHD Diagnosis • Attended School Since Beginning of Year 2 • Previously Attended a Pupil Referral Unit.	Participant 8 (Mother)

3.4.6 Staff

The staff that were recruited work in the school setting and knew the children selected for the research. They were also familiar with the school systems and the staffing structure. The staff were then sent via email an information sheet and consent form for them (Appendix G) outlining all the details of the study and confirming how the data would be collected and used. The participating staff are listed below in Table 5.

Table 5

Staff Participants Table

Staff Participants	Role Within the School
Participant 9	Deputy Head Teacher
Participant 10	Year 6 Teacher
Participant 11	Learning Mentor
Participant 12	Learning Mentor

3.5 Procedure

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the original structure of the AI has been creatively adapted to facilitate the use of remote data collection. The researcher resubmitted the ethics form to include remote data collection which was approved. The interviews and focus groups, which were all originally intended to be conducted in person, within the primary school, were ultimately conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams. This has meant an adaption to the structure of the focus groups (see section 3.5.3), which initially included the creation of a visual representation with collage materials.

3.5.1 AI Cycle Within the Current Study

Within the research, the four-stage cycle of AI was adapted to three stages due to the restrictions of COVID-19 and the researcher's awareness of the extra time constraints for the school setting up the remote meetings. It was adapted by condensing the Design and Deliver phases in to one meeting. The Design phase involves creating proactive propositions and this was incorporated with the Deliver phase to create the action plan. Table 6 depicts the AI cycle within the study. The data collected throughout the Discover and Dream phases from the interviews and focus groups sought to address the research questions, looking at three different stakeholder's perspectives. The Design and Deliver phase contributed to the transformative nature of this research, empowering the participants. The researcher's intent was to ensure that the data collected contributed to change within a system.

Table 6

Stages of the Appreciate Inquiry and Data Collection Cycle

AI Phase	Participants (numbers)	Data Collection	Data Analysis/Procedure	Research Question Addressed
Discover Phase	Children (n=4)	Individual Interviews	Thematic Analysis	**RQ1a**
	Parents (n=4)	Individual Interviews	Thematic Analysis	**RQ1b**
	Staff (n=4)	Focus Group	Thematic Analysis	**RQ1c**
Dream Phase	Children (n=2)	Individual Interviews on Microsoft Teams.	Graphic representations of the children's 'Dreams' for the school.'	**RQ1a**
	Parents (n=2)	Individual interviews Software was used to create a shared document.	Graphic representations of the parent's 'Dreams' for the school.	**RQ1b**
	Staff Focus Group (n=3)	Themes and quotes were shared with the staff from the Discover phase via PowerPoint presentation. Software was used for the staff to create a shared document of what their dreams were for the school.	Graphic representations of the staffs 'Dreams' for the school.	**RQ1c**
Design and Deliver Phase	Staff Focus Group (n=2)	Dream phase shared with the staff. Provocative Propositions were generated through a shared discussion, Action plan	Data will be analysed and used to form 'Provocative Propositions'	Fulfilling the Transformative Nature of the Research.

3.5.2 Discover Phase

3.5.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher used the principles of AI to design semi-structured interview considering the research questions and the retrospective participant groups (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008) (see Appendix H, I). Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used in the Discover phase with the pupils and the parents. Individual interviews were conducted for the children as Morgan (1997) found that children may find it difficult to express themselves in a group.

When considering eliciting parent views during the Discover phase, individual interviews were deemed appropriate as there may be confidential history (Barbour, 2008), which would not be appropriate to share in a focus group. Semi-structured schedules use open-ended questions to allow flexibility.

When conducting the interviews, the researcher employed a sensitive and empathetic approach, drawing on active listening and attunement principles (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2012). The researcher also remained mindful of giving the children space and time, and to answer providing clarification where needed and adapting the questions where necessary.

3.5.2.2 Focus Groups

Within the AI, focus groups were used with the staff in the Discover phase. The focus group questions were also designed with the AI principles in mind (see Appendix J). Focus groups support the action research methodology as they offer insights into shared views within an organisation and are consistent with AI principles, suggesting meaning is co-constructed and that change can be created through group interaction. Robson and McCartan (2016) note that an advantage of focus groups can be that they empower participants, allowing them to build on thoughts of others within the group. However, limitations of focus

groups can be the creation of potential conflicts between personalities, confidentiality issues and the skills based in facilitating the group (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

In facilitating the groups, the researcher was conscious of the importance of group dynamics and making sure there was equal contribution (Bloor, 2001). The researcher was aware the staff members all held different positions within the school and that potentially there may be different power dynamics.

3.5.2.3. Data Collection in the Discover Phase

The eight interviews and focus group were recorded on Microsoft Teams and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. An example can be seen in Appendix K. The researcher took notes throughout each interview and focus group recording any key ideas.

The individual interviews and focus group were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is a way of identifying themes through the research questions. The researcher adopted a deductive approach to analyse the data, which meant that the research questions were used to determined themes and sub-themes. The researcher was not looking to identify new theory but to examine what is currently working within a system. The transcripts were coded looking for semantic evidence (what was said during the interview) and latent ideas (the underlying ideas that may have influenced the semantic content). A thematic analysis for each group of participants (students, teachers and pupils) was carried out during the Discover phase in response to the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) states that thematic analysis supports the participatory element of this research as the children, teachers and staff are collaborators within the research.

The rationale and detailed stages of thematic analysis are discussed in 3.5.5.

3.5.3 Dream Phase

The findings of the Discover phase from the three groups were shared with the parent and staff participants at the beginning of the Dream phase via a PowerPoint presentation on

Microsoft Teams (Appendix L). The Dream phase of AI involves using the 'magic wand',
and miracle question.

3.5.3.1 Interviews with Children

Originally the Dream phase was going to be conducted through a focus group with
two participants (the other two participants had withdrawn from the study at this point). Due
to COVID-19 and restrictions, it was decided in collaboration with the school that this stage
of the research would be conducted individually on Microsoft Teams. The school were asked
to provide Lego, pens and paper and creative materials for the children to choose from. The
children were asked to create their 'Dream School' using any of the resources available. The
researcher used prompt questions (Appendix M) to facilitate the children's thinking around
what they wanted their school to be like. Their visual representations are presented in chapter
four (Figures 19-21).

3.5.3.2 Interviews with Parents

Again, this stage was originally going to be a focus group. Due to one of the
participants falling ill just before the focus group, this stage was conducted individually. The
researcher used interactive software to create a shared document which both participants
contributed to. The researcher asked the 'miracle question' (see Appendix M) and then a
series of questions to facilitate the creation of a shared document. Participant seven was
interviewed first and created a graphic representation of what she would like her dream
school to be. With the parents' permission this image was shown to participant eight during
her interview and participant eight contributed to and added to it. The researcher wanted this
stage to be collaborative so sharing the document allowed both parents to contribute. (See
Figure 22.)

3.5.3.3 Focus Groups with Staff

Due to COVID-19, the staff were all in separate 'bubbles' so they were sent a
Microsoft Teams invite and the focus group was set up at a convenient time. The staff were

sent a link so they could access software which can be used to create a shared document. A

PowerPoint presentation of the Discover phase (Appendix L) was shown. The staff group

created a word cloud (Figure 23) of what their dream school would be. The researcher asked

the 'miracle question' (see Appendix M) and then a series of questions to facilitate creating a

graphic representation of their dreams for the school. The participants accessed shared

software and created a shared, visual representation of their dream school. (Figure 24.)

3.5.3.4. Data Analysis in the Dream Phase

The graphic representations created in the Dream phase were used as the data as the

diagrams clearly depicted the participants' dreams and hopes for the school. The participatory

nature of this research meant that it was the researcher's aim for the participants to be

empowered.

3.5.4 Design and Deliver Phase

The Design and Deliver phases were combined due to the time constraint for the

participating school. This focus group consisted of the deputy head and a learning mentor.

The overarching themes, identified from the thematic analysis from the Discover and Dream

phases were used to generate "provocative propositions." Hammond (2013) describes

"proactive propositions" as symbolic statements which should stretch, challenge and

innovate, aiming to answer how the Dream phase might be realised. Hammond (2013) also

stipulates that they enhance the AI process and they reiterate positive experiences which

have taken place within the school.

Once the proactive propositions had been generated within the group, the researcher

facilitated a solution-focused discussion using each preposition statement as a starting

point. A shared document in Microsoft Teams was presented and the statements were

added. For every statement, an action was generated and added to the action plan.

3.5.5. Thematic Analysis Stages

The process of thematic analysis within the research will now be discussed. The six-phase guide by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used as a clear structure to guide the analysis. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, clear guidelines were essential as a qualitative approach can be criticised for a lack of guidelines, which was noted by Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Potter (2002).

The researcher chose TA for data analysis due to its flexibility and the lack of ties to particular theoretical standpoints (Braun & Clarke, 2006), like other qualitative approaches such as IPA. TA provides an in-depth and multifaceted analysis of qualitative data, identifying patterns in participants' lived experiences congruent with the participatory nature of this research. The researcher's aim was to contribute to change within a system and TA enables social interpretation of the data, supporting the development of policies. Other studies using AI (Cozens, 2014; Martin, 2015) have successfully used TA as a means of data analysis.

It is important to consider the limitations of TA, which are highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006), including the absence of dialectical analysis. Ultimately, it was felt by the researcher that TA offered the most suitable means of analysis of participants' experiences and views and that it would provide a useful summary of key ideas contained within the large data set in a way that would be accessible to all stakeholders.

Familiarisation with the Data

Data was collected from four child interviews, four parent interviews and the staff focus group within the Discover phase of the AI. The recordings on Microsoft Teams were transcribed verbatim. The researcher used this to cross reference and fully transcribe the interviews which Bird (2005) describes as an essential part of the process when qualitative approaches are used. The researcher took notes throughout the transcribing of the interviews,

recording initial themes and what the researcher deemed to be pertinent information. Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage this process as the researcher becomes familiar and absorbed in the data.

Generating Initial Codes

After the interviews and focused group were transcribed, the researcher became familiar with the data, and a range of initial codes was developed. The data was organised into groups (Tuckett, 2005). A decision was made not to use computer software, Kelly (2004) argued that it assists coding however Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended that the codes are descriptive and that coding manually assists the researcher with familiarisation. The 'track changes' facility was used to note down initial codes on Microsoft Word and lines were highlighted if the researcher observed similarities in themes.

Searching for Themes

Once the data had been systematically coded, broader themes were explored. This process was conducted with the support of visual aids (post-it notes, see Figure 2) as this facilitated the exploration of dominant themes and sub-themes in a systematic way. The initial codes were written on post-it notes, and the researcher began grouping them into themes.

Figure 2

Example of Visually Sorting Themes in the Data
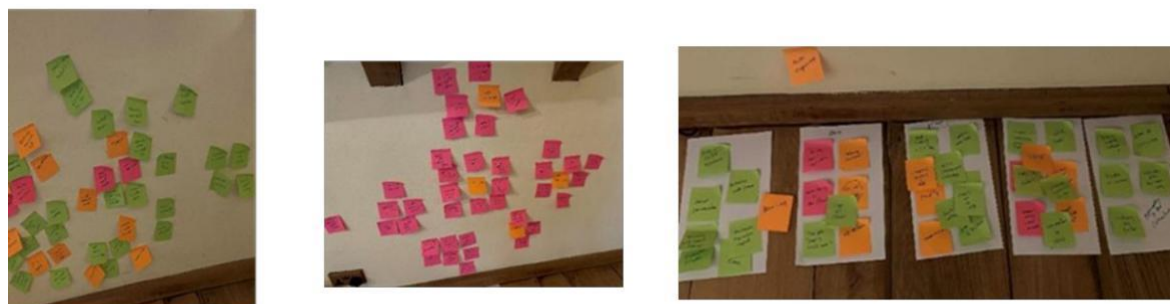
Reviewing the Themes

The themes were refined and broken down into sub-themes, a thematic map was produced (see Figures 3, 8 and 13 within the Discover phase.) Michael and Frederickson (2013) stipulated the importance of detailed quotations within the data set to appropriately determine the themes and sub-themes.

Theme definitions

After the themes and sub-themes had been selected, they were named and defined. A description of each theme and sub-theme was written and consideration given as to how this linked to the research question. The quotations are provided in chapter four under each theme and sub-theme identified.

3.6 Reflexivity

3.6.1 Researcher's Position in the Current Study

Within this study, the researcher played an active role within the collaborative process of the AI. Willig, (2008) acknowledges that epistemological reflexivity is an imperative part of qualitative research. The researcher recognises the potential impact of her own beliefs and values within the research. Parker (1994) believes that rather than this being a disadvantage, it is an advantage within the research. A research journal was kept throughout the process, encouraging reflexivity during the project and enabling the researcher to reflect critically on thoughts, interpersonal relationships, potential biases and position within the action research.

Within qualitative research, it is important to acknowledge potential issues of power affecting the researcher and the potential influence on the study. The researcher, although aware of this potential power, aimed to address the potential power imbalance by avoiding assumption of the expert role, focusing instead on giving power to the participants through the emancipatory aspect of the study. Christensen (2004) said that the researcher should

acknowledge that their position as a researcher and their position as an adult can give power and control in their social cultural environment with children.

A full audit trail, including records of all raw data collated (transcripts or interviews) and data analysis, was kept throughout each stage of the research (Robson, 2016). All transcripts from the interviews and the focus groups were reviewed multiple times to ensure reliability. The themes were summarised and checked at the end of every interview with the participants to ensure consistency (2003).

Robson (2011) notes that a case study design considers the context of the organisation (the school) which heightens ecological validity.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Educational Psychologists are bound by the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2018). The principles set out in the code of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity were prevalent throughout this research, together with the BPS's guidance (2014). The research will give a voice to children, working with and for their interests, upholding the Rights of the Child (1990). All participants were treated with respect and dignity throughout the research and were afforded full transparency throughout the project. The research was approved by University of East London's ethics board (Appendix 0).

3.7.1. Informed Consent

Gaining informed consent from the participants was paramount in this research. (Kvale, 2008). Written consent was obtained for all participants involved within the study. All participants were briefed on the purpose of the research through a telephone call. All participants were emailed a consent form outlining all the details of the study and how the data would be collected and used. (see Appendix F) The participants under 16 needed a parental signature. They were also repeatedly made aware that they had the right to withdraw at any point.

3.7.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

BPS (2014) states that participants have the right to confidentiality within the research. Steps were taken throughout the research to adhere to this. Participants in the research were anonymised during transcription to protect confidentiality. Agreement was made that no names would be used or any other identifiable information, including schools or local authorities. Data was pseudonymised. Participants that were interviewed were assigned a number (names were not used). Transcription of the interviews was undertaken only by the researcher to protect confidentiality of participants. The LA and name of the school was also withdrawn to further ensure that there was total anonymity.

3.7.3 Right to Withdraw

Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the research study at any time without being obliged to provide a reason. This was made clear to participants on the information sheets and consent forms. If a participant decided to withdraw from the study, they would be informed their contribution (e.g., any audio recordings and interview transcripts) would be removed and confidentially destroyed, up until the point where the data had been analysed. The original plan was for participants to be unable to withdraw after July 2020 due to the data having already been analysed, however due to COVID this was extended as the data collection period was moved to the Autumn Term and completed by January 2021.

3.7.4 Data Storage

Video recordings and transcripts were saved in separate folders. Each audio file was named with the participant's pseudonym and the date of the interview. Each participant was attributed a participant number, in chronological interview order. Transcription files were named e.g., "Participant 1". No list was kept of participant numbers linked to personal identifying information. Due to the nature of the research, transcriptions were completed by February 2021 which was later than originally planned due to COVID 19. A list of pseudonyms

was kept in a secure file. Recordings were stored on Microsoft Stream. They were saved to UEL storage (OneDrive for Business). Consent forms were saved onto the researcher's laptop immediately after the interview. They were then transferred to an encrypted storage device and erased from the laptop. The encrypted storage device was stored in a locked cabinet on the researcher's private property. Paper versions (if collected via the school) were then destroyed and electronic versions transferred from the encrypted storage device onto the researcher's personal space on the UEL server that can only be accessed by the researcher (using the researcher's password). If collected electronically via UEL email, these were uploaded to a separate folder on the UEL OneDrive for Business. Consent forms were then erased from the encrypted storage device. The UEL OneDrive for Business was used for the transcripts, video files and consent forms. All were encrypted and password protected. Once data had been backed up on UEL servers it was deleted from the encrypted storage device.

3.7.5 Counteracting Possible Detrimental Effects of Research

The nature of AI is inherently solution focused and based on positive psychology so it was anticipated that the experience would be positive for the participants. However, due to the potentially previous problem-saturated narratives of exclusion, measures were put in place. In case of emotional distress during or following the interview, contact details of a relevant support organisation were made available in a debrief letter (Appendix N). If participants appeared distressed during the interview, they were offered a break or the option to end the interview. The participants were also informed that any issues relating to their safety or the safety of others would be referred to the safeguarding lead at the alternative provision.

The timings of the interviews and focus groups were arranged around the participants' schedules and the head teacher was consulted on the logistics of setting up the remote focus groups. Being mindful of restrictions in place at the time, the researcher wanted to make sure that there was minimal disruption to the school and staff who were navigating through an uncertain time.

During the interviews and focus groups, active listening skills and attunement principles were employed, enabling the researcher to create a non-confrontational, supportive and safe space, and respond fittingly to any potentially topics. The nature of AI is based on positivism, however, due to the nature of the topic, they would be given space to share issues that arose.

3.8 Critique of Methodology

A well cited criticism of AI is its inherent focus on the positives and omission of any problems (Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010; Mertens, 2010). As noted by Pratt (2002), this potentially may dismiss participants' negative experiences, avoiding discussing the reality for the participant. Bevington (2015) recognises that the positive nature of AI can allow for honesty, identifying resources to potentially overcome barriers and actively plan for a more positive future (Mertens, 2010).

3.9 Summary of Methodology

This chapter has outlined the research paradigm and ontological and epistemological standpoint of the researcher. The chosen methodology - AI - is explored and critiqued and the researcher justifies and links the theoretical framework and transformative nature of the research throughout. A detailed account and justifications are given of the data analysis process and how this answers the research questions. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations and the reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Overview of Chapter

This chapter will present the findings for each stage of the AI. The Discover phase will be presented first. The participant groups have been considered in turn with overarching themes and sub-themes presented which have been identified through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was collected through interviews and focus groups on Microsoft Teams. The Dream phase will then be presented with each participant group in turn systematically addressing the research question. The Dream phase was conducted through interviews and focus groups on Microsoft Teams. Visual representations will be presented for each group combined with a summary of their 'dreams' for the school. These two stages of the AI will be used to answer the research questions:

What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion?

a. From the perspective of the children?

b. From the perspective of the parents?

c. From the perspective of the staff?

The design and delivery phase of the AI will then be presented to facilitate the transformative nature of this research. The researcher intended to ensure that the data collected contributed to change within a system, empowering the participants within the process. Taking a critical realist focus meant that the aim of this research is not simply understanding but promoting change through understanding.

4.2. Discover Phase: Children's Views

RQ1a. What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of the children?

Figure 3

Themes and sub-themes of children's views on what supports them at school
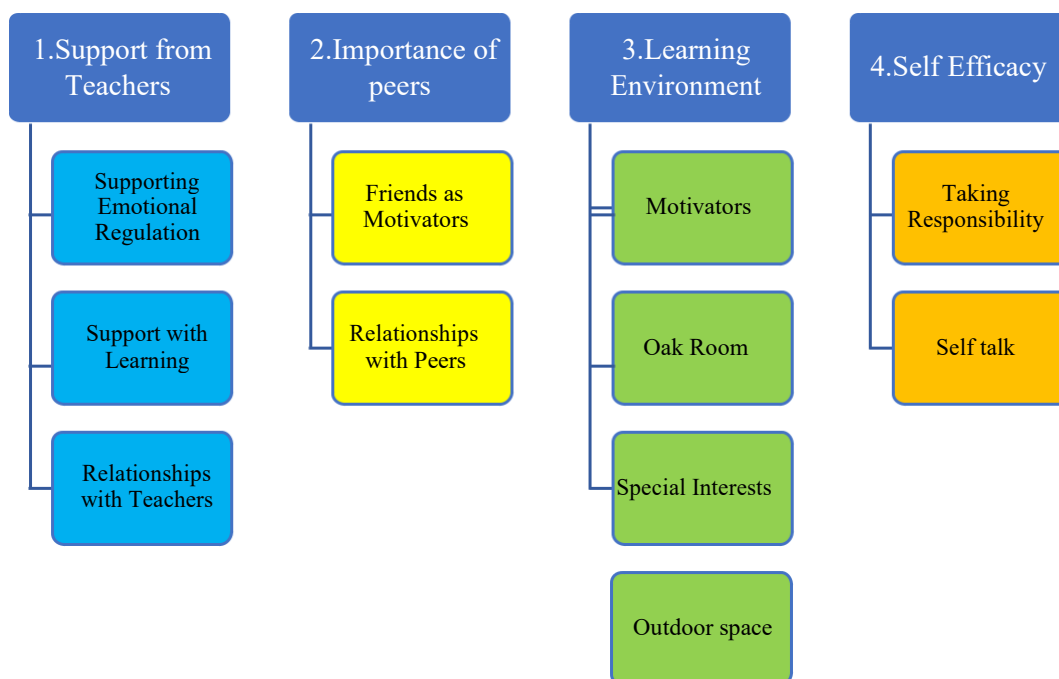
4.2.1 Theme 1: Support from Teachers

Support from teachers was consistently mentioned across the four interviews as a source of support and a factor that helped the pupils at school with their learning and emotional needs which is presented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Theme 1 and sub-themes
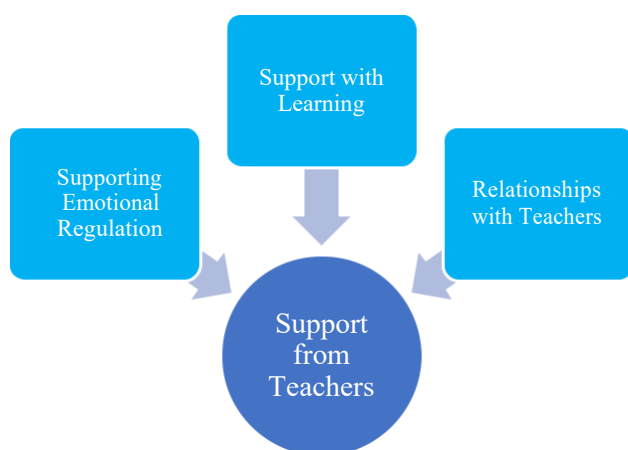
4.2.1.1 Supporting Emotional Regulation

All four of the participants felt that there was a member of staff that they could go to and that supported them. Ben explained how a particular teacher understood him, "*This teacher called Mrs Cremner, she would ask me what has been happening and going on? What's happened? Because when I am trying to hide my sadness, the teacher will always know if I am sad or not,*" (Ben, lines 34 - 35.) He also knew that there were adults that he could approach if he needed help. He described an incident that had taken place at play, but he felt that the teachers would support him, "*I would go and tell the teacher that's on the field.*" (Ben, line 85.)

All the children mentioned individual teachers by name, for example when William was asked who he would go to if he felt upset about anything, his response was, "*Mrs Smith,*" (William, line 158). When Luke was asked which teacher he would go to for support, he replied, 'any teachers' (Luke, line 144), indicating that all teachers at the school would be able to help him.

4.2.1.2. Support with Learning

Teachers were named consistently when the children were asked about who would help them at school with their learning. Ben and Luke felt that they access a lot of help, "*I get a lot of help.*" (Ben, line 19) Luke also stated, "*teachers help me a lot.*" (Luke, line 64). Specific teachers were also mentioned, "*there is one teacher that helps me,*" (Luke, line 90) "*They do stuff on laptops and Mrs Smith she helped me do the work,*" (William, line 72). Finn also expressed, "*They normally just help me, help me with stuff,*" (Finn, line 100). The children also gave specific examples around helping with particular subjects, for example timetables.

4.2.1.3. Teacher Attributes

The children spoke about the teacher's attributes that supported them, "*she's a very nice teacher and she gives us dojos,*" (Finn, line 109). Ben also felt that his teachers created a feeling of safety, "*the teachers are really kind. And they're always there to help you. And all the other children. And they make me feel happy and safe in school,*" (Ben, lines 195 - 196).

4.2.2 Theme 2: Importance of Peers

Peers were a very important part of the children's enjoyment at school. All four participants mentioned peers in a variety of different contexts within the interviews.

Figure 5

Theme 2 and sub-themes
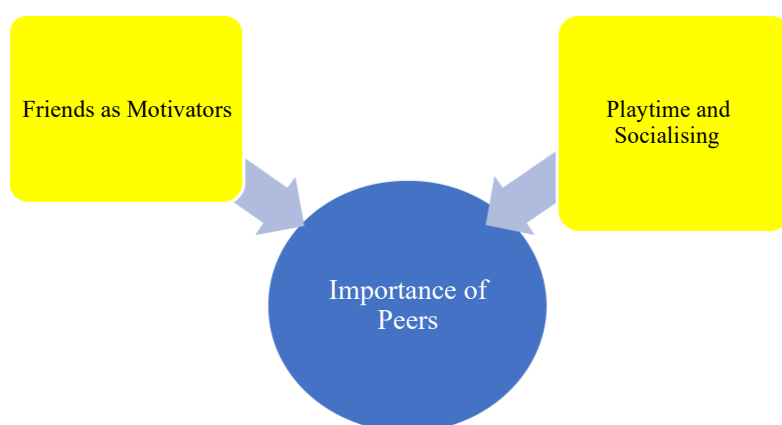
4.2.2.1. Friends as Motivators

Friends and peer support were often used as a motivator for the children. They described behaving well then being able to play with peers. "*So then I have seven ticks, okay so I get two people to come and play with me at the end of the day,*" (Finn, lines 54 - 55). Finn then goes on to say, "*one day I behaved really good and I got all my ticks and Mrs Smith let me have five people to play Lego with me,*" (Finn, lines 76 - 77). Ben also described how

he could choose friends when he received a reward, *"I get to choose two friends to come with me,"* (Ben, lines 160 - 161).

4.2.2.2. Playtimes and Socialising

When the children were asked what their favourite thing was about school, friends were a consistent theme, and playtimes. "*I go outside and play with my friends*," (Ben, line 81). "*You get 45 minutes lunchtime play*," (William, line 48). William also enjoyed playing football with his friends, "*They all play football,"* (William, line 135).

When Finn was asked what he liked about school, he replied, "*just my friends,"* (Finn, line 191). Luke also described friendship as "*the best thing about school is PE, work and friendship,"* (Luke, line 24). Luke also viewed his friends as a source of support, *"and my friends help me as well,"* (Luke, line 83).

4.2.3 Theme 3: Learning Environment

How the learning environment was set up supported the children in a variety of ways.

Figure 6

Theme 3 and sub-themes
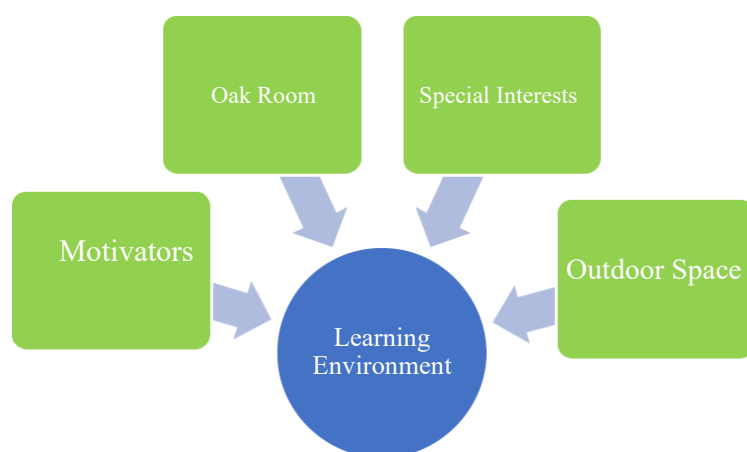
4.2.3.1 Motivators

Silver time, which is a reward system, was cited across the four interviews as a motivator to do well in school. "*I have this chart. And it has silver time. So, every time I have*

numeracy, literacy and everything else, I get ticks," (Finn, lines 51 - 52). Silver time and ticks were important to the children. Ben described how he felt when he obtained silver time, *"I feel really happy,"* (Ben, line 151). The children were very clear about what they needed to do, *"I do everything I am told and not be naughty then I get silver time,"* (Ben, line 155). William felt that "*you have to earn it ... by doing work,"* (William, line 170). Finn also felt that "*it was just my chart,*" (Finn, line 218) that helped him at school.

4.2.3.2 Oak Room

Oak Room is an additional room where the children can go to as a safe space away from the classroom. Ben felt that it was a support for him, "*There is this place called Oak Room, you can go in there and tell people how you feel, there's teddies and toys in there and computers,"* (Ben, lines 19 - 20). The children also felt support in small groups, "*He gives me help in small groups,"* (Ben, line 79).

4.2.3.3. Special Interests

There were various activities that were mentioned that motivated the children, Lego was mentioned by Finn, "*I can play with Lego and computers and build things, I can do arts and crafts, it's fun,"* (Finn, line 27). "*It's because it gives me lots of ideas to build stuff like robot cars,*" (Finn, line 70). William said "*I like to play on the laptops,*" (William, line 173).

4.2.3.4 Outdoor Space

Outdoor space was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Running and having space and freedom away from structured times within school appeared to help the children regulate themselves. Finn spoke about his enjoyment when running, *"I was really excited because at the end of the day we get to do cross country, I team up with Henry and normally run round the field seven times,"* (Finn, lines 137 - 138). William also mentioned the field, "*and there's a field you can play on,"* (William, line 48) as something he liked to do.

Ben consistently mentioned being outside, "*like there were two sheds, massive sheds that had like all benches in 'em, , there was like seats in a full circle. And it was really fun. And then when we went on the field, there was this bit that was an apparatus,*" (Ben, lines 115 - 118).

He was also very enthusiastic about the edible garden, *"there is this thing called the edible garden and I have been making cucumber and lettuce,"* (Ben, line 174). He enjoyed being outside in nature, *"we do planting... we have been planting beans, beetroot and flowers,"* (Ben, line 170).

4.2.4 Theme 4: Self Efficacy

When the children were asked what helped them at school, some of the children felt that it was them that managed the situations and could resolve conflicts.

Figure 7

Theme 4 and sub-themes.
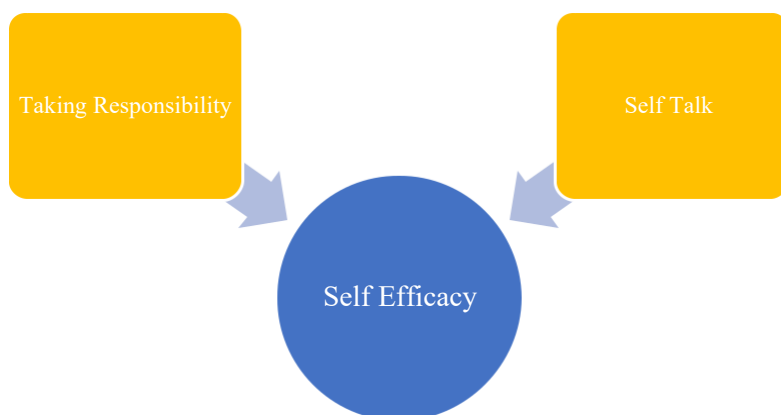
4.2.4.1 Taking Responsibility

There was a sense from the children that they could help themselves and take responsibility for their responses without help from adults, this was very apparent in Finn's interview. Finn expressed how he tried his best and would encourage himself, "*well, I just encourage myself to be the best*," (Finn, line 88). He also expressed that "*I tried my best to be really, like really sensible. And don't mess up and don't be silly, like don't fight with people,*"

(Finn, lines 81-2). When Finn was asked who would help, he replied, *"I would sort it out myself,"* (Finn, line 101). Similarly when he was asked about what would help him solve a conflict with a peer he replied, *"I just talked to him,"* (Finn, line 182).

4.2.4.2 Self-talk

Finn verbally mediated to himself when he was at school, *"I say to myself, but not out loud. I say to myself, don't be silly, don't get distracted, don't have fights,"* (Finn, lines 94 - 95).

4.3 Discover Phase: Parent Views

RQ1b. What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support the children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of parents?

Figure 8

Themes and sub-themes of parents' views on what they think works to prevent exclusion.

1.Staff Knowledge and Skills	2. We Work Together	3. Whole School Ethos/Systems	4.Provision and Support
Flexible Approach	Feeling Part of the Process	Going the Extra Mile	Motivators
Staff are well Trained	Good Communication	Individualised Approach to Inclusion	Nurture Rooms
Time to Understand	Staff stand by You	Social inclusion	Supporting Emotional Regulation
Calming, not Controlling		Firm but Fair	Consistent Adults
		Whole school Approach	Working with Specialists

4.3.1 Theme 1: Staff Knowledge and Skills

Parent participants all spoke very highly of the staff, especially the knowledge and skills that they had. They were consistently mentioned as a positive factor that enabled the children to be successful.

Figure 9 *Theme 1 and sub-themes*
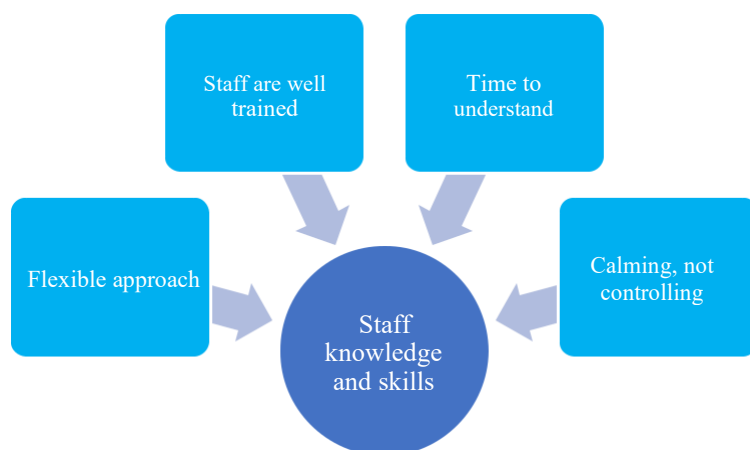
4.3.1.1. Flexible Approach

Parents described the flexibility of provision and support, adapting and changing practice depending on the needs of the children, "*So they took him back to being in the classroom all day, and changing the tactics of the chart, for example, or the mentor going to the classroom, if necessary,*" (Participant five, line 174). In this example, all of these strategies involve keeping the children in the classroom and adapting support around them. Participant eight describes time out for emotional regulation then joining the class, "*but something like timeouts, you know, and then to stay in the other small group where he can play computer games, he plays other things before he goes back to class again, which they said is working well,*" (Participant eight, line 40).

Participant five describes the adapted provision when the children needed a break from the classroom environment, "*sometimes he had the chance to split his time because sometimes he cannot stay in the room and concentrate,*" (Participant five, line 35). Another

example; *"so they gave him kind of like breaks to go into these rooms, or for a learning mentor to go outside his classroom and sit down with him and just to play Lego or to do any other activity that calms him…" (*Participant five, lines 22-24).

4.3.1.2 Staff are Well Trained

The parent participants felt that the staff were well trained, feeling confident that they could support the children with their needs, "*Well, I think the staff is great, they are very well trained and they have a lot of knowledge on how to support kids with special educational needs, um and that I believe has helped a lot,"* (Participant five, line 11). Updating skills and training was important, *"and for what I've heard, for what I've seen, they keep updating their skills."* (Participant five, line 245-246.) Also, *"I think the knowledge, they have. I mean, it's not, because some of them are not just teachers, I think they do a lot of courses, they update their skills a lot. So that is really important. You know, you need to update your skills,"* (Participant five, line 241-243).

There was a sense that the staff had personal knowledge of children with SEN, which promoted a sense of understanding, "*I think that these teachers have got their own personal knowledge that spills into their work. I feel that a lot of people have special needs children themselves, though,*" (Participant six, line 30). The staff's knowledge and understanding promoted a sense of relief amongst the parent participants. "*But then obviously, it sunk in, the fact, the reason why I'm not getting calls is because they're there. They've got the knowledge and everything to handle it,"* (Participant six, line 226-227). Participant seven had confidence in the staff's ability resulting in her feeling calmer, "*I see these women, they know exactly what they're doing. And that that makes you feel a lot calmer, I know,"* (Participant seven, line 218-219).

4.3.1.3 Time to Understand

The parents felt the teachers understood their children/grandchildren and that they had taken the time to get to know them, "*okay, they understand his situation. Whereas in his former school it was quite difficult because they didn't understand him. But they understand him, and he adapted easily."* Participant six also felt that understanding was key, "*because the teachers talk so much, so they sort of get a better understanding of it. But I just can't put it into words, how they, they managed it, because they manage it very well,"* (Participant six, line 100-102).

The parents also felt that having the time to spend with the children contributed to their success, "*they've taken the time, obviously, he needs a lot more, one-on-one help and a little bit more time and patience,"* (Participant seven, line 47-48). "*At first, he, he couldn't socialise with other children. But they still took the time. So, a one-on-one teacher would go out with him,"* (Participant seven, line 96-98)

4.3.1.4. Calming, Not Controlling

When the parents were asked about what works to help emotional regulation, there was an emphasis on how the staff would calm the children down, "*and they was just amazing with him. And I'd watched them like just manage to not control him but calm him. Control was not the word, they calmed him,"* (Participant seven, line 201-203). Participant seven then talked about knowing her child is in the right school, "*and I thought, you know, while usually it's just me, I'm the only person that can calm my child, when I watched it, when I watch these ladies, within seconds, having him sitting down, drawing, and I was just like, you know what, he's in the right place,"* (Participant seven, line 203-205).

Strategies were also discussed, "*she got down to his level, she talked to him nice and calm, asking him what he wanted, why he was acting like this,"* (Participant seven, line 211), and also encouraging the children back in to class, "*I can't believe you've not only calmed*

him down. He's actually gotten to go in that classroom and do the work. I was like that to me was just like, Whoa, yeah, that's pretty impressive," (Participant seven, line 218-219).

Participant eight talked about preventative strategies, *"when they notice, he is about to start, they can take him out of the class or tell him let's go or give him rewards and everything, so I'm just happy," (*Participant eight, line 111)*. "But sometimes they tried and calmed him down because he had a bad day or to try and distract him from whatever he felt anxious about. So that has been really positive, I think,"* (Participant five, lines 23-24).

4.3.2. Theme 2 – We Work Together

Parents valued their relationship with the staff and felt that they were included in decisions. Working together was a central factor that the parents considered to enable success for the children.

Figure 10

Theme 2 and sub-themes
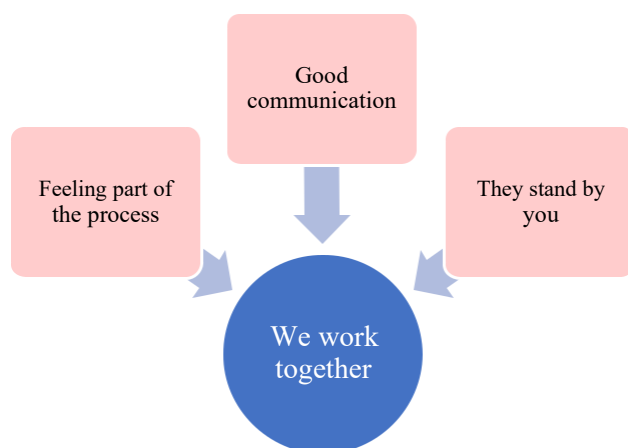
4.3.2.1 Feeling Part of the Process

Parents felt included during meetings and their opinions were valued. They felt empowered and supported during meetings which is portrayed by Participant seven, *"we have plenty of meetings, asking what my opinion as well as the specialist opinion, which was great,*

because then you don't feel like you're being left out and everyone else is taking over like you know what's going on." (Participant seven, line 53-54).

Participant six expressed she felt she was listened to and the importance of working together as she felt that at her grandson's previous school he used to 'play them off' against each other. *"It was the fact that they listen to me and we work together. That is a key element working together. Because if we didn't, there would be hell to pay because Ben would be able to play us off so much,"* (Participant six, line 38-40).

4.3.2.2 Good Communication

Good communication was cited by parents as a successful factor, they felt that the staff always communicated with them through different means, *"because obviously if something happens then, um, I will receive an email or a call and then you know like a follow up maybe a month after or a week after just to see if things have changed, if they have or how things can be improved,"* (Participant five, line 35-36).

Participant eight worked full time but still felt like she was kept informed, *"I don't pick him up regularly, but whenever anyone picks him up, if they feel they have any concern, or whatever, they relate to me. And if they want to reach me, they can email me. So, there's, there's a support channel,"* (Participant eight, line 141-143).

4.3.2.3 They Stand by You

The final sub-theme involves the parents feeling like the school was supporting them and advocating for them. Participant five felt supported in the decision she made about medication, *"the fact that they were supporting me for not medicating him, that was really good,"* (Participant five, line 58-59).

Participant seven felt that due to the school, her son was not getting lost in the system, *"you do worry that he's gonna be lost in the system and things like that, because he's not learning like other children, and you do panic, but they helped me so much with the meetings,*

they've always contacted me, letting me know how he's getting on," (Participant seven, line 56-59). She then went on to say, *"they're like, standing by you and helping you,"* (Participant seven, line 77). Participant six received support from the school for a housing matter. She felt supported and that the school were advocating for her, "*regardless, still having just the backing of the letter from the school because I find that if you ask anybody for anything, that letter from the school throws more weight than I ever could…"* (Participant six, line 154-156). Participant six also had another example of the school advocating and supporting her, *"so they email the local authority for me, and they email the social worker to talk because I never get a response from her. So they're constantly on everybody else's case on my behalf, which, in turn, relieves the pressure off me to be able to have more time and energy to deal with Ben,"* (Participant six, line 146-148).

4.3.3 Theme 3 – Whole School Ethos

The whole school approach was a consistent theme across all the parent participants. They spoke very highly of the school's approach to inclusion and their ethos.

Figure 11.

Theme 3 and sub-themes
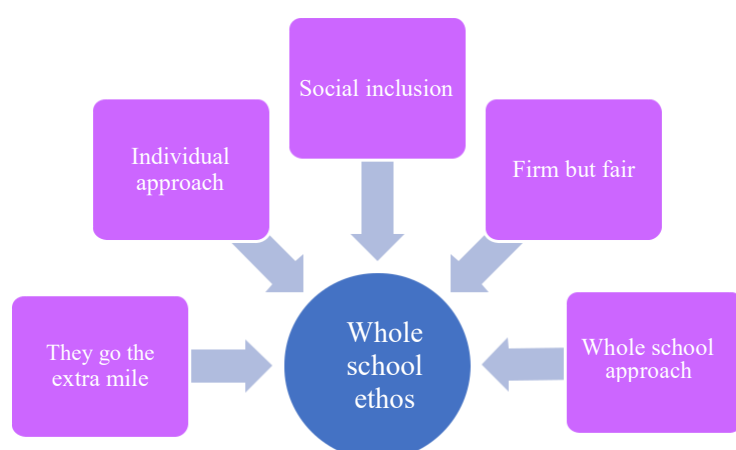
4.3.3.1 They Go the Extra Mile

The parents feel that the school goes above and beyond, "*but the last few years, they've put so many measures in for Ben and they've gone above and beyond for him,*" (Participant seven, line 161-163). Participant seven also says, "*and with these people right behind you, it is so much relief to know that like there's someone there if you do need advice, you can just ask them advice,*" (Participant seven, line 86-88).

Participant six describes how the school contacted her more times than the social worker, "*I have had the family worker phone me many times in actual fact, the social worker hasn't phoned me at all during COVID,*" (Participant six, line 79). Participant six also talked about the importance of the little things and reiterating how far the school go to support her, "*so that jelly stood there, and you know that entertained him for the afternoon. Just little things like that. But that's, that's, that's how far they go,*" (Participant six, line 135-136). "*Everything, I mean I know I sound like I am praising too much, but there is nothing that I think that I could pull that school up on with regards to how they managed support Ben and myself in his special needs,*" (Participant six, line 121-122).

4.3.3.2 Individual Approach

The parent participants felt that the school treated each young person as an individual, "*you know, I know that there is a blind child in the other classroom, not here, but the other classroom. And they have, you know, all these marks up in the floor,*" (Participant five, line 204-205). Participant seven described how the school was set up for her son before he went in, which she felt helped, "*and obviously, just before we went into school we met, they allowed me to meet all the teachers,*" (Participant seven, line 158-159). The learning and provision was also mentioned and planned around special interests, "*yeah, they managed to find things that he could love. But what his interest was like interest one week was robots. So that week it was done by teaching with robots*," (Participant seven, line 49-51).

4.3.3.3 Social Inclusion

Social inclusion was incredibly important to the parents. They described the commitment for children to be included in activities. Participant five describes her son being able to take part in the Nativity for the first time, *"during the practices and the rehearsals so that I thought that was amazing as it was pretty much the first year that he had joined a good place in the Nativity,"* (Participant five, line 66-68). She also felt that he was included much more socially than his previous school. "*Yeah I think that also Finn was able to participate in a lot of like social stuff with the other kids,"* (Participant five, line 69).

Another example of this is the school taking the children swimming. In a previous setting, the child's grandma has been asked to go on all trips, *"and they took him swimming with the rest of the class and that's loads and loads of potential problems within the swimming capacity, not listening, jumping into the pool, slipping, running, tripping, getting on the bus, you can guess, but not once have a felt I have had to take part, in fact I have not been asked to be,"* (Participant six, line 32-25).

The school's commitment to promoting social engagement is described a number of times by Participant seven*, "They was trying their hardest to get him to socialise with our children. And yeah, it's been amazing… they've still managing him to get him into school. Rather than just having a limited time, like an hour in school and not socialising,"* (Participant seven, line 64-66). *"Because he had no friends and to hear your child has no friends is kind of hard. So when you hear that they're taking these measures and doing this for your child. Yeah, I was, I was very happy with that,"* (Participant seven, line 102-103).

4.3.3.4 Firm but Fair

Consistency was important to the parents when managing the children's behaviour, *"it's all about firm but fair whereas a lot of the time I find that they namby pamby the kids too much,"* (Participant six, line 158-159). Participant six felt consistency was key for her

grandson, *"but they're very consistent and the thing is with Ben you have to be consistent,"* (Participant six, line 97). Detentions were only mentioned once, *"and they deal with it constructively. If you get detention, I will get an email saying why, although they're far and few between,"* (Participant six, line 66-69).

4.3.3.5 Whole School Approach

When the participants were talking about the successful factors that helped the children, there was an emphasis on the whole school staff and support rather than particular individuals, *"the support that I have had it's been yeah from the bottom up to the top and I think that is very important so that has been one of the positive things … I am talking from the top person so from the Principal all the way down to kitchen people, I think they are really good with dealing with um all the children,"* (Participant five, line 31). *"So my engagement has been pretty much with all the teachers and stuff. And you know, yeah, the people from the office are great. And the whole staff is really good. So I think all that is really important in a school really, really important,"* (Participant five, line 201).

Participant six talked about all the staff knowing her son, not just his teachers, *"the whole school is a very friendly school. They are very good, it's a very good school. We're quite lucky. Like, like, even these teachers who are not his teachers know William, and things like that,"* (Participant six, line 65).

The ethos of the school for supporting all children was expressed, *"they care. They care not only about one child, I know, they care about every single child in the school,"* (Participant six, line 213).

4.3.4 Theme 4: Provision and Support

There were a number of different facilitative factors that were talked about in relation to provision and support that the parents felt in turn supported the children in school.

Figure 12

Theme 4 and sub-themes
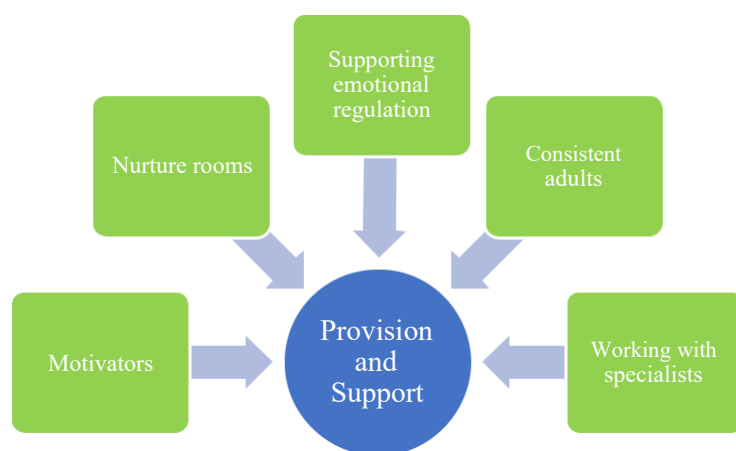
4.3.4.1 Motivators

Participants viewed short term reward as being a factor that was successful, "*I think it works well with short term rewards for him. I know that for him, he forgets a lot of things* (Participant five, line 92-94). "*Yeah, because it encourages him to have all the seven stars. So, for example, he does good the first hour in math, and he gets the star,*" (Participant five, line 106-108). *"And what we think has really worked for him. The positive measures – rewards,"* (Participant eight, line 160). *"It's like little things like for children, it gives them something to look forward to, especially someone like Ben, like I know, it sounds like bribery. If you do this, we give you that, but for a child like him is a good thing,"* (Participant seven, line 50).

4.3.4.2 Nurture Rooms

The smaller groups and nurture rooms were a positive factor that supported the children. Participant seven felt that this was a central part of her son's success, "*he needs that help and support in that nurture group. Without that he wouldn't have got as far as he's come now,*" (Participant seven, line 38-38).

The participants felt that the staff in the nurture spaces understood the needs of the children, "s*o you can go into Oak Room and chill out, they have enough people around him that know him, and totally get his needs,"* (Participant six, line 76-78).

The benefits of smaller groups and additional support were also discussed as a positive factor, "*yeah, like that they had these one-on-ones in there, like smaller groups it benefitted him so much, if he had been kept in the classrooms, and when pushed to do what other children had to do, he would have been lost. So having that chance to go to Willow class and have that smaller group and more teachers helping him, that's why it's amazing,"* (Participant five, line 172-176)

4.3.4.3 Supporting Emotional Regulation

Supporting emotional regulation of the children was a reoccurring theme and also having the space to be able to do so, *"but he needs someone to help him with his emotions. Okay. And with encouraging him, and with his self-esteem to let him know that he's doing great. Yeah. He needs all that. And if he doesn't get it, then things go downhill,"* (Participant five, line 127). *"So three mentors in the Oak Room they had, I think it was two times a week, he used to go there, they used to talk about his fears, or how they feel if they feel sad, and why they feel like that, sometimes if they were not feeling great,"* (Participant five, line 35).

Having the space to talk was important, including time with peers, *"they chill out in there and you know, they talk things through, and they mix with a couple of other kids in there that maybe have had a, you know, bad day as such. It takes the heat and pressure out of it,"* (Participant six, line 135-138).

Extra space for the children was a facilitating factor to support them. Outdoor space was significant and Forest School was named as a positive factor. *"They also have the Forest School, which I think, you know, being involved with nature works for a lot of kids,"* (Participant eight, line 136). Additional spaces were important for the participants as it gave the children an alternative place to go within the school if they needed to, *"for me, it was*

important that he had another space to go to in case he just doesn't want to be there. So that's really good," (Participant five, line 200-201).

Outdoor space allowed the children fresh air and space to run, "*I think the size, the playground, the amount of extra rooms and extra space, that they have to support these kids,"* (Participant eight, line 201). The spaces also allowed the children choice over where they could go, creating safe spaces, "*the fact that they nurture a lot, the kids they have like this small library at the entrance which is like kind of like a closed space, where they can go and read, if they feel like it,"* (Participant five, line 2003).

4.3.4.4 Consistent Adults

The participants felt that having one consistent adult for the children's routine was a contributing factor to their success, *"yes, one person that he is familiar with is always in his routine. Okay, so that helps a lot he's familiar with the person,"* (Participant eight, line 62).

Teaching assistants were also spoken about as having a central role supporting the children. *"The teaching assistants, I think they have an extremely important role and, in the classroom,"* (Participant five, line 213).

4.3.4.5 Working with Specialists

Participant seven talked about the fact that her son could not communicate when he was younger, which contributed to his emotional outbursts. The support from speech and language was a key part in supporting his communication, *"and so without the speech and language teachers that wouldn't have been possible so like they have done amazing with him. And yet they've got him speaking and him speaking quite quickly, which was pretty, pretty impressive. So without them yeah, he needed he needed them specialists,"* (Participant seven, line 73-76).

4.4 Discover Phase: Staff Views

RQ1c. What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of staff?

Figure 13

Themes and sub-themes of what staff perceive to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.

1. Whole Schools Ethos	2. Approaches to the Curriculum	3. Staff Working As a Team	4. Learning environment and Provision	5. School Systems Supporting Children
Staff commitment to inclusion	Differentiation supporting inclusion	Communication and flexibility	Nurture room	Working in partnership with parents
Nurturing environment	Flexible approach to school day	Staff attributes and own experiences	Consistency	Organisation of staff roles
Prioritising wellbeing	Supporting writing	Empowerment trusted to make decisions	Having the time	Schools engagement with outside agencies
	Motivators	Working as a Team	Space to regulate emotions	Approach to managing behaviour
			Small steps approach	

4.4.1. Theme 1: Whole School Ethos

Figure 14 Themes and sub-themes
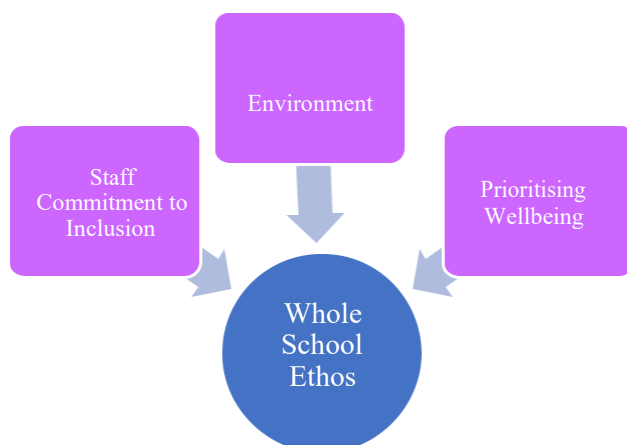
4.4.1.1 Staff Commitment to Inclusion

The staff's determination and commitment towards the children became apparent in the focus group, with exclusion not being an option, *"so yeah, I think it's a combination of a lot of things. But yeah, obviously it never even entered our head that he wouldn't stay. He was ours that was it,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 72-73). The way that they spoke about the instilled a sense of belonging for the children.

There were also discussions around other schools and what they do, "*I think the main factor was that we are an inclusive school and we tried hard to keep them in school. Other schools would have excluded him by now,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 67 - 69).

It is clear that it is a whole school approach, describing how all the staff would be committed and take the time to help the children within the school, "*and it's also you know, the time, I think everybody in the school, teachers and everyone, takes time out of their day to sit and sort issues out with not just the children that have got ASD needs or things like that. It's like, you know, just like if children have got issues, and the teachers and the learning mentor is there, and you know, the head take time, to just sit and listen and solve a problem. We're always trying to help them, you know,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 531-536). This reinforces that all the staff take time and are committed to supporting the children.

4.4.1.2 Nurturing Environment

The staff were all consistent when describing the school as a nurturing school, "*we are definitely a nurturing school,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 527). After a visitor had been to the school he commented on the environment, "*we had a visitor today and he was just saying to me, you can feel it the minute you walk in about how much everyone cares. It's a very nurturing school and I thought yes that's definitely it. You know, yeah, I can't really explain it,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 511-513). "*Yeah, it's much more nurturing, and the whole child and the ethos of the school. Whereas a lot of children have come from another school and*

speaking to their parents, they can see a difference in the ethos," (Staff Focus Group, line 548). *"Obviously, inclusion is one of our fields that we're all like, really inclusive. And as a school, we're very inclusive,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 265).

4.4.1.3 Prioritising Wellbeing

The leadership and head teachers' values were clear among the staff, in that the children's wellbeing came first, *"from top because our head teacher has always said children first, you know, their wellbeing comes first. He's always said that, like, I've been here for a long time and it definitely wasn't like that before. And the minute he came in, it was always wellbeing first, they can't do anything unless their wellbeing is addressed,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 515 - 517). *"Is quite true children won't learn if they're not happy. So their happiness comes first,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 520). *"But obviously, if a child's not happy, they're not going to learn,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 273).

4.4.2 Theme 2 – Approaches to the Curriculum

Figure 15

Theme 2 and sub-themes
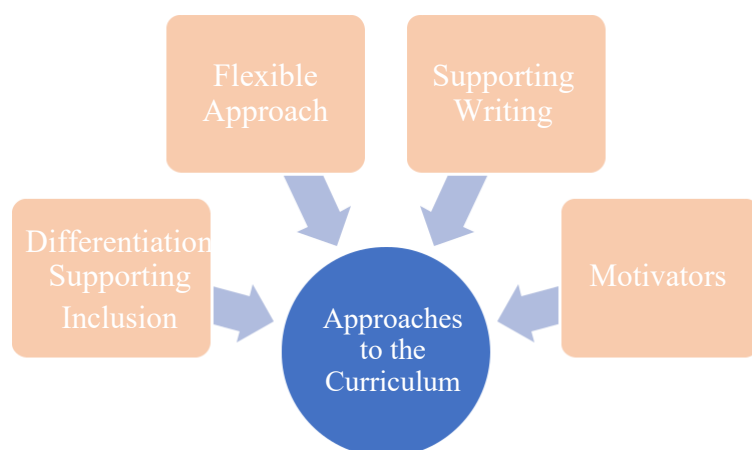
4.4.2.1 Differentiation Supporting Inclusion

Differentiating the curriculum was seen as central to enable success for the children. *"One thing I'd say that does work is higher up the school yeah, differentiation is key. So*

we're not expecting children in year five and year six to do the same work as year five and six if they are below this," (Staff Focus Group, lines 224 – 226).

An example was given about how a piece of work was adapted to include the children in the lesson. "*So Sharon will talk to him. So we've been doing our story about World War Two. Yeah, we want him to make sure he's included in that learning, because he can still learn about World War Two, even if he can't write about it,*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 244 - 247).

It was a priority for the staff for the children to achieve and learn through the lessons, "*and that way, he's got something in his book, he's got something to show for himself,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 249). Also, to feel included with the class, "*and he was feeling included in the class,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 254).

4.4.2.2 Flexible Approach to the School Day

The staff participants spoke about the adaptability of their practice, a mixture of one-to-one support and support in class, and also promoting the independent aspects of learning. "*He gets one-to-one every day, but not for the whole lesson. We have timetabled slots for him. And then he gets set some work on his own and someone goes back and checks, but no one's sitting by his side all day every day anymore, which is amazing,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 149-150).

The transference of skills learnt on a one-to-one basis was also mentioned. *"And he works for 45 minutes on his own with his one-to-one, doing all his phonics and stuff. And you know, vocabulary work, he has lots of speech and language which is then practised in class'*(Staff Focus Group, lines 183 – 185)

4.4.2.3 Supporting Writing

The deputy head felt that a contributing factor to children having outbursts was due to not being able to write and addressing this could potentially have an impact on preventing

exclusions. "*I'm not saying that's why some children are excluded. But a lot of the issues that we've had in the past, because some of the boys especially, is because of writing. Writing is a big factor. If I think about a couple of kids, children we've got now, their thing is if you ask them to write, they find writing really, really difficult,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 232).

When he asked the children, they attributed their behaviour to not being able to write. "*When they calm down. So, why did you feel like that? Oh, because I can't write*," (Staff Focus Group, line 236).

4.4.2.4 Motivators/Positive Rewards

Silver time was used consistently with the children to motivate them to engage in learning and the curriculum. The staff recognised the children needed immediate rewards. "O*bviously recognising that a lot of these children need something there and then and you know, not to wait all week,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 85-86). *"He was very driven by silver time, he used to love that,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 80-81).

4.4.3 Theme 3 – Staff Expertise and Working as a Team

Figure 16

Theme 3 and sub-themes

Staff attributes and own experience

Reflecting on practice

Communication and flexibility

Autonomy

Staff Working as a Team
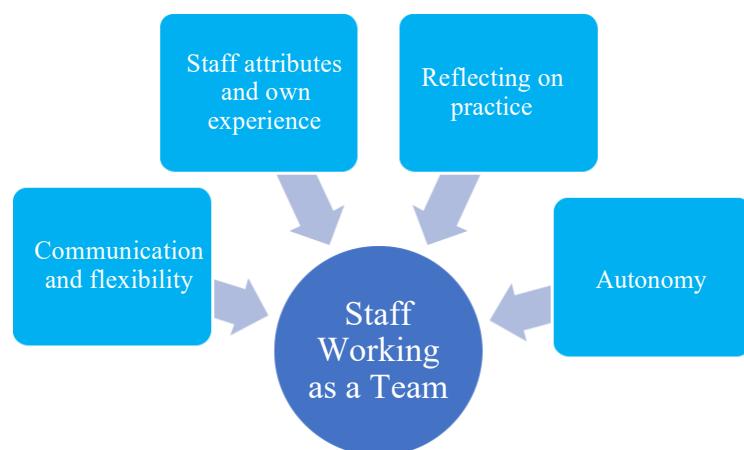
It was very clear that one of the dominant themes for successful provision for the children was the staff team. To support the children and be successful, close relationships,

communication and support were central. The senior leadership team created an environment where the staff feel valued and supported.

4.4.3.1 Communication and Flexibility

The staff team presented as exceptionally close. They valued working as a team and the consistency of supporting each other. "*We work quite closely together, as well, as a staff team. So everybody's kind of singing from the same hymn book,*" (Staff Focus Group, line 309). "*And I think as well, I think we work at our best when we're together, we all kind of sing from the same hymn book. So it doesn't matter. If one of us then takes over from that child, that child is still getting the same treatment that the last one left them with,*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 457-459).

There was a sense that all the staff had an understanding of all of the children's needs rather than just one particular child, which is highlighted in this example. "*And then the next person might take over to give you a break, and they would still carry on with that parrot fashion. You know, so we kind of work together and we kind of, we know each other quite well that we can just pick up from where the other one left off,*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 361-363).

A continuous thread was how the staff supported each other especially when things were challenging. "*But they're quite difficult and quite challenging. After more than a half an hour, 45 minutes, then you can have a break. So then L would go off and have a break, and then someone else will take over. So it's a bit like a tag team,*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 449-452).

Another example of teamwork and flexibility is when the member of staff needed support and the children needed a change of adult. "*So when we work at our best as a team was when we just could step in and help each other so that we had our own key children. If we weren't getting anywhere with them, it didn't mean that we were failing, it just meant that we needed someone else to come in, and the child might listen to them. So we used to like do*

a bit of a tag team. You know, and just having that flexibility to know when to step in," (Staff Focus Group, lines 436 - 440).

If the staff needed support or advice, they felt comfortable asking colleagues, **"***yeah, anyone in our school would not be worried to ask for help, which shows how supportive everybody can be,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 496 - 497).

4.4.3.2. Staff Attributes and Own Experience

Staff mentioned the internal attributes that they deemed as essential to provide the most successful support when working with children who are at risk of exclusion. "*Patience, patience, calmness, knowing how to pick your battles*," (Staff Focus Group, line 384). The staff spoke about the job as more of a passion, *"but you also really, honestly have to have a passion for doing it,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 386). "*You can tell that we've got passion for it, because we walk towards trouble. And I think that you have to enjoy doing it otherwise, I can imagine it'd be just such hard work. But yeah, I think that's the biggest thing. Yeah. Yeah, you have an understanding as well, empathy."* (Staff Focus Group, lines 388 – 390).

Staff who also had their own experience was a feature deemed successful by the parents. "*Most of us have had so much experience either of our own children or children through the school that you, you understand where the children are coming from and why they're behaving like*," (Staff Focus Group, lines 391 – 392).

4.4.3.3 Reflecting on Practice

A refreshing aspect of the Staff Focus Group was how reflective they were on their own practice, they were not afraid to have honest conversations and learn from past experiences. *"Yeah. And we will get it wrong sometimes. I think sometimes the children know, yeah. If you apologise to them and say sorry,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 554 - 555). "*I think, experience as well, I mean, we all make mistakes that were sometimes in the past, we might have done something or maybe I shouldn't have done that. So you learn from*

experience where we got a lot of experience in the school and got some very skilled people. We don't always get it right," (Staff Focus Group, line 455).

4.4.3.4 Sense of Autonomy

Staff felt trusted to make decisions about the children, resulting in them feeling empowered and valued. "*I think we only got to a place where it worked because we would talk to each other. And we were allowed by the head to make the decisions together, didn't he? Because we knew him best and had his mum on side as well. Think consistency, to be fair and firm,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 420 - 422).

4.4.4 Theme 4 – Learning Environment and Provision

Figure 17.

Theme 4 and sub-themes
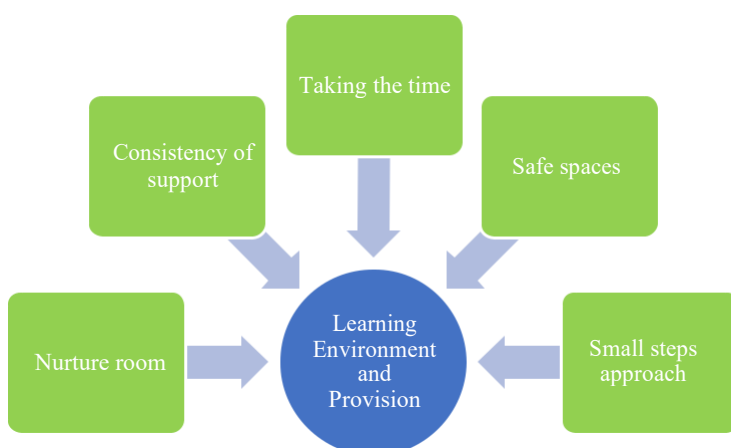
4.4.4.1 Nurture Room

The school has a nurture room which they deemed to support the children who were at risk of exclusion. "*And by then he was trashing classrooms and, you know, throwing chairs, tipping tables, attacking staff. And then I think it was year two, he went to what we call the nurture room for a year. And he was in there for a year,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 125 - 126).

She followed on to say, *"by the time he was in year four, the work that we've done on him and done with him, he had stopped he had really calmed, calmed down a lot,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 129 - 130). Later on, during the focus group, she returned to talking about the nurture room. "*He was a little bit, he was a bit calmer in there. He still had these moments where he would probably trash the room sometimes. But it worked better for him because it was in smaller groups. He had his visual timetable in there,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 161-163).

Resources that were used in the nurture room were mentioned, "*blob trees, there's a lot of work on that in the nurture room ... okay and the five point scale that yeah*," (Staff Focus Group, line 216).

4.4.4.2 Consistency of Support

Having the three learning mentors allowed for consistency for the children, throughout their school day and not just in the classroom. "*We've been lucky, we've had three learning mentors to work with that group so it does make a big difference for some of these children that they know there's always someone to go to because obviously play times and challenge some of these children and knowing that there's someone there every day that's gonna support them, who is also there, not just during lunchtime, as well. Yeah. I think that's quite important,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 45). "*He just seems to respond to the same adult and consistency for him. He needs the same person, I think*." (Staff Focus Group, lines 188 - 189). "*Being honest with them and consistent. I've, I found over my years of teaching, if you say you're going to do it, do it. Three Cs – communication, consequences and consistency*," (Staff Focus Group, line 414).

4.4.4.3 Taking the Time

Due to the setup of the staff and having three additional learning mentors, time was mentioned as an important factor of successful provision. "*I guess we had the luxury of being*

able to take our time and being on a one-to-one with him," (Staff Focus Group, lines 61 - 62). *'The learning mentors have the time,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 335). They described how they needed time to build up successful relationships with the children.

One member of staff attributed time as the most important factor. *"But to be honest, I think the biggest resource we have is, and this is a real luxury compared to a lot of schools, is the time because honestly, I feel like that's the biggest thing. We've got the time to put into it. Rather than any resources,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 331 - 333). Time was considered more important than training for supporting the children. The year six class teacher explained how *"all of us have done training as we've gone along. But actually, it's the time that we have to put into it,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 341 – 342).

4.4.4.4. Safe Spaces

The setup of the school allows different spaces for the children, which the staff considered an important part of the children's provision. If they needed time away from class, they were allowed the space to do so. *"It's the space as well. So we have our own room, so the children have somewhere to go. So that's, I mean, it might not be the resource in the sense that you're talking about but, you know, these children go and if they feel they want to come out of class, they've got a safe space, and we have places for the children to go. So that's quite a big part of it,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 346 - 349). *"I think having a safe space for them to go to is a real big thing. You've actually got quite a lot of space in the school. I'm thinking about if children at the moment meltdown or have a problem they have different safe spaces. They can go there. And feel safe in that space. It might be under a table under a blanket. It might be in the library. It might be down the stairs back to the classroom,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 353-55).

Outdoor space was also believed to be a positive factor for the children. *"So yeah, so we're really lucky. We are very lucky in that sense. You've got quite big outdoor spaces*. (Staff Focus Group, line 362). The year six teacher also described how the Forest School

space was a safe space for a child. "*Year six don't normally go in the autumn term, but because we are in bubbles, taking them and he really thrives out there. Having that extra space. I think a lot of these children miss out on this, its where he used to run to when he got upset, to forest school.*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 369 - 370).

4.4.4.5. Small Steps Approach

For the children to be successful, small steps were mentioned consistently as a positive factor, "*small achievable goals,*" (Staff Focus Group, line 64). "*It was very, very small steps, real small steps, he started off outside my room,*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 76 - 77). "*Time, but, and it's all based on small tasks. He does some small tasks at the beginning of every lesson,*" (Staff Focus Group, line 148).

4.4.5 Theme 5 – School Systems

Figure 18

Theme 5 and sub-themes
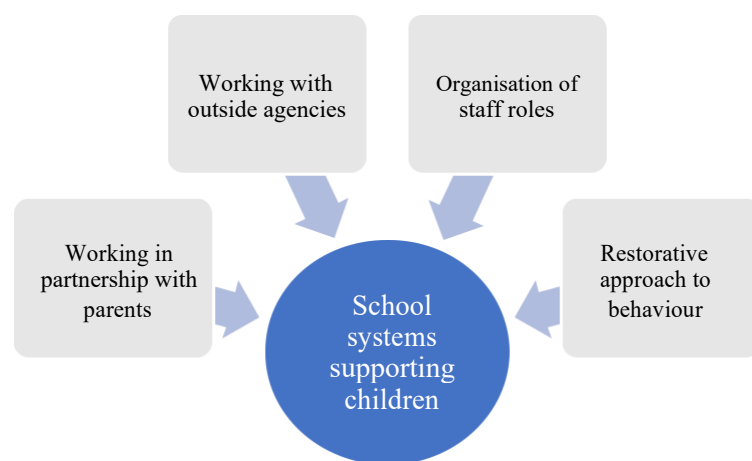
4.4.5.1 Working in Partnership with Parents

A fundamental part that the school considered to be important is working with the children's parents. "*We try and have that partnership with the parents as well. You know, to inform them and keep them up to date on what's going on,*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 310 - 311). The school would also utilise the support from the children's parents when they were

supporting the children, *"and the other thing is, we did used to communicate with his mom a lot. So if he was particularly bad, he responded to his mom, but his mom would talk to him on the phone. And he used to listen to her,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 96 - 97).

4.4.5.2 Working with Outside Agencies

Working in partnership with outside agencies supported the children with their SEN needs. An example of this is the impact of Speech and Language, *"I mean, yeah, he's, he's come a really long way. And I mean, he's got language now. He can express himself easy. You know, he's got a lot of language now,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines137 - 138). *"He has had a lot of support from outside agencies as well. Yeah. So from speech and language, so when he first came in reception he essentially didn't have any language,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 191 - 193).

The impact of this support was then discussed. *"You would not know he had all those outbursts in the past. He just wouldn't do that. He just wouldn't do that now, it's the language, expressing yourself in a way that's appropriate,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 204 - 205).

4.4.5.3 Organisation of Staff Roles

It is clear that the organisation of the staff has enabled the learning mentors to have time to spend with the children. *"Because we have learning mentors. For me, as a teacher, I can spend my time teaching the curriculum, as I know, the emotional thing is all part of the design, we do that. But we can't, we can't possibly give the children the time that they need,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 344 - 345). *"I guess we had the luxury of being able to take our time and being on a one-to-one with him,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 61 - 62). *"The learning mentors have the time,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 335).

There is also a dedicated family worker that the school employs. *"There is the family worker who works with families, the background and she talks to the parents and we talk to*

the children," (Staff Focus Group, line 314). She is very much seen as one of the team, *"she is part of the school, one of us,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 321). *"I think we've got a lot of staff here, haven't we, you know, different staff. It's not just teachers, you've got all different people with different experiences, different titles, you know, so I think we're quite lucky enough,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 537 - 539).

4.4.5.4 Restorative Approach to Managing Behaviour

Consistency was described as a successful factor when discussing what works well for children, *"so we've got a very consistent behaviour policy,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 285). "*Think consistency, to be fair and firm.*" (Staff Focus Group, lines 420 - 422). Detentions were also seen as a positive measure, *"so we have detentions. So it was introduced a few years ago by the head. But it helps everybody because it was very clear what the expectations were. And it's a very simply written, if you do this, you get detention, like three things, isn't it?"* (Staff Focus Group, line 290).

An important factor to note is that the school's approach to managing conflicts was restorative justice. "*And then also we do the restorative, we do a lot of restorative work with the children. They do something wrong, we don't just tell them off. And wherever we get them all together to see what they could do differently next time. We do an awful lot of restorative work,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 290 - 293). "*These children feel a huge injustice, if they're not heard, hold on to things for days especially with ASD, see, they will not let go. So although we might not be able to do it straightaway, if they're too heightened, we always come back to it, and they get a chance to say their side of it. So it's quite fair,"* (Staff Focus Group, lines 301 - 304).

The importance of good paperwork and notes around any incidents were important to staff as it instilled consistency for the children. "*That's why the file notes are important. Yeah. So we write everything down,"* (Staff Focus Group, line 306).

4.5 Dream Phase: Children Views

RQ1a. What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support

children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of children?

The Dream phase allowed the children to build on what they felt worked, allowing them to

explore things that could potentially enhance their school experience. It was facilitated

through individual Microsoft Teams meetings; the school provided the children with a variety

of materials which they used to create their dream school. The two participants within this

phase constructed their 'dream school' individually.

Ben chose to draw a picture of his dream school and then he wanted to use the Lego to

create a model.

Figure 19

Ben's drawing of his 'dream school'.
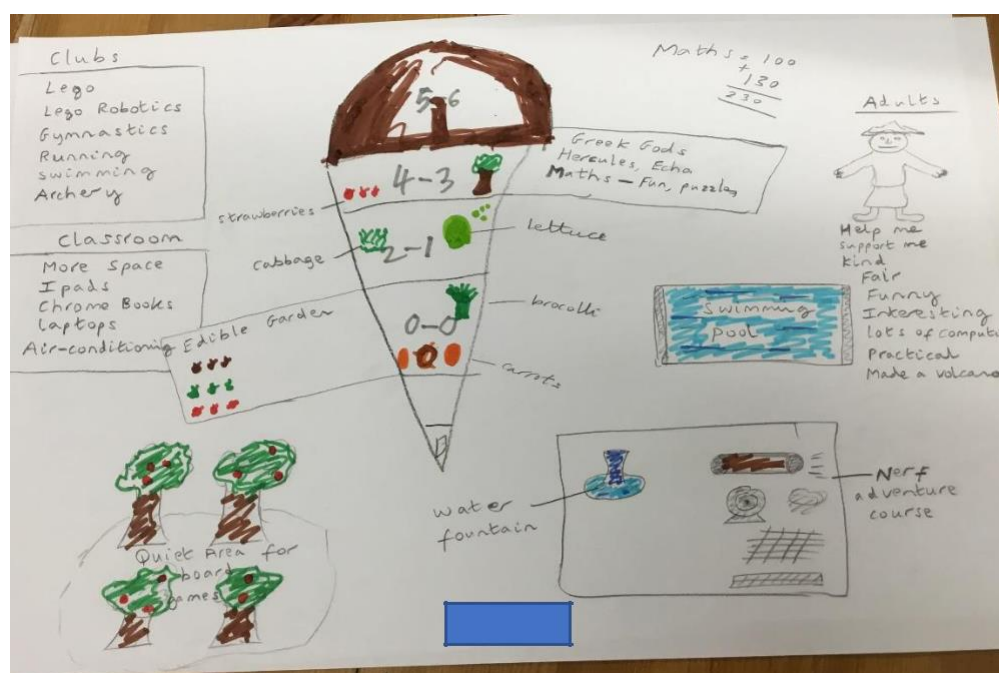
Figure 20

Ben's 'dream school' made out of Lego
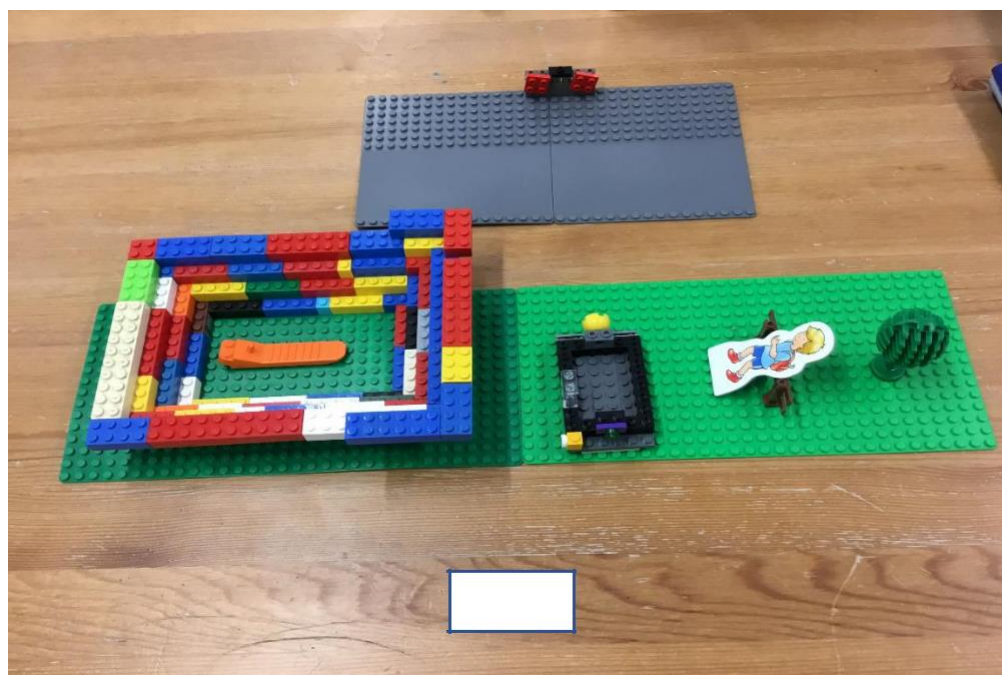
Ben started by describing his dream school which would be made out of ice cream. The children in the school would have ice cream every five minutes. He drew an ice cream cone as the structure of his school, then split the sections into year groups. Each year group was allocated a vegetable to eat from the edible garden. Ben is in year four and said they would be learning about the Greeks (the Greeks is his favourite subject).

In the grounds of the school, Ben wanted a swimming pool (grey section on Lego model) and a Nerf gun adventure course, which he would play all day. On the Lego model, he put a picture of a boy next to a ramp, symbolising him in the Nerf gun adventure playground. Ben wanted a quiet area in the playground where he could play board games, and a water fountain that he could drink from all day. The tree on the Lego model represents the edible garden. The clubs that Ben said he would like in his school were Lego robotics, gymnastics, swimming and archery. The classrooms would be bigger with iPads and laptops. He described the teachers as being helpful, kind, funny and fair.

Figure 21

William's picture of his dream school
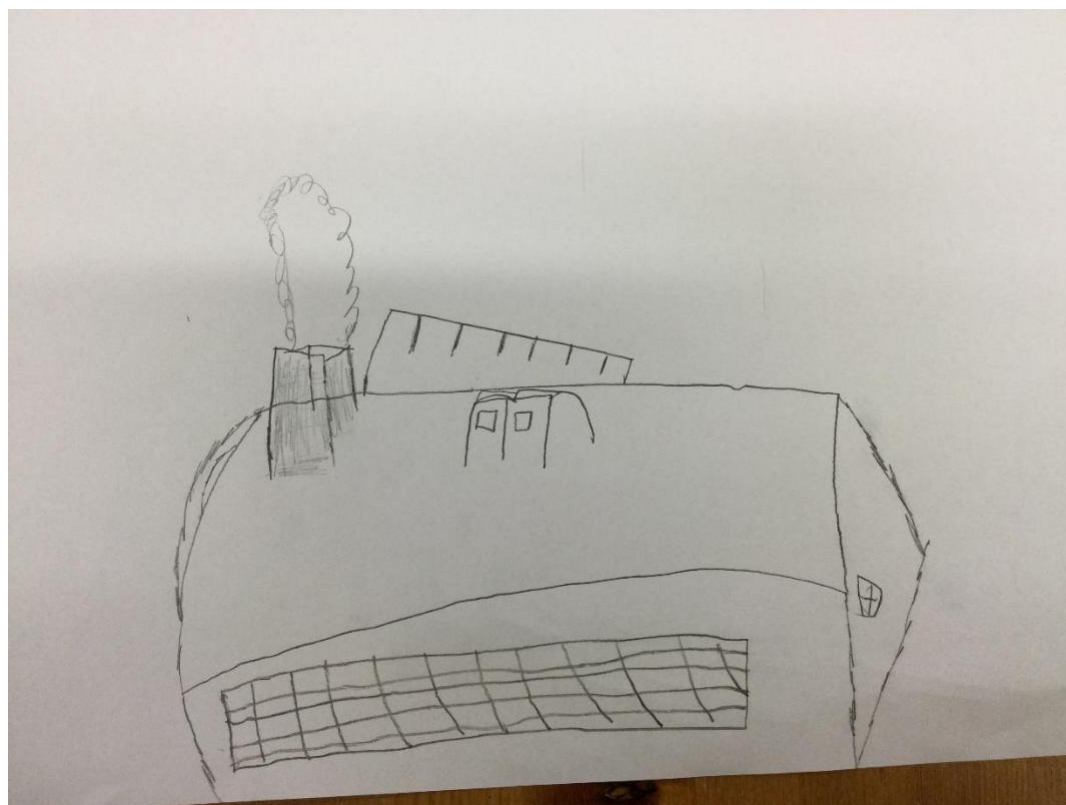
William chose to draw a picture of his school. He found it difficult to think in an abstract way and to imagine what his school could look like; he was very literal in his thinking, which was consistent with his ASD diagnosis. It was important for William to have a football pitch, which he has drawn at the front of the school. He wanted the school to have a chimney and windows. The playground is at the back of the school. William would like to play Roblox with his friends in his dream school.

4.6 Dream Phase: Parent Views

RQ1b. *What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of parents?*

The Dream phase builds upon and enriches the data collected from the Discover phase as it allows the participant to express what they perceive to support the children, building upon what is already in place. Individually, parent participants constructed a shared visual

diagram of their dreams and interactive software was used to create an interactive diagram.

The document is presented in Figure 22.

Figure 22

Parents graphic representation of their 'dreams' for the school
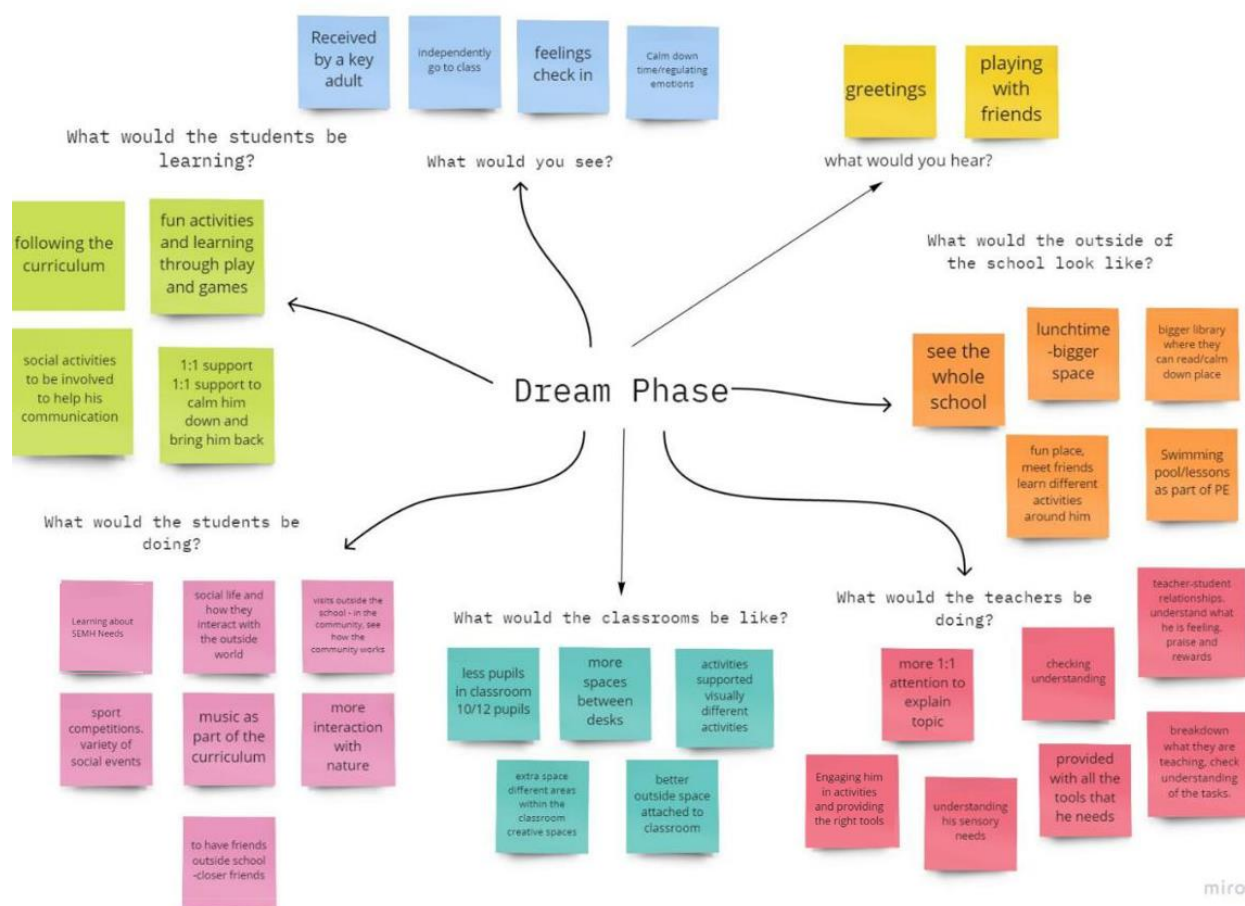
The parent participants were able to access a shared document at individual times so they could both contribute to it, creating a shared understanding of their dreams for the school. The researcher asked them the 'miracle' question and the prompting questions (see Appendix M). The diagram is structured by using the prompting questions.

Learning Environment

It was important for the children to be greeted by a key adult, go independently to their classroom and have a 'feelings' check in so they are calm and regulated when starting

the school day. Each classroom would have outdoor space attached to it, creative spaces within the classroom and more space between desks.

Teaching and Learning

Participants would like everything taught to be broken down, with visual support and teachers checking the children's understanding and their sensory needs. The children would be provided with the right 'toolset' to successfully engage in activities. The class sizes were also discussed with 10 / 12 children being the preferred number. There was an emphasis on supporting social skills and the children learning more about social, emotional and mental health.

Curriculum

There was a consensus that play-based learning within the curriculum is taken away too early and should be part of the curriculum moving further up the school. The participants wanted music, swimming and more sports competitions with a variety of social events incorporated in the curriculum. Nature was also considered an important part of the provision. The participants wanted the children to have more interaction within the community and to learn how the 'outside' world works.

Facilities

The school would have a bigger library where the children could read and calm down and also bigger lunchtime spaces.

4.7 Dream Phase: Staff Views

RQ1c. What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of staff?

The Staff Focus Group commenced with constructing a 'word cloud' using an online software programme. Each participant selected up to ten words which described their 'dream school' for children who were at risk of exclusion. Figure 23 is the word cloud that was generated by the staff participants.

Figure 23

Word cloud for staff 'dream school'

Encouragingly, the words used in the cloud included words that the parent participants had used within their interviews such as inclusion, nurture, communication, space and support which formed some of the main themes from the research. The size of the words reflects how frequently the response was inputted. It creates a powerful graphic representation of what staff perceive supports children who are at risk of exclusion.

The Staff Focus Group then created a shared diagram of their dreams for the school which also had similarities to the parents' Dream phase.

Figure 24

Staff's graphic representation of their 'dream' for the school.
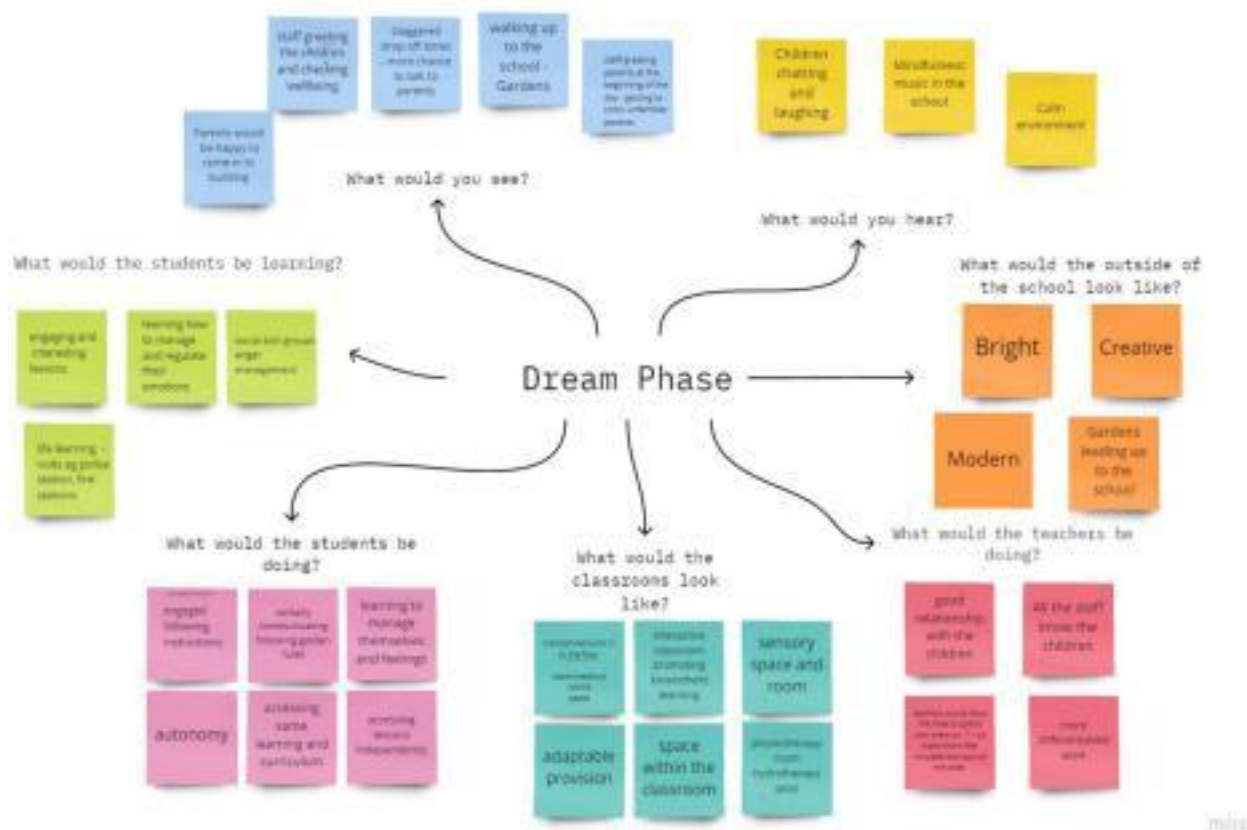
Learning Environment

Similar to the parents, the staff would greet the children on arrival to the school and the children would have an emotional regulation check in. This would create a chance for the teachers to access and speak to unfamiliar parents. Gardens would be leading up to the school which would be bright, modern and creative. Mindfulness music would be playing in the school, creating a calm environment. The staff wanted to continue staggered starts (which was in place throughout lockdown) as it was a calmer start for the children coming in.

Teaching and Learning

All the children would be accessing the same curriculum as their peers, independently and be able to follow instructions. The classroom environment would be interactive,

promoting kinesthetic learning and have more space within the classrooms with breakout

spaces. A focus on emotional regulation, social skills and anger management were cited as

central components to successful provision, supporting the children to manage their feelings.

Similar to the parents, an emphasis on life skills and visits into the local

community (police station, fire station).

Facilities

The staff wanted a trampoline sunk into the floor, and a physiotherapy

and hydrotherapy pool for specific interventions.

4.8 Design and Deliver

The design and deliver phase was the final stage of the AI fulfilling the transformative

nature of this research. The data was used to generate six 'Proactive Propositions' through a

virtual meeting with the deputy head and a learning mentor. The results of the Dream and

Discover phase were shared and six statements were generated through discussions. These

statements are presented in Figure 25. Each statement was then used to structure an action

plan (Table 7).

Figure 25

List of Proactive Propositions in Design and Deliver Phase

Provocative Propositions:
• Children and parents are greeted every day and they feel welcome and have a sense of belonging within the school.
• The children feel calm and regulated at school.
• Children are part of the community and regularly engage in trips and community projects.
• Lessons are creative, fun and inspiring for the children, motivating them to learn and make progress in the curriculum.
• The school environment is bright and colourful and facilitates creativity and imagination.
• The children are regularly involved in nature and outdoor activities.

Table 7

Action Plan Generated from Proactive Propositions

Provocative Propositions	Action Plan	By who?	Date to be Implemented	Review
Children and parents are greeted every day and they feel welcome and have a sense of belonging within the school.	• Staggered start to the day, each year group come in at slightly different times. • Children are greeted by staff – someone in each year group will be at the gate. • Mindfulness music will be played at beginning of the day.	Deputy head to coordinate timetable. Member of staff from each year group.	Beginning of the Summer Term 2021	September 2021
The children feel calm and regulated at school.	• Make resources from 'zones of regulation' for each classroom. • Staff meeting to explain concept. • Set up zones of regulation in the classroom. • Assembly to explain to the children in the school what zones of regulation are. • When the children come into their classroom they check in and put a peg on the zones board.	Learning mentors Deputy head SENCO	April/May 2021 May 2021	September 2021
Children are part of the community and regularly engage in trips and community projects.	• Continue with visits. • Real life experiences, visits from police/fire for years 3 / 4. • Continue with junior citizens award.	Target Year 3 / 4 team	September 2021	Termly
Lessons are creative, fun and inspiring for the children, motivating them to learn and make progress in the curriculum.	• Planning audit. • Staff to hand in medium-term plan. • Share and identify creativity in planning, bring this to staff meeting. • Options in the community included in the plans.	Planning audit SLT and phase leaders. Ideas shared in weekly staff meetings.	September 2021 – half termly September 2021	

	• Look at kinesthetic, interactive and play based aspects of learning within the planning.			
The school environment is bright colourful and facilitates creativity and imagination.	• Playground updated, painted and equipment fixed. • All planters are used with bright colourful flowers. • Update ball pen with artificial surface (continue with bid).	Deputy head	August 2021 (Summer holiday- commence work on ball pen) September 2021	Termly
The children are regularly involved in nature and outdoor activities.	• Forest School – 2 more members of staff trained. • Every year group to do Forest School. • Edible garden to be set up in communal area.	Teachers Learning mentors	September 2021	Termly

4.9 Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the findings of the AI addressing the research questions in turn. Each section starts with a TA identifying the theme and sub-themes addressing the research questions. The themes that were identified through the data analysis answering the research question of what works to prevent exclusion were from the children's perspectives, support from teachers for learning and emotional regulation; importance of peers; and the learning environment. The themes for the perspectives of the parents were staff knowledge and skills; working together; whole school ethos; and provision and support. The themes identified through the staff interviews were a whole school approach; approach to the curriculum; staff expertise; working as a team; school systems; and the learning environment. The Dream phase was then presented as the participants 'Dream School', a visual representation, and the chapter concludes with an action plan based on the data collected within the AI cycle. Chapter five will address and discuss the interpretation of the findings in relation to the existing literature and the implication for practice moving forward.

Chapter Five

Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

The aim of this transformative, action research was to explore the research question, 'What factors within a mainstream primary school are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion from the perspective of the children, parents and staff.' This was in response to limited literature in primary schools that empowered and promoted the voice of all three stakeholders, the most fundamental of all being the children. Importantly, the thesis adopts a positive psychology approach from a critical realist perspective; the key purpose of the research was to promote change through understanding, making a difference to the real world. Consequently, this chapter draws together the research findings, providing a critical, reflective synthesis in the context of previous literature through an ecosystemic theoretical lens. Highly significantly, the implications for educational psychology will be explored, as well as the strengths and limitations of the research and the impact of COVID-19. Finally, implications for further research are addressed together with the researcher's personal reflections and research journey.

5.2 Reflective Synthesis of the Research Findings

5.2.1 RQ1a. What Factors Within a Mainstream Primary School Are Perceived to Support Children Who Are 'At Risk' of Exclusion from the Perspective of the Children?

5.2.1.1 Support from Teachers

The children who participated in the research felt teachers understood their needs and were described as '*kind and there to help'*, providing significant support with learning and emotional regulation. Teachers play a central role in providing support at school for children, fostering positive children relationships, promoting wellbeing and learning (Hill & Rowe,

1996) which was consistent with the findings in this research. Cornelius-White (2007) conducted a meta-analysis concluding that learner-centred student-teacher relationships are effective when they are non-directive, empathetic, warm and encouraging, which is how the relationships were described in this research. Roorda, Koomen, Spilt and Oort (2011) state that negative student-teacher relationships were linked to poorer children engagement and achievement.

Each participant had specific teachers they named as someone that helped and supported them with their learning and emotional needs. The quality and consistency of one-to-one relationships is recognised by Pirrie et al. (2001) as being central to supporting children who are 'at risk' of exclusion. It appeared that the children had formed secure relationships with certain adults within the school, but encouragingly they felt that all the teachers would help, reflecting a whole school approach. Drawing on data from a longitudinal survey of children, Obsuth et al. (2016) argued that the quality of teacher-children relationships has the power to influence students' behaviour, both positively and negatively. They highlighted the importance of an inclusive school environment facilitating supportive teacher-children relationships.

When considering children's attachments to their teachers as a contributing factor to success, it is important to consider even though teachers may provide a secure base, this does not necessarily mean that children have an attachment bond with their teacher (Ainsworth, 1989, Schuengel and van IJzendoorn, 2001). For the children, the teachers change every year, therefore the relationship is often not longitudinal. In contrast, for the children in this research, in many cases the learning mentors had provided the consistency of support, given that they were not attached to a particular class, contributing to success.

Within the research the staff supported the children to feel happy and safe in school. Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis of effective education stated that schools need to create an environment where students feel safe to learn. Feeling safe is a key part of children being

regulated and ready to learn. Maslow's (1943) *Hierarchy of Needs* stipulates that we are motivated to fulfil certain needs in a progressive manner. Feeling safe and secure is described as a 'basic' need and without this higher level need, social esteem is harder to achieve and self-actualisation cannot be met.

5.2.1.2 Importance of Peers

Friendships, peer groups and social inclusion are a central component of a child's school life. Social isolation can occur if a child feels they do not have meaningful friendships and children 'at risk' of exclusion already have the potential to feel isolated, experiencing fixed term exclusion or being educated away from their peers. If a child feels socially excluded, Thompson and Morris (2016) state that they are at higher risk from negative social and emotional outcomes, including depression and early school dropout.

Positive peer relationships were a significant factor in supporting and enhancing the children's enjoyment of school. The children were motivated to finish work and follow the behaviour policy by being able to spend time with friends after the completion of a task. The social dimensions of school and positive peer relationships are often highlighted as a contributing factor to children experiencing positive outcomes, including positive mental and physical health (Engels, Finkenauer, Meeus & Deković, 2001). Poor peer relationships (for example, bullying) can contribute to negative effects on emotional wellbeing. Children who are 'at risk' of exclusion often experience friendship difficulties, which can be a contributing factor to an exclusion.

5.2.1.3 Learning Environment

The learning environment supporting the children included extrinsic motivators, spending time in Oak Room, being motivated by their special interests and spending time outside. The participants were motivated by 'silver time', a consistent theme for all the children. During that time, the child could enjoy an activity of their choice. Silver time is a

reward system based on a behaviourist perspective, and extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic motivation is when a child engages in an activity for a reward, or they fear a punishment (Tohidi and Jabbari, 2012). The children were clear on the quantity of ticks needed to obtain silver time at the end of the day. One participant said he should 'not be naughty' to obtain silver time which raises questions over his constructs of what 'naughty' means. Extrinsic motivation can prompt a high level of willpower. However, it may not always encourage engagement of an activity to master a skill or enhance knowledge. Intrinsic motivation, in contrast, encourages participation to experience challenge, fun and internal satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000) without the expectation of rewards. The rewards the children were working towards were socially orientated and tailored to special interests. Extrinsic motivators engage students in activities and help to sustain motivation throughout the process of learning over time (Li & Lynch, 2016). The literature review did not specifically identify studies on extrinsic motivators; behaviour was studied at a whole school level including policies and procedures (Hallam, 2007).

The children described outdoor space and being able to run around as central to their enjoyment of school as it provided an opportunity to regulate their emotions, having freedom and autonomy away from the structured environment of school. Nature also featured with the edible garden, allowing the children a sense of achievement in growing their own vegetables and having something to nurture and look after. The importance of the set-up of schools and how to organise the space was highlighted by Gilmore (2013). The school was fortunate having a large outside area and space for additional rooms, which is seldom the case for many provisions.

Space for emotional regulation, encompassing a feeling of safety, was evidently an important feature or provision and was provided by Oak Room. This room provided motivating activities such as Lego, computers and building materials. The literature highlighted therapeutic group interventions to support children who were at risk of exclusion

(Renwick & Spalding, 2002; Cullen-Powell & Barlow, 2005), involving structured, prescriptive sessions and external professionals (albeit, the emphasis was on changing behaviour). In contrast, Oak Room was a constant space with no specific time allocation providing support for emotional regulation when the children needed flexibility, autonomy and space.

5.2.1.4 Self-Efficacy

The children had confidence that they could manage situations and regulate their behaviour, indicating 'self-efficacy'. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) is a person's belief that they can succeed in a situation. The Self Discovery Programme (Cullen-Powell & Barlow, 2005) was established in the theoretical framework of self-efficacy but it was a structured intervention, with success measured using a standardised questionnaire from the teacher's perspective.

In contrast, the children in this research exhibited self-efficacy in their ability to manage situations, which they were clear at articulating in the interviews. Potentially, the children in this research have had encouragement and received positive verbal feedback when they have exercised skills in self-regulation and task engagement, giving them the confidence and encouragement (Redmond, 2010) to manage situations themselves.

Previously, children's voices were strikingly absent from research in primary school assessing what is working for them. When perceiving what has supported them at school, the children described relationships, both with teachers and peers, the learning environment and a sense of self-efficacy as fundamental.

5.2.2 RQ1b. What Factors Within a Mainstream Primary School Are Perceived to Support Children Who Are 'At Risk' of Exclusion from the Perspective of the Parents?

5.2.2.1 Staff Knowledge and Skills

Parents described factors perceived to support their children in school, including: the staff adapting provision to their child's needs; training and personal knowledge; a consistent approach to behaviour management; and taking sufficient time with their children to understand their needs.

Staff knowledge and skills were considered an integral part of supporting children who are 'at risk' of exclusion. Parents welcomed adaptable provision, giving a sense of an individual approach and an understanding of the child's needs. They felt that staff had taken the time to understand the children, as a result putting in place preventative strategies, predicting if they were going to have a bad day. The parents had faith in the staff and referred to them as highly skilled and well-trained. They noted that this provided a feeling of comfort and relief that they had the right skillset to support their children.

These findings concur with The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2017) review into school exclusions, which reported that the level of expertise of school staff in SEND, cognitive and emotional development and awareness of cultural differences is key to understanding and addressing needs.

Another positive factor identified by parents was a perception of instances where staff had children with special needs themselves, promoting a greater understanding of their own child's needs. This was in fact true, although the parents were not aware of this information. When addressing the children's emotions, there was a sense the staff were very skilled at calming the children down rather than controlling them, showing respect and talking to them at their level. Gill et al. (2017) reflected on the development and support of teaching staff, including the need to recruit teachers with the skills to work with children at risk of exclusion,

and the provision of training for trainee teachers and as part of their ongoing professional development.

5.2.2.2 We Work Together

The parent/carer participants reported that the school worked in partnership with them, maintaining effective lines of communication, forging trusting relationships, and making them feel valued and empowered. The literature focusing on preventing exclusion and involving parents identified in the review considered specific programmes (Smith et al, 2013), often involving interventions of a certain duration, for example, Learning 2 Learn and the SWIFT family group. The overarching success of these interventions stemmed from the engagement of parents and the establishment of a different power dynamic, with a support worker replacing a teacher, and providing a different relationship. Interestingly, in this research, the parents felt the relationships with all the staff were supportive, including the teachers and SLT. Rather than the engagement being a time-limited intervention it was daily, and implemented not just at school but at home, creating an ongoing sense of advocacy and support for the parents.

A number of studies identified in the literature review drew upon the theoretical framework of attachment theory (Bowlby, 2007), emphasising the importance of parental involvement and forming secure relationships. These included nurture groups, Story Links (Waters, 2015), Learning 2 Learn (Smith et al., 2013) and the Incredible Years Programme (Cole, 2015). These programmes had positive outcomes, highlighting the usefulness of considering attachment theory when addressing children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.

Parents felt the school was on their side, and that they were valued and included in the decisions, addressing any potential power imbalances that could be perceived in a parent/school relationship, *'you don't feel like you are being left out'*. Roffey (2004) identified that these relationships can increase parental confidence and strategies. This was

true for a parent participant in the research, who felt comfortable asking for advice and strategies from the staff that they might use at home.

The rationale for working in partnerships with parents and forging positive home school relationships is evident in the literature with a number of studies attributing relationships with parents as a key feature of the success of an intervention (Smith et al., 2013). Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, and Closson (2005) identified that positive interactions with families can also motivate children in school. Pianta and Walsh (1996) concluded that when parents feel valued and relaxed with staff, they will convey a similar message to their children.

5.2.2.3 Whole School Ethos/Systems

Parent participants spoke in high regard of the school's ethos, characterising the school as going '*above and beyond'* for their children. An individual approach, adapting provision, commitment to social inclusion, and the school's methods for managing behaviour utilising a whole school approach were deemed central to the success of the children, consistent with Hatton's (2013) findings. There were a variety of examples detailing parents' accounts of when the school had gone above the 'normal' provision.

A whole school approach to inclusion was specified, rather than individual staff members or separate provision. A central theme was social inclusion. There was a commitment and drive to include the children in all activities, which some previous settings had failed to do. The parents felt that there was a concerted effort to socialise and provide opportunities for their children to make friends.

A consistent, whole school approach to behaviour was deemed a positive factor, adopting a firm but fair approach. The need for a co-ordinated policy to manage behaviour was identified by the Institute of Education and National Foundation for Educational Research (2014). Hatton (2013) also identified the importance of having a clear behaviour policy when creating an inclusive ethos at the school.

5.2.2.4 Provision and Support

Provision and support contributed to '*what works'*. Nurture groups, space to support emotional regulation and the importance of key adults, along with incentives to motivate behaviour, were all identified as sub-themes.

Silver time was a facilitative factor that the parents felt enabled success. Again, this is an extrinsic measure, raising the question: should the success be attributed to children conforming to what is believed to be 'good behaviour' in order to remain in class or are they engaging in meaningful, motivating learning? This is a point for discussion. However, remaining true to the research question, it was a factor that was deemed as working for the children.

Speech and language support was specifically mentioned as a facilitating factor for supporting the children. One of the participants was at high risk of exclusion before he received support for his communication. The relationships between behavioural difficulties and speech and language difficulties have been well documented (Brenner et al., 2002). In the literature review studies, such as Law and Silver (2003) and Rechten and Tweed (2014), it has been identified that supporting communication skills yielded positive results impacting self-esteem, social communication and language skills. In this research, the impact of speech and language supported facilitating verbal communication reducing the child's risk of exclusion as he no longer uses violence to express his needs.

Previously the school had a nurture room, set up in a classic way, which Bennathan and Boxall (2000) state is essential for success. One of the participants spent two years in this nurture room and the parent felt it was the nurture group that enabled her son to stay in school successfully. Nurture groups are a well cited intervention supporting children who are at risk of exclusion; they also prompt concerns over children being removed from their classroom. An evaluation of nurture rooms by O'Connor and Colwell (2002) found only short-term benefits, however, Cole (2015) cited favourable evidence of nurture rooms which is

consistent with this research. A parent expressed that the nurture room had supported her child to integrate back into mainstream class and to be successful a year on.

Rooms such as Oak Room and Willow were seen as positive factors in supporting children and a safe space for them to go. These rooms are not traditional nurture spaces, however, they are described as places in which the staff understand the children and support them with emotional regulation. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1965) suggests that a nurture room should provide a secure, predictable environment where children can develop a trusting relationship with staff. When the parents and children talk about these additional rooms, quite often the child had the choice and autonomy to go there rather than being directed, which potentially makes it less threatening and more inclusive.

5.2.3. RQ1c What Factors Within a Mainstream Primary School Are Perceived to Support Children Who Are 'At Risk' of Exclusion from the Perspective of the Staff?

5.2.3.1 School Ethos

Munn et al. (2001) described school ethos as underpinning all practice. Timpson (2019) identified a range of school systems and cultures that can prevent exclusions, which is congruent with this research. The staff spoke very highly of the inclusive ethos of the school. They were incredibly committed to inclusion and creating a nurturing environment for the children. The head teacher and leadership team prioritised wellbeing and exclusion did not feature in their practice. This supported findings in the Ofsted (2009) survey of primary schools, concluding that low excluding schools had head teachers that viewed exclusion as a last resort.

Fullan (2003) stipulated the job of leaders was to create a shared culture, requiring a leadership style promoting trust and empowerment. Leithwood et al. (2009) also noted that collaboration and a structure involving everyone in the process of change can build social capital. The school in this research appeared to have a shared culture and the staff felt trusted

to make decisions about the children. The head teacher was talked about as being '*out with the children on the field*' and there was a sense that there was no hierarchical structure. Instead, he positioned himself as part of the team, always prioritising the children.

5.2.3.2 Approaches to the Curriculum

The staff adopted a flexible approach with regards to the curriculum. Differentiation was important, enabling the children to still access the same curriculum as their peers but achieve success due to the right planning, thereby increasing self-confidence. Cole (2015) highlighted the need for flexibility in the curriculum to enhance students' self-esteem and draw upon their strengths. Staff also utilised the children's special interests. Hope (2007) looked at potential adaptations that can be made to the school curriculum to accommodate children with different interests.

The deputy head spoke about the correlations between children who struggled with writing and children who were at risk of exclusion (Daniels et al., 1999; Ofsted 2003 and 2005) as he felt this was a contributing factor to emotional outbursts. This was consistent with the Story Links interventions evaluated by Waters (2015). This included therapeutic story writing with children with literacy difficulties and who were at risk of exclusion, when their parents attended sessions the rates of exclusion reduced. It highlights the frustration that children experience with an unidentified SEN need and lack of self-esteem and self-worth that they can experience as a result (Ofsted, 1999). There was not a specific writing group for a particular group that was 'at risk' of exclusion, however it was a focus within the school.

Consistent with the pupil and parent views, staff felt that 'silver time' increased motivation and contributed to the children being successful at school. The staff felt that due to the nature of the children's needs, this approach was immediate and gave them something concrete to work towards. The incentives that were being used were peers and special interests; each reward that was valued by the children. As already noted, social isolation can often be a part of exclusion so increasing social participation is essential.

5.2.3.3 Staff Working as a Team

Communication, flexibility, staff attributions, personal experience, autonomy and reflective practice were all central features for successful provision. Staff working well as a team and feeling supported contributed to the children feeling secure and supported. Similarly, Cole (2015) highlighted teamwork and staff frequently talking and listening to each other as central in creating an inclusive ethos (Daniels et al., 2003). Ofsted (2005) also found that good relationships and strong teamwork between adults promotes a positive classroom ethos.

Teamwork was a vital factor in supporting children who were at risk of exclusion. The factors influencing this included a joint feeling of communication and flexibility throughout the team and a feeling of empowerment and trust from the head teacher. Channer and Hope (2001) found that transformational leaders demonstrated a strong belief in other people which was evident in the school. Roffey (2007) says that the most powerful influence in schools is the SLT and how they are able to communicate with others to promote positive change.

Staff felt valued and supported, managing their roles with autonomy and confidence as they felt trusted to make decisions. Another central feature of the successful team was consistency. The staff had an overview of all the children's needs, so the approach was consistent, which benefitted the children and also meant that staff could rely on each other when they needed a break.

The learning mentors had their own personal experience with children with SEN, which created a deeper understanding of the children they worked with. Interestingly, the parents had named this as a positive factor as there was a sense of shared understanding and a feeling that the staff '*understood*'. Personal attributes were also described as essential to practice, such as patience and calmness. Cole, Gondoli and Peeke (1998) agreed that teachers who worked well with children displaying challenging behaviour were not necessarily experts in theory and training but calm, flexible and empathetic.

A refreshing aspect of the staff team was their ability to reflect on their practice. This is not discussed in any of the literature identified in chapter two on preventing exclusion in primary schools. There was a degree of openness and honesty to their practice with the children, creating a sense of mutual respect. If they felt a situation had not been managed in the correct way, they would share this with the children and discuss it.

5.2.3.4 Learning Environment and Provision

Staff described a number of aspects of the learning environment and provision that they felt enabled the children to succeed at school. Similar to the parent participants, the nurture room was cited and having space for emotional regulation was considered to be important, including the outside area and time in Forest School and in nature. Having consistency for the children and the time to spend with them was key, alongside a small steps approach encompassing achievable goals for the children to feel successful.

A further consistent theme was having time with the children. This was particularly cited by the learning mentors within the school. They felt that dedicating significant time to the children outweighed the amount of training that they attended as without time you cannot implement the training. The class teacher in the Dream phase wished that she could have more time on a one-to-one basis with the children who were 'at risk' of exclusion.

5.2.3.5. School Systems Supporting Children

The whole school systems that contributed to children's success included working in partnership with parents, organisation of staff roles, school engagement with outside agencies and a restorative approach to behaviour management.

There was a strong sense of the importance of working in partnership with parents, which is well cited in the literature, as being a contributing factor to better outcomes for children and which was also central for parent participants. The benefits of working with

parents of children 'at risk' of exclusion are widely recognised (DFES/DoH 2004; Porter,
2014).

The staff allocation assigned three learning mentors to work with children who were
'at risk' of exclusion facilitating the staff being able to take the necessary time with them.
This was only possible due to the structure of the staffing and resource allocation, prioritising
support for children who are 'at risk' of exclusion. This stems from the decisions made by
the SLT directly influencing the children's macrosystem.

Restorative justice was embedded in the school, promoting positive outcomes for
any conflicts that arise within the school. Restorative practices have been found to
contribute to the development of peer relationships (e.g., Armstrong and Thorsborne, 2006).
Bevington's (2015) AI exploring restorative justice within primary schools was highlighted
in the literature review. He concluded that for this approach to work and be embedded, it
had to be consistent with the school values. Within this research the school's culture and
values were congruent with restorative approaches, which was an enabling factor to support
the children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.

Support from outside agencies was a facilitating factor but only speech and language
therapy specifically. Surprisingly, the literature review identified a number of studies citing
multi-agency interventions (Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007, Maguire et al., 2001; Rose,
Stanforth, Gilmore & Bevan-Brown, 2018), concluding that there was a necessity for a
multidisciplinary approach. However, there appear to be many limitations to this, including
the lack of longitudinal data after the support has ceased. Multi-agency intervention was not
a theme that was identified in this research. The multi-agency studies did, however, identify
that schools need to have a holistic approach to school exclusion and SEMH needs, which
was evident in this research.

5.3 Application to Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992)

This research has demonstrated how '*what works'* to prevent exclusion from primary schools can be understood by looking at the interacting processes that happen within the systems around the child. The findings of this research will now be summarised by using the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) framework which acknowledges how settings and relationships affect individual development to prevent exclusion. Figure 26 provides a visual representation of the themes and sub-themes that were identified by the children, parents and staff throughout the research on what they perceived works to prevent exclusion. The individual themes and sub-themes have been detailed in section 5.2

Figure 26

Perceived Factors of 'What Works' to Prevent Exclusions Applied to Ecological Systemic Theory (*Bronfenbrenner, 1992*)
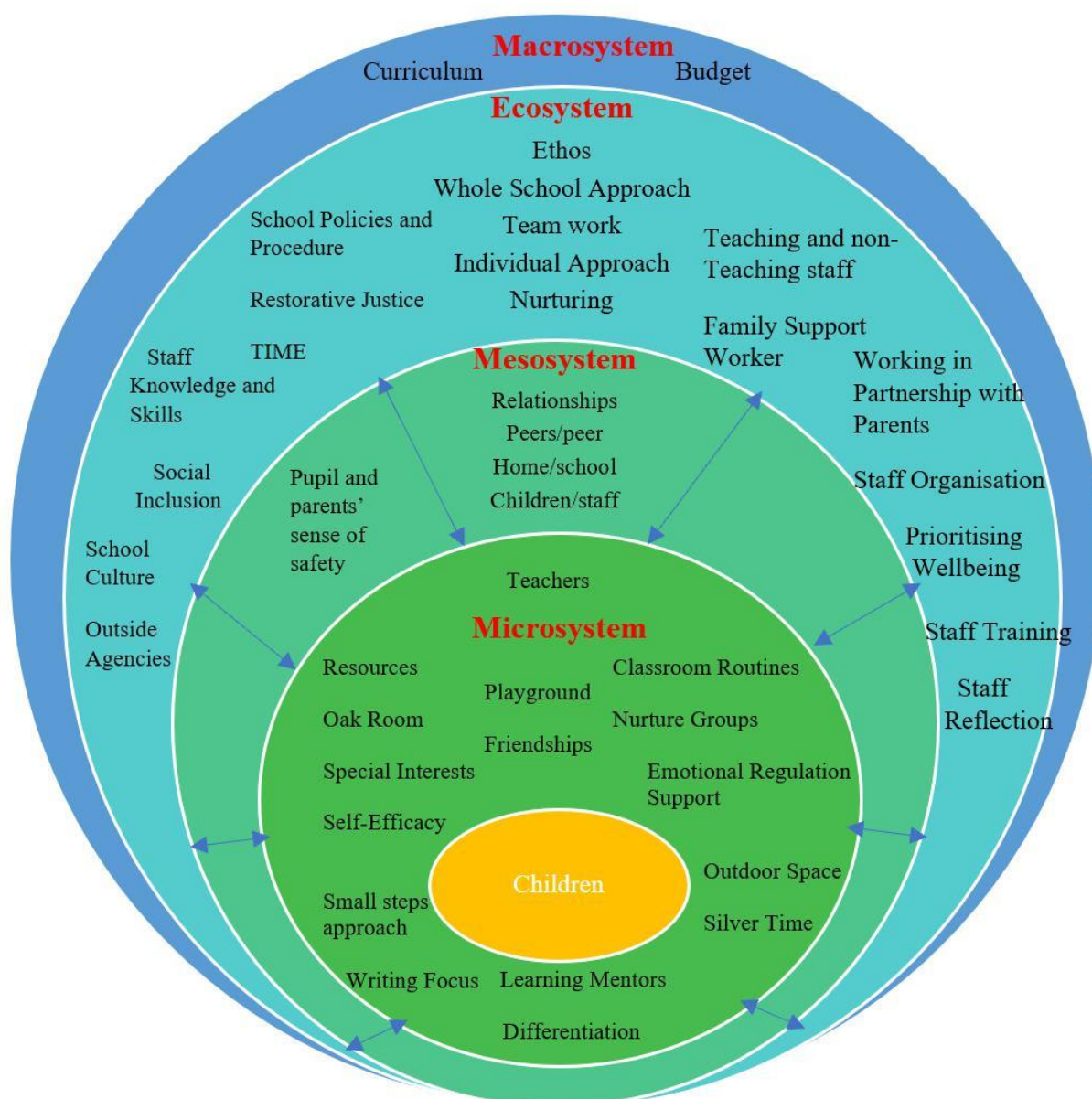
5.3.1 Microsystem

One of the most direct influences on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) is what happens at the 'microlevel' and the interactions that individuals have in their immediate world on a daily basis. This research conceptualises this, identifying the number of interacting

factors present within the microsystem that supported children who were at risk of exclusion. Figure 26 highlights these factors within the microlevel of the child that were consistent across all three participant groups, encouragingly showing a triangulation of the findings. The use of space within the school allowed the children to have support for emotional regulation (Oak Room, use of outside space). Adopting a small steps approach, special interests, silver time (reward system) and a differentiated curriculum facilitated the staff to support the children with their learning and SEMH needs. Friendships were a central part of the children's microsystem, highlighting the importance of positive social interactions. Interestingly, outdoor space, the edible garden, forest school and nature did not appear in the literature and it poses the question of whether the use of nature and the freedom of outdoor space could be used more for children who are 'at risk' of exclusion by being integrated into their school day.

5.3.2 Mesosystem

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) highlights the mesosystem recognising the critical relationship between the microsystems of the children. (Hayes, O'Toole & Halpenny, 2017). In the context of this research, the interacting relationships between the three stakeholders were central to what works to prevent exclusion. These relationships evolve and change, facilitating the successful factors within the microsystem. The strong relationships between the SLT and staff created a sense of teamwork enabling consistent, high-quality support for the children. The parents' and children's sense of safety related to the quality of relationships with the staff. Bronfenbrenner (1992) stated that even with a positive environment, without stable and warm relationships, that environment is not beneficial for the child (Hayes, O'Toole & Halpenny, 2017). Bronfenbrenner (1992) also believed that children are sociable beings, who learn best through interactions with others and building relationships (Dunphy, 2008; Hayes, O'Toole & Halpenny, 2017). The relationships

the children have with their peers and teachers have created an environment that supports them to feel happy at school.

The literature identified in chapter two supported this with one of the overarching successful factors being the quality of relationships. Three characteristics of developing positive relationships with parents, according to Julian, Lawler and Rosenblum (2017), are communicating openly, creating mutual respect and trust and being responsive with parents, which were identified in this research.

5.3.3 Ecosystem

Within the Ecosystem, the factors do not sit directly within the immediate environment of the child but still have influence over the child's experience of school. There were a number of factors that resided here; the school's ethos, whole school approach and prioritising wellbeing was central. The ethos of a school influences inclusivity (Cooper et al., 2000), which was certainly the case in the school studied as part of this research. The ethos appeared to underpin all of the practices in the school, and the parents and staff were very clear on what the culture, values and ethos of the school were. The school was described as '*nurturing*' by both teachers and parents, with a focus on putting wellbeing first. This corresponded with Hatton's (2013) study that identified having an inclusive ethos required a clear behaviour policy, positive relationships, a culture and ethos of respect and staff beliefs.

The structure of the school and staff allocation enabled the learning mentors to take time with the children, something that they valued more than actual training. The head teacher had a clear whole school approach, which was reflected by the staff and identified by the parent participants. The recent review by Timpson (2019) agrees that adopting a whole school approach is central to effective provision. Factors identified as supporting children who are 'at risk' of exclusion were the leadership team, staff structure and expertise, approach to the curriculum and a consistent approach to behaviour, each of which was evident in this research.

According to the Children's Commissioner's (2012) enquiry into school exclusions, exclusions can be prevented by a positive learning environment and a focus on quality of teaching and learning alongside a clear and consistent behaviour policy that is individual to the pupils. A restorative, consistent approach to managing behaviour has also been cited as a successful way to manage conflict, which is fully embedded into the school which the research resided in. Hallam's (2007) review of a school improvement programme, focusing on positively influencing behaviour, emphasised the importance of establishing effective relationships with parents, developing internal procedures and policies, making changes at a whole school level. This was reflected within this research as relationships were robust with the parents, procedures were emphasised by both the staff and the parents and a whole school approach was central.

5.3.4 Macrosystem

Within the macrosystem, there are influences that sit outside the physical environment of the school but impact frameworks and inner systems. Within this research, the allocation of the staffing meant that three learning mentors were consistent figures and support for children who were at risk of exclusion.

This conceptual framework has summarised the findings from this thesis, identifying the perceived multitude of interacting factors that resided in the school to successfully prevent exclusion. Centrally, it has included three groups of stakeholders with the children's views residing at the heart of the research.

5.4 Implications of Research and for EP Practice

5.4.1 Use of Positive Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry

At the core of this research sits positive psychology. Within the area of exclusion there is a continuing need to move away from the child deficit model (attributing the reason for the exclusion internally to the child) to adopting a more solution focused approach. In

line with the solution focused (De Shazer, 1985) and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) underpinnings, this research has sought to highlight solutions and strengths and to build upon them. Morgan (2016) agrees that studies involving solution-orientated language and promotion of positive aspirations are more likely to prompt change. Using AI as a methodology has fostered this positivity within a system empowering the participants, which has implications for further research and practice working with children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.

Approaching the research through a solution focused, positive psychology lens allowed the research to move away from the deficit narrative that dominating the thinking around exclusion. The AI was the chosen methodology for collecting data but also contributed to transformative change. This way of working for EPs could potentially be attractive to schools in a climate of 'traded' services as it is cost effective, contributes to whole school practice and focuses on positives. An AI is also a way to ensure more equality of access for children as it seeks to make a change in an organisation.

5.4.2 Promoting Child Voice

This research centred on the child's voice which the British Psychological Society (2015) views as central to EPs work. It has successfully sought children's views on a topic which have thus far been absent. It has empowered them within the process as their voice has been included in transformative change within their school creating an action plan. Furthermore and significantly, it has highlighted the importance of including the child's voice within research concerning exclusion in a primary school, offering insights and innovative ways of working. To date, similar research has focused solely in secondary schools and after the child has been excluded. Arguably, if more focus is put on primary prevention this would potentially impact and lessen exclusion rates in secondary schools.

5.4.3 The Use of Ecosystemic Framework

This research has demonstrated that applying an ecosystemic framework working with children who are 'at risk' of exclusion can provide invaluable insight into the interlinking systems within a school that can contribute to better outcomes for this group of children. It has highlighted the benefits in examining the complex systems and interacting environmental factors, rather than focusing on specific time-allocated interventions that are not sustainable.

Using this framework has highlighted the potential for EPs to support schools to implement whole school, preventative strategies, looking at a range of interlinking factors and the influence of positive relationships and leadership. For example, by looking at staffing structure, it allowed three learning mentors to dedicate time getting to know and supporting the children, which resulted in positive outcomes.

5.5 Dissemination of Research

This research will be shared with key stakeholders that have been involved in the research process. This involves the children, parents and staff members. At the end of the Discover phase, the themes and sub-themes were shared with the respective groups. The results of the research were also shared with the head teacher of the school in which the research was conducted, and the action plan was presented as a working document for the school to implement from the summer term, 2021.

All the participants will receive a summary sheet or a leaflet of the research findings in September 2021 that will be adapted to ensure it is age appropriate. The research findings will be shared within the LA and presented at the SENCo forum when this is permitted in light of COVID-19. The research will be shared with the EP team through a presentation following the completion of the viva. The researcher aims to publish the findings from the research following the thesis viva.

The researcher would potentially like to contribute and share findings with TEPs in the future, sharing how an AI can be used to facilitate transformative change and how using an eosystemic theoretical framework can provide valuable insights into what works to prevent exclusion. The researcher plans to share the findings in future EP roles using this knowledge to support schools supporting children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.

Nicholson (2018) emphasises the valuable role that psychologists have in providing staff training to 'hard to reach' students, as they are not covered in initial teacher training courses. So it is the researcher's aim to share these findings on teacher training courses or to newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

5.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

5.6.1 Strengths

This research was strength based, focused on positive psychology moving away from the problematic ingrained narrative surrounding exclusion. This allowed the research to concentrate on facilitating factors that focused on preventing exclusion, with a hope to contribute to better outcomes. This research was set in the real world with a central aim of empowering the children in the process by eliciting their voice. A key strength was including children's views but also centrally, including them as a key stakeholder in transforming a system. The Design and Dream phase enabled them to express their views, which were transferred into an action plan that will be implemented next term.

5.6.1.2 Use of AI in the Study

The use of AI was a key strength in the research and worked well as a method to collect data, producing a range of informative and insightful answers apprising the research questions. Producing the action plan derived from the data was a key strength within the research. Fulfilling the transformative nature of the research, the researcher felt a sense of achievement that the data had provided a working document that was potentially going to

impact children within the school. The researcher's aim was not only to use the data to answer the research questions but to also provide meaningful change to further support those participating children who are 'at risk' of exclusion, which was congruent with the social justice element of research. It should be noted that although the action plan has been written and shared, it will now be the school's responsibility to deliver the actions.

AI allowed the stakeholders to focus on 'what works' rather than a process of elimination based on what has not worked in the past. The staff were empowered by this as it allowed them space and time to think about the positive factors and how much the children had progressed. Feeding back to the staff by sharing parental quotes was powerful as they commented it was often a job where feedback was sparse. The staff found it a positive experience, expressing that the remote nature of the research was beneficial as they found it accessible having the option to join the meetings from home.

The success of an AI in organisational change is centrally attributed to the recruitment of members of staff who hold decision-making powers. This research was fortunate to have the deputy head as part of the staff group; an individual who was able to implement change at an organisational level. It also incorporated a wide variety of stakeholders central to the children's provision, not just the SLT team.

The research demonstrated that an AI can successfully be conducted remotely, which is another unique contribution of the research, and can be used to inform future practice. Combining the Design and Deliver stage of the AI allowed the transformative nature of the research to be carried out, being sensitive to the time commitment of the participating school. However, had these stages been conducted separately, this would have allowed more time to generate the proactive propositions, potentially enriching the action plan.

5.6.1.3 Data Collection

Using semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to adapt and be flexible with the questions and focus groups, especially with the children who were at times reluctant to

answer some of the questions. Fortunately, the research design allowed for such flexibility. The shared document that was created for the focus group element of the Dream phase worked well as it provided a sense of ownership for participants and shared understanding. The graphic representation was creative and clearly depicted the participants 'dreams' for the school.

5.6.2 Limitations

5.6.2.1 Design

This research implemented a single case study design set in one primary school within an LA. Accordingly, the findings are somewhat limited in their generalisability, however, within this design, this was not the intention of the research. Case study designs are the most common and the most useful form of research, adopting a critical realist's position as it allows for a comprehensive exploration of underlying mechanisms from how they are manifested in real world scenarios (Burawoy, 1979). The research was not in pursuit of a 'truth' but focused on the promotion of change through understanding. Kelly (1955) argued that each individual has their own constructs, therefore it would not be appropriate to generalise. Taking this into consideration, the findings from this study can still help inform the limited literature on what works to prevent exclusion from primary schools at a whole school preventative level.

The solution focused nature of the AI means that it does not allow for 'problems', a feature which has been criticised (Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010; Mertens, 2010). Avoiding problems may make the participant feel that they are not important. For example, the pressure from the national education system to fulfil academic targets were neither addressed nor considered in this research, due to the solution focused nature of the AI.

Within the research, parent participants talked about previous environments they felt were problem saturated. The researcher listened and acknowledged them, but adopting

positive psychology supported the researcher towards a solution focused approach by using questioning around what was working. Adopting a methodology, such as narrative approach, would have supported the participants to tell their stories. However, this was not congruent with the positive, transformative nature of the research.

5.6.2.2 Recruitment

The selection criteria for the participants were those who had been at risk of exclusion. The researcher's aim was to conduct 'real world' research, so avoided being prescriptive in the profile of participants. However, the four participants selected were all boys, which is in line with the national statistics, as boys are three times more likely to be excluded than girls (DfE, 2018a, p6). All four participants had an Education, Health and Care Plan and three had ADHD, again reflective of national statistics (DfE, 2017b, 2018, 2019a). This in itself is an interesting point to explore and raises questions around the nature of their special educational needs, their gender and what puts them more 'at risk' of exclusion than their peers.

5.6.2.3 Data Collection

Due to the identified needs of the children, some of the language used in the interviews proved difficult to interpret. For example, one child with ASD finds abstract thinking quite challenging so consequently he found imagining a 'dream' school difficult. The year six participant had speech and language difficulties, so it was hard to decipher his understanding of some of the questions. Some of his answers were very limited, which could be due to his expressive language difficulties or perhaps anxiety around being questioned on a video call. Reflecting on this, these points would have been easier to address on a face-to-face basis as visuals could have been used to support the questions.

The Staff Focus Group consisted of the deputy head, one year six teacher and two learning mentors. The presence of the deputy head could have potentially impacted the power

dynamics as the learning mentors may have perceived him to hold all the power, which could have influenced what they said. However, they appeared to talk freely and appeared consistent in their views.

5.6.2.4 Data Analysis

This design was emancipatory, accounting for each of the participants' views equally when identifying themes in the thematic analysis, rather than focusing on frequency or duration. Therefore, it might be assumed that one person's view could have skewed the data. However, the action research case study design employed in this instance viewed each individual viewpoint as valid and important. Indeed, the central purpose of this approach was to empower participants, valuing all viewpoints.

During the Discover phase, there were equal participants in each stakeholder group. Due to COVID-19, one parents and one grandparent dropped out of the study and their son/grandson participants dropped out due to personal reasons. This meant that during the Dream phase, there were only two parent/child participants. Having all the participants would have potentially enriched the data, providing additional insight into the participant's dreams for the school. It was decided that due to the challenges of the pandemic and the pressure on the school, new participants were not sought.

5.7 Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 undoubtedly impacted the research. However, the researcher remained true to the values and aims that were originally set out by being creative and adopting positive psychology, not only to the research but also to the researcher's approach to COVID-19. As the pandemic progressed, the researcher kept adapting alongside it with perseverance and patience, to overcome the challenges of conducting an AI remotely. This added a further unique aspect of this research as the AI was successfully adapted, which enabled the researcher to collect the data, answering the research questions but to also fulfil the

transformative nature of the research through the Design and Deliver phase. The researcher reflected on how the application of positive psychology was a central factor that enabled this research to be completed successfully.

The research was originally going to be conducted face-to-face, allowing the researcher to use interpersonal skills to develop a rapport with the participants. Moving to remote interviews proved challenging due to the difficulties encountered by technology, and the flexibility of the informal interactions acquired when meeting in person. However, in the Discovery phase of the data collection, eight interviews were conducted and one focus group. There were some difficulties with technology and Wi-Fi and accessing Microsoft Teams, particularly for the parent participants. There was one interview with a parent that had been set up on three different occasions (speaking to the school, this parent had previously been hard to contact). On the fourth attempt, the parent was phoned and stayed on the line until the meeting had been accessed. One of the parents that was interviewed had COVID -19 at the time of the interview but still wanted to go ahead.

The individual interviews with the children proved challenging remotely. One of the participants lost focus quite quickly and found it difficult to maintain concentration and remain motivated. Again, it was felt that face-to-face interactions with more time to play games and build a rapport with the children may have been conducive to him answering the questions in more detail. However, whether this would have been the case will never be known.

The focus groups in the Dream phase were originally planned to be creative, with collage and art materials to construct a visual representation of a 'dream school'. When this was no longer possible, online software was used to create a shared document and shared understanding of a dream school. The children had to conduct their Dream phase individually due to the logistical challenges outlined and were provided with Lego and paper and pens.

Had the research been conducted face-to-face, the outcomes of the Dream phase and the production of visual materials may have been enhanced.

The researcher was mindful of the extreme pressure that schools were under during COVID-19, and this research was another aspect for the school to have to navigate by arranging meetings, accessing staff and the children whilst adhering to all the relevant safety protocols. With this in mind, the timings of the interviews were stipulated by the school and the researcher was aware of time allocation and assiduous in not exceeding this. The researcher felt a sense of responsibility to reduce any additional pressure or stress that the research could have.

5.8 Reflexivity

This research has social justice at its heart, addressing a complex multi-faceted topic involving participants that have all been on challenging journeys. The researcher feels passionately about the injustice of exclusion and that, in a society striving for acceptance and inclusion, it should be unacceptable to 'exclude' our most vulnerable children, which can lead to alarming consequences. Being aware of this, the researcher remained reflective throughout the whole research journey and self-aware as to the risk that her own views, beliefs and history might influence decisions and interpretations rather than being an unbiased observer (Silverman, 2000).

Willig (2013) encourages researchers to reflect on their journey. With this in mind, a journal was kept throughout the research process, which encouraged reflexivity, enabling the researcher to reflect critically on thoughts, interpersonal relationships, potential biases and position within the action research. The research was discussed with the research supervisor to review discourses and reflect upon influences on the research. This was an important and useful process, as was the use of peer review and discussion.

5.8.1 Power and Position within the Research

Within qualitative research, it is important to acknowledge potential issues of power and the effect the researcher can have on the project. The researcher, although aware of this potential power, addressed the potential imbalance by avoiding assumption of the expert role, focusing on giving power to the participants through the emancipatory aspect of the study. Throughout the research the results were shared with the participants and the data was used to inform an action plan with the intent to empower the participants.

Christensen (2004) said the researcher should acknowledge their position as a researcher and that their position as an adult can give power and control in their social cultural environment with children. The researcher speculated on how much choice the children actually had in taking part in the study or whether they took part because an adult had told them to, even though they had the choice to withdraw at any point. Had the researcher been able to meet face-to-face with the children, the project could have been explained in more detail. Consequently, the researcher would have had more confidence that the children wanted to take part.

5.9 Conclusion

This research endeavoured to contribute to a gap identified in previous literature by providing an in-depth exploration of what works to prevent exclusion from primary school from the perspectives of pupils, parents and school staff as a step towards reducing exclusion rates. One of the central successes of this research was the action plan produced in the Design phase. It is set in a time where unfortunately the use of 'exclusion' is still taking place on a daily basis and disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable children in society. Consequently, this research had social justice at its core and the transformative nature aimed to promote organisational change within a primary school.

The data analysis identified a number of interlinking factors that were successful in preventing exclusion. This included a strong leadership that created an inclusive, nurturing

environment by prioritising wellbeing of the children. The staff team showed unconditional commitment to the children that they worked with and felt respected and valued. The support for the children was consistent and an individualised approach was key, including a differentiated curriculum. Restorative approaches to behaviour and a whole school approach ensured continuity and a sense of 'fairness'. The way that the space was utilised within the school allowed the children to have the space to feel safe and supported to regulate their emotions, forming consistent relationships with the learning mentors. The outside space and use of nature were also a contributing factor.

Slee (2011) has described exclusion as "separating and sorting children into their allocated tracks, into streams that assign them to unequal destinations," (p.151). These destinations have not been decided by the children; they have been decided by a society that still uses exclusion as an acceptable 'punishment' for vulnerable children contributing to inequality and poor outcomes (Topping, 2012).

EPs have a commitment to 'change this destination', putting the power back with the children and their families striving for social justice and equality. EPs are dedicated to preventing the barriers to learning and promoting inclusion and acceptance (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). This research has demonstrated that focusing on 'what works' and byadopting a positive psychology standpoint, it is possible to identify the interacting factors within a system contributing to better outcomes. The quote below demonstrates that if society instilled this culture, commitment and attitude to our children, then 'exclusion' would cease to exist.

"*So yeah, I think it's a combination of a lot of things. But yeah, obviously it never even entered our head that he wouldn't stay. **He was ours, that was it,***" (Staff Focus Group, lines 72-73).

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Appendices

Appendix A

PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram

Identification	Records identified through database searching (n = 455)	Additional records identified through other sources (hand searches and snowballing) (5)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 198)

Screening	Records screened (n = 198)	Records excluded after inclusion/exclusion criteria applied (n =167)

Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n =31)	Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n =14) (see Appendix B for reasons for exclusions)

Studies included in synthesis (n = 17)

Appendix B

Selection of studies excluded from final review selection

Excluded Studies	Reasons
Austin, D. (2010). Introducing consultancy supervision in a primary school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. *Emotional and behavioural difficulties*, *15*(2), 125-139.	• Not a mainstream primary school • Not for children directly at risk of exclusion
Kourkoutas, E., Eleftherakis, T. G., Vitalaki, E., & Hart, A. (2015). Family-School-Professionals Partnerships: An Action Research Program to Enhance the Social, Emotional, and Academic Resilience of Children at Risk. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *4*(3), 112-122.	• Greek school – not transferable to the English Education System
Schnelling, K., & Dew-Hughes, D. (2002). A solution to exclusion: A total involvement model to support pupils and reduce exclusions. *Emotional and behavioural difficulties*, *7*(4), 229-240.	• Year 7-11 middle school not primary aged children.
Cefai, C., & Camilleri, L. (2015). A healthy start: Promoting mental health and wellbeing in the early primary school years. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *20*(2), 133-152.	• Risk/protective factors moving school. • Not focus on at risk of exclusion
McCluskey, G., Riddell, S., & Weedon, E. (2015). Children's rights, school exclusion and alternative educational provision. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *19*(6), 595-607.	• Not focused on Primary school views
Parker*, C., Paget, A., Ford, T., & Gwernan-Jones, R. (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. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *21*(1), 133-151.	• Children had already been excluded from school and were in alternative provision
Bradbury, S. (2004). The use of Pastoral Support Programmes within schools. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *20*(4), 303-318.	• Primary and secondary • Focuses on EP involvement but evaluating programme
Osler, A. (2000). Children's rights, responsibilities and understandings of school discipline. *Research papers in Education*, *15*(1), 49-67.	• Focused on school discipline and policy not preventative strategies.

Jones, J., & Smith, C. (2004). Reducing exclusions whilst developing effective intervention and inclusion for pupils with behaviour difficulties. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *9*(2), 115-129.	• Secondary based
Tellis-James, C., & Fox, M. (2016). Positive narratives: the stories children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) tell about their futures. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *32*(4), 327-342.	• Secondary based • Not preventative for children 'at risk' of exclusion.
Hayden, C. (1995). Preventing Primary School Exclusion: What Can Education Service Based Initiatives Do?	• Before time specified
McKeon, M. (2001). Promoting the inclusion of students at risk of exclusion: An evaluative case study. *Emotional and behavioural difficulties*, *6*(4), 236-250.	• View of secondary aged students • In school centres based in secondary schools
Allen, K., Marlow, R., Edwards, V., Parker, C., Rodgers, L., Ukoumunne, O. C., ... & Ford, T. (2018). 'How I Feel About My School': The construction and validation of a measure of wellbeing at school for primary school children. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, *23*(1), 25-41.	• Not primary school children 'at risk' of exclusion. • View on individual school

Appendix C

Summary of Research from the Literature Review

Author	Title and Journal	Participants	Design	Intervention Themes	Data Analysis	Findings	Critique
Targeted Group Interventions							
Cullen-Powell, L., & Barlow, J. (2005)	A journey of self-discovery: an intervention involving massage, yoga and relaxation for children *British Journal of Special Education, 32*(3), 138 144.	172 primary aged children across 172 schools 'at risk' of exclusion. N= 54 control N= 54 intervention	Questionnaire	12 sessions − 45 minutes • Therapeutic interventions • Massage • Yoga • Relaxation • Client led approach	SDQ questionnaires	Communication with teachers (p<0.001) and contributions in class (p<0.001) • Improvement in SDQ total difficulties (p=0.031) Improvement in self-confidence, social confidence and communication. • Relating it to the classroom	Demonstrated 'small steps' maybe sowing the seeds Control group − other variables involved.
Renwick, F., & Spalding, B. (2002).	Section: 'A Quiet Place' Project: an of Early Therapeutic Intervention within Mainstream Schools. Research *British Journal*	17 primary schools aged children 172 children 6 weeks intervention 3 times a week.	Pre/post research design	• Room within a school/community • Holistic therapeutic support • Building on 'inner strengths' solution focused • Teacher and parent views included.	Quantitative	Increase in 'positive' behaviour (p<0.001) stats significant	Short term affects Longer term follow up

	of Special Education, *29*(3), 144-150.						
Costello, E., & Lawler, M. (2014).	An exploratory study of the effects of mindfulness on perceived levels of stress *International Journal of Emotional Education* 21-39.	63 Primary school aged children	Qualitative And qualitative	• Mindfulness therapy • Intervention	Thematic analysis Strengths & Difficulties (SDQ) Behaviour profile	enriched their understanding of thoughts and feelings and were enabled to deal with stress more effectively	Caused distress to participants Evidence not conclusive Short duration No longitudinal data.
Rechten, F.,& Tweed, A. E. (2014.	An exploratory study investigating the viability of a communication and feedback intervention for school children at risk of exclusion: analysis of staff perspectives tweed	Primary school staff 32 participant s ts	Mixed methods Thematic analysis	• Use of role-play to rein act situations • Staff views • Carl Rogers-person centred approach • Teacher View	Thematic analysis	Positive results Staff feel that it is successful in reducing exclusions.	No parent or Childrenviews on the intervention

	Educational Psychology in Practice, *30*(3), 293-306.						
Law, J., & Sivyer, S. (2003).	Promoting the communication skills of primary school children excluded from school or at risk of exclusion: An intervention study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, *19*(1), 1-25.	31 children Aged 9-11	Questionnaires	Intervention for speech and language Self esteem Social communication Showed improvement in areas of language Parent View Teacher View Child View	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ	Children changed school Children frequently absent from school Included a control group Included parental perspectives 80% positive feedback.	
Interventions in Partnership with Parents							
Waters, T. (2014).	Story Links: working with parents of pupils at risk of exclusion. *Support for learning,*	Primary 6-11 years	Case study Qualitative and quantitative approach	Group Intervention with parent/care Parent and carer view Based on attachment theory 10 week intervention	Exclusion figures Interviews	Decrease in exclusions	No follow up

	29(4), 298-318.						
Day, C., Kowalenko, S., Ellis, M., Dawe, S., Harnett, P., & Scott, S. (2011)..	The Helping Families Programmeme : a new parenting intervention for children with severe and persistent conduct problems *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, *16*(3), 167-171.	15 families 5-11-year olds	Qualitative and quantitative	• Family intervention • Ecological approach • Strength based • Risk factors of exclusion • Programme still running • Parent and teacher view (high parental engagement)	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	Positive results 80% of parents and 70% teachers reported positive improvements.	Child had to have a diagnosis could be portrayed as medical model Conduct problems Constructs of behaviour.
Smith L, Jackson L, Comber N (2013) .	Therapeutic early interventions to prevent school exclusion and truancy: evaluation of three contemporane ous projects London	2 primary schools	Qualitative/ quantitative	• 3 therapeutic interventions • Engagement of parents • Family Group – two primary schools • Therapist and school-partner • Moving away from deficit model • Interviews with children, parents and children.	Interviews	Evidence of having decreased exclusion rates Engaging with at risk families Includes child voice	Constructs around language

				• Family Group • Teignmouth Community School, learning 2 Learn			
Whole School Systems							
Hallam, S. (2007).	Evaluation of behavioural management in schools: A review of the behaviour improvement programme and the role of behaviour and education support teams. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, *12*(3), 106-112.	700 schools	Qualitative and quantitative	• Whole school • Behaviour Improvement Programme me and Team • establishing effective relationships with parents • Developing internal procedures and polices as a result of effective behaviour audit • Working with parents/staff and children	Exclusion rates Attendance rates	Impact on attendance but not primary exclusions Promoting positive behaviour	Schools selected on their crime statistics
O'Connor, T., & Colwell, J. (2002).	The effectiveness and rationale of the 'nurture group' approach to helping	68 children (46 boys and 22 girls) 3 primary schools	Qualitative/ quantitative	• Nurture Group within mainstream classroom. • Based on attachment theory.	Developme ntal diagnostic profile	2 years study Results provide support for nurture groups Acknowledge the lack of parent support	Exclusion from classroom.

	children with emotional and behavioural difficulties remain within mainstream education. *British Journal of Special Education*, *29*(2), 96-100.						
Bevington, T. J. (2015).	Appreciative evaluation of restorative justice. *Pastoral Care in Education 33*(2), 105–115.	6 primary school staff members	Case study Appreciative Inquiry	• Whole school Approach • Restorative approach • Congruence • School Values	AI	Link between Values outcomes an. Aim reducing exclusions Staff views only.	No impact measures
Evans, M. J., & Cowell, N. (2013).	Real school improvement: is it in the eye of the beholder? *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *29*(3), 219-242.	26 primary schools	Mixed methods design Interviews	• Staff participation, capacity, perceptions of change. • Whole school solutions approach. • Cognitive/organisational psychology	Quantitative analysis using stats package. Thematic analysis	Fixed term exclusion decreased Pupil and staff self esteem. Self-esteem increased. Statistical difference.	Several schools withdrew from the studies. Lack of generalisations

Hatton, A L. (2013).	Disciplinary exclusion: the influence of school ethos *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, *18*(2), 155–178.	Primary school 128 staff	Qual/quantitative 3 Focus groups Interviews Questionnaires	• Whole school approach • School Ethos • Clear behaviour policy • Values and beliefs • Preventative strategies implanted at whole school level	Thematic analysis	Disparity between schools managing exclusion Reduction in exclusions	No pupil voice included No parent view included Inconsistent methods
Multiagency Interventions							
Panayiotopoulos, C., & Kerfoot, M. (2007).	Early Intervention and prevention for children excluded from primary school *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *11*(1), 59–80.	124 primary aged children 4-11	Randomized control trial Quantitative	• Multi-agency intervention • Full engagement of the parent, child and school. • Early intervention • Engagement of all parties	Questionnaires Strengths & Difficulties (SDQ) Health outcome scale General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) Interviews: Pupils Teachers	Results not stats significant but useful. Not a longitudinal study Need for more research Intervention had better success with children under 10.	Results not stats significant but useful. Not a longitudinal study Need for more research Intervention had better success with children under 10.
Rose, J., Stanforth, A., Gilmore, G., & Bevan-	You have to do something beyond	18 schools	Qualitative-Interviews	• Multi-agency • Transferred inclusions –	Interviews transcribed	Exclusion rates decreased TI decreased	Could be deemed to be opposite of inclusion as its

Brown, J. (2018). "	containing": developing inclusive systems in a partnership of primary schools. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *23*(3), 270-283.	Over years.		children going to another school Head teacher perspective			removal from the cl Based on exclusion statistics Only interviewed head teacher.
Maguire, M., Macrae, S., & Milbourne, L. (2003)..*r*	Early Interventions: preventing school exclusions in primary settings *Studies in Education*, *26*(1), 45-62.	3 years Primary age	Case study	Multidisciplinary team Government incentives Interviews: keyworkers & Senior Management Team Key school personnel Parents • Observation: meetings	Reducing exclusions	2 schools better able to manage difficulties 1 school no impact Multiagency team supporting only parents – did not effect change in school Individual support for some children did not address issues	Parents reluctant to engage with the project
Meta Analysis							
Cole, 2015	Mental Health Difficulties and Children at Risk of Exclusion from Schools	Meta analysis Aged 4-24	Qualitative/ quantitative	Solution focused brief therapy CBT Mindfulness	Reducing exclusions	Mixed results Whole school approaches Interventions	Lack of action and participatory research.

	in England A review from an educational perspective of policy, practice and research, 1997 to 2015.					

Appendix D

School Recruitment Email/Letter

Dear Colleague,

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East London undertaking the Professional Doctoral Training in Educational and Child Psychology. My doctoral research is focusing on children in primary school that are 'at risk' of exclusion. From a positive psychology standpoint, I am looking at what is working within a school to support these children. The research will involve interviewing four children and their parents/carers and four members of staff. There will also be some focus groups.

If you are interested in this study, I can meet with you further to discuss the project in more detail at a time that is convenient for you. I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours Sincerely,

Amy Herbert (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix E

Parent Information Letter and Consent Form

PARENT INVITATION LETTER

You and your child are being invited to participate in a research study which involves building on what works for children who have received extra support at school or have currently been 'at risk' of exclusion. The title of the research is:

'*An Appreciative Inquiry of factors within a primary school that are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.*'

Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

My name is Amy Herbert and I am a postgraduate in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research that you and your child are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

I am conducting research into the positive factors within the school environment to create positive change for children who have previously received fixed-term school exclusion or are deemed 'at risk' of exclusion. This process involves gaining the views of you and your child and school staff members. There will be virtual semi-structured interviews as well as focus groups. My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to take part as you have been identified as a parent of a child who has received additional support at school and may have been at risk of exclusion or experienced as fixed term exclusion. It is hoped that there will be 4 children participants and their parents and 4 members of staff in total involved in the research. I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree for you and your child to participate in the study you will both have a semi-structured interview (at separate times) and will be asked to take part in a focus group with other parents at a time that is convenient for all participants. This will take part virtually on Microsoft Teams. You have the right to not take part or withdraw from the process at any time.

What will happen to the data?

The responses from the interview will be audio-recorded, analysed and written up for a doctoral thesis. Any quotations or information will be anonymised in reports and group feedback.

How is confidentiality maintained?

The school and participant's names will not be identified in the study. All data will be stored securely and destroyed when it is no longer needed.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

 You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated data, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

What is the duration of the research?

The research process will last for approximately 6 months. The interviews will be in the first stage of the research then the focus groups will take part one to two months later.

Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will take place virtually on Microsoft Teams at a time that is convenient for you. You will be sent a link which will enable you to access the virtual platform.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The research findings will be written up as part of a doctoral thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at UEL. The findings from the study will also be fed back to the school and the Educational Psychology Service as well as the Directors of Education of the Local Authority.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher has undergone a satisfactory criminal records check.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Amy Herbert

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor, Dr Lucy Browne School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

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Consent to participate in a research study (parental/guardian)

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which my child will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my child's involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent for my child to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that he/she has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to child and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should my child withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………………………….

Parent/carer Signature:

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Signature

………………………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………..…….

Appendix F

Student Letter and Consent Form

STUDENT INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to take part in a study about the thing in school that help and support you. It is very important that you understand what taking part would involve. Please take time to read about the study or ask an adult to help you read it.

Who am I?

My name is Amy Herbert and I am learning how to be an Educational Psychologist. I work with children in schools and look at everything that they are good at and also if they might need some extra help if they are finding something difficult. As part of my learning I take part in research (a project) in a school.

What is the research/project?

I am interested to find out the things that have helped you in school when you have been finding things hard and may have spent time out of class. I would like to find out all the things that have been working for you and also other things that you think may help you to be happy and settled at school.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because sometimes you have found things hard and have had to spend time out of class or school find things at school hard and it would be great to hear what has helped you.

What will happen?

If you would like to take part, I will ask you some questions about school and what is going well. This will take place in school on Microsoft Teams which means that we can talk to each other on the computer and you will be able to see me on the screen. At the moment I cannot come in because of COVID-19. It will be about 45 minutes. This conversation will be recorded so I can remember all the important things you said. I will then do some group work which will also be on the computer This will involve drawing pictures about how you would like the school to be and all the things that could help you.

I will also be talking to your parents and teachers about the same thing and we will all be making a plan for your school. When the project has finished, I will be sharing it with my work with my university (like school) the information will hopefully help other children who find things difficult sometimes. When I share the information, I will not be using your name or school name, so it remains anonymised which means that no one can tell that it was you in the study.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

You do not have to take part it is up to you. If you decide to take part and then change your mind that is also fine. You can tell me, your teacher or parents/ carers and we will not ask any questions.

If you want to take part, I will be coming into your school to explain in much more detail about the project where you can ask more questions.

Amy Herbert

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

Amy Herbert

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Consent to participate in the study.

I have read the information sheet and I understand what the project is, and I would like to take part. I also understand that if I do not want to take part at any point then I do not have to. I agree that when I am in the virtual interview it will be recorded.

Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………………………….

Signature

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Signature

……………………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………..…….

Appendix G

Staff letter and consent form

STAFF INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to participate in a research study which involves building on what works for children who are 'at risk' of exclusion. The title of the research is:

'*An Appreciative Inquiry of factors within a primary school that are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion.*'

Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

My name is Amy Herbert and I am a postgraduate in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research as part of a doctoral thesis on an area that I feel very passionate about and will hopefully inform further practice and research in this area.

What is the research?

I am conducting research into the positive factors and supportive strategies within the primary school environment to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion. This process will involve gaining the views of the children, parents/carers and school staff members, as well as having collaborative discussion and planning between students, parents and staff members about how these supportive factors might be developed within the school.

My research has been approved by UEL Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to take part as you have been identified as a professional who works with students who are seen as being at risk of school exclusion. Children 'at risk' will have

received a high level of support and interventions in school, they could have received internal or fixed term exclusions. It is hoped that there will be 4-6 participants who are members of staff in total involved in the research. I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will you have to do?

If you agree to participate, I will come in and brief you on the research project and the process. You will be asked to take part in a focus group interview with other staff members which will be arranged at a convenient time for all participants. You have the right to not take part or withdraw from the process up to

What happens to the data collected?

The responses from the interview will be recorded, analysed and written up for a doctoral thesis. Any quotations or information will be anonymised in reports and group feedback.

How is confidentiality maintained?

The school and participant's names will not be identified in the study. All data will be stored securely and destroyed when it is no longer needed.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

 You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence up to 3 weeks after the data has been collected. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

What is the duration of the research?

The research process will last for approximately 6-8 months however the time commitment for you will be 3 hours over this duration.

Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will take place in a quiet, private room in the school. You will be informed of the location if you choose to take part.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The research findings will be written up as part of a doctoral thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at UEL. The findings from the study will also be fed back to the school and the Educational Psychology Service as well as the Directors of Education of the Local Authority.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher has undergone a satisfactory criminal records check.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Amy Herbert

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor, Dr Lucy Browne School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study (staff)

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to child and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………………………….

Signature:

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Signature

…………………………………………………………………………………

Date: ………………….…….

Appendix H

Student Interview – Discover Phase

Question 1	Tell me about the best thing at your school?
Question 2	Tell me about the teachers that have really helped you?
Question 3	Tell me about a time when school was really good? Why was that?
Question 4	Can you think of something that you have done really well, and you felt really proud of?
Question 5	What have you been most proud of this school year? What made that happen? How did you help this to happen? How did others help this to happen?
Question 6	What do you think helps the children here to be good friends? How do your teachers help you to be a good friend?
Question 7	Are there any groups that help you in school?
Question 8	What makes you want to come to school?
Question 9	Tell me the top three things that you like about coming to school?

Appendix I

Parent Interview Schedule – Discover Phase

|	
Question 1	Tell me about the best thing about the school? Why do you think that is? What do they do really well?
Question 2	Tell me about the teachers and how they have helped you and your child/grandchild? Can you think of a particular time you felt supported?
Question 3	Tell me about a time when you as a family felt supported by the school? Why was that? Who was involved?
Question 4	Can you think of a time when your child/grandchild was really happy and school? Why do you think that was?
Question 5	What have you been most proud of this school year? Why was this? Who was involved? How did you feel?
Question 6	What do you think helps the children here to be good friends? How do your teachers help with this?
Question 7	Are there any particular interventions or groups that helped your child/grandchild at school?
Question 8	What makes your child want to come to school?
Question 9	Tell me the top three things that you like about coming to school?

Appendix J

Staff Focus Group interview schedule

Question 1	Tell me about the best thing about working with the children this year? Why do you think that is? What was your role in that?
Question 2	When have you been most proud to be a part of this school? What made this possible? What was your role in that?
Question 3	Tell me about the resources in the school that have made a difference to the children's provision? Why do you think that was?
Question 4	When do the staff work at their best as a team? What supports them to do this? How does it feel?
Question 5	When do the policies and procedures at the schoolwork at their best?
Question 6	What do you think supports the children at this school to be good friends? What is your role within this?
Question 7	Are there any particular interventions or groups that you feel are really successful? Why is this?
Question 8	What makes you want to come to work at the school every day?
Question 9	Tell me the top three things that you like about coming to school?

Appendix K

Example of Interview Transcription

Transcript	Annotation
61 I guess we had the luxury of being out onto one with him and really take our time. Yeah, so as I say he	**Amy Herbert** Taking time with the YP
62 started off in a corridor in the classroom	

63   **Debbie** 03:40

| 64   Small, achievable goals. Yeah we did get diagnosis for him with ADHD. So he was then medicated | **Amy Herbert** Small achievable goals/small steps |
| 65   which did make a difference | |

66   03:52 – **Paulette**

67 But I don't think it Yeah, the medication had a little bit, but I don't think that was the main factor. I think	**Amy Herbert** Medication making a difference
68 the main the main factors deals, were actually an inclusive school. And we tried as much as keep him	**Amy Herbert** Medication part of the change but not the main change
69 in school, whereas other schools would have would have got rid of him would have permanent	
70 exclusion, in year three or year four. He wouldn't have got to year five or six.	

71   **Sharon** 04:14

72 So yeah, I think it's a combination of a lot of things. But yeah, obviously we it never even entered our	**Amy Herbert** Inclusive school – ethos main reason YP was successful.
73 head that we would he wouldn't stay. He was our that was it. And that was a huge achievement, really.	**Amy Herbert** Staff attitude commitment towards inclusion
74 But that took four years. Yeah. To get him to a place. Yeah.	

75   **Gary** 04:31

76 It was very, very, very small steps, real small steps. So he was he was outside of my room. Wasn't he	**Amy Herbert** Very small steps gradually building up support
77 for a year maybe.	
78	

79   04:44 – **Paulette**

| 80   He had a special timetables - Yeah. Not that he liked those. He had his own agenda. He was very, | **Amy Herbert** Extrinsic/behaviorist rewards |
| 81   very, very driven by silver time he used to love that | |

82   05:01 – **Amy Herbert**

83   What was that silver time ? Did you say?

84   05:03 – **Debbie**

85 Yes. So as a school we have golden time on a Friday afternoon. Yeah, obviously recognizing that a lot	**Amy Herbert** Individual approach, staff understanding of different needs, adapting approaches
86 of these children needs something there and then you know, not to wait all week to be good. Yeah, he	
87 did just have silver time at the end of math's literacy. And in the afternoon, okay, it was quite a lot. I	
88 don't know. Many other children have had that much silver time, but he couldn't concentrate for very	
89 long and he was very driven by that. But obviously, by the time he got to year five, and six, I think he	
90 just had it once a day.	

91   05:38 – **Sharon**

92   This overtime was reduced a lot. But by the time he got to year six, we are doing that with another child

93   at the moment, trying to reduce it, increasing the work expected and reducing the silver time.
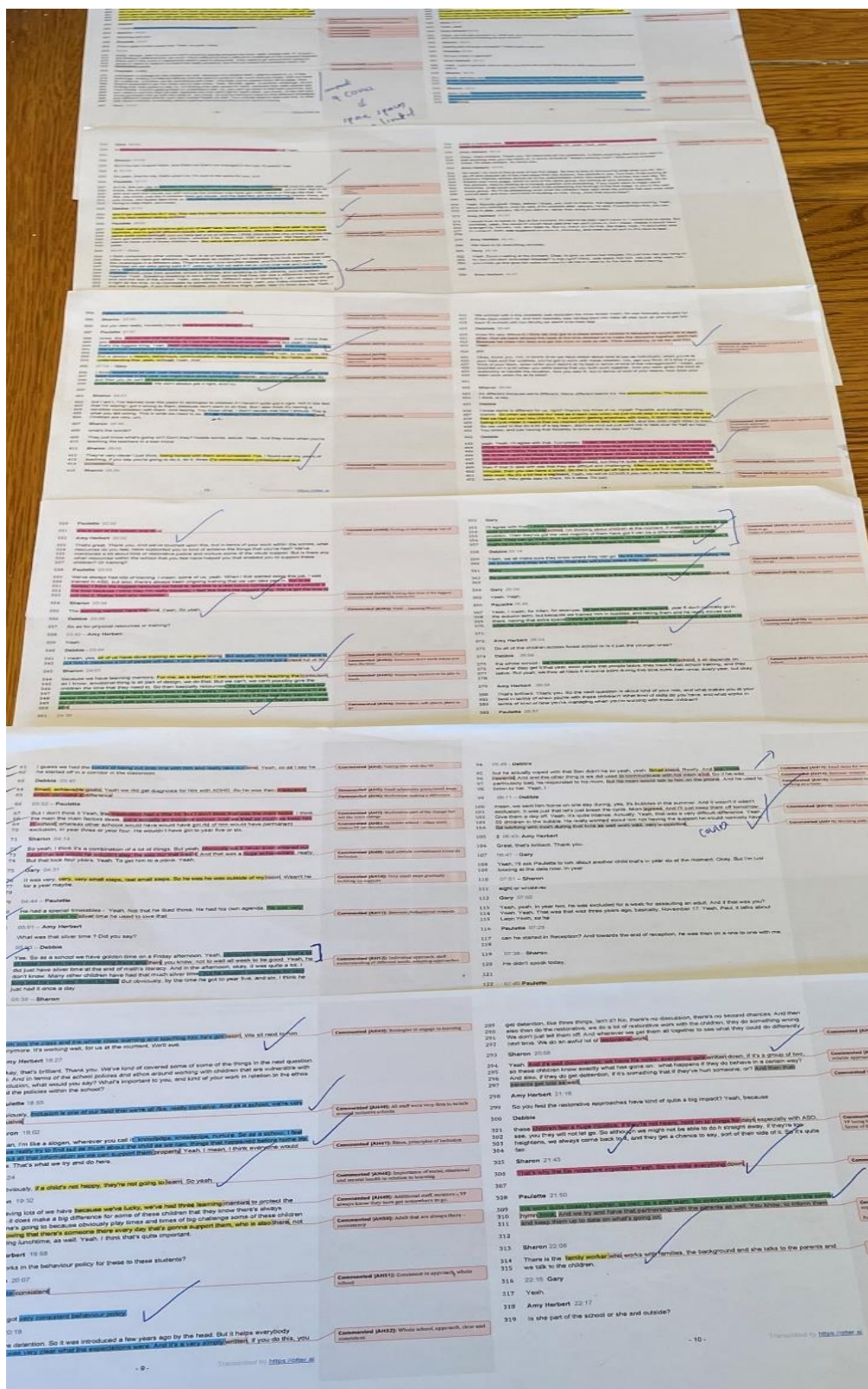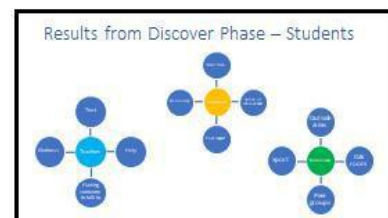
Appendix L
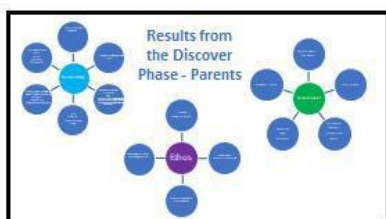
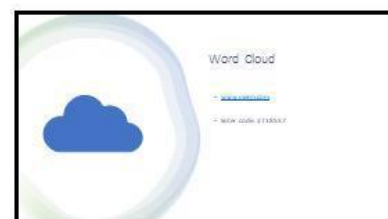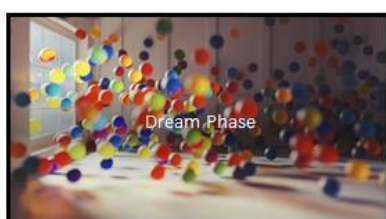## PowerPoint Shown to Participants in the Dream Phase

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Appendix M

Dream Phase Prompt Questions

Focus Groups Questions (children, teacher, parent)

Prompt

If a miracle happened overnight and you came to school tomorrow to find that school is your dream school, what would it be like?

What would the school buildings and the outside area's look like?

What would the teachers be like? What would they be helping with and how?

How would be the classrooms be set up? What would the space be like?

How would the breaktimes be set up? What activities would there be?

How would the curriculum be set up? What extracurricular activities would there be?

What groups and interventions would there be?

How would you know the children are happy?

Appendix N

Participants Debrief Letters

University of
East London

<u>**Participation Debrief Letter**</u>

Thank you for participating in my research study on looking at what works to prevent exclusion in Primary schools. This letter offers information that may be useful in light of you having now taken part.

What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The following steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided.
- All data (including personal contact details) will be securely stored on the University of East London One Drive and will be password protected.
- The data will be pseudo anonymised, which means that each participant will be assigned a number, rather than using names.
- The fully anonymised data may be seen by my supervisor, examiners and may be published in academic journals.
- After the research has been completed, the data will be stored for as long as is deemed necessary by UEL, but will be stored securely.
- You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated data, provided that this request is made within three weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

https://www.mind.org.uk/

https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/school-based-risk-factors/school-exclusion/

You are also very welcome to contact me or my supervisor if you have specific questions or concerns.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Amy Herbert

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor, Dr Lucy Browne School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Participation Debrief Letter – Student

Thank you so much for taking part in my study. It is important to talk to children about how they feel about school to make sure that they are getting the support they need.

The aims of this study were to look at all the good things that your school is doing to support you and if there is anything else that could help you feel happy and settled at school.

The information you gave me will be held anonymously. This means that it will be impossible for people to know what you told me. If you think of any questions you would like to ask once I have gone then you can ask to speak to your teacher. If you decide you do not want to take part in the study, you can tell your parent or teacher who will contact me. This can only be done 3 weeks after the interview has been done.

If you have taken part and is has made you feel uncomfortable or worries in any way then these are some places that you might help you.

YoungMinds: the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and children. –
Visit their website: www.youngminds.org.uk

The Mix: the UK's leading support service for children. They are here to help children to take on any challenges they might be facing. Talk to them 24 hours/ day -via their
website: www.themix.org.uk or on this free, confidential helpline: Freephone 0808 808 4994 •

Childline: the UK's free helpline for children and children. It provides confidential telephone counselling service for children with a problem. Talk to them for free any time: -by phone on: 0800 1111 -or via online chat: www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

 Amy Herbert

Appendix O

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: Martin Willis

SUPERVISOR: **Lucy Browne**

STUDENT: Amy Herbert

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Title of proposed study: An Appreciative Inquiry of factors within a primary school that are perceived to support children who are 'at risk' of exclusion

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

In 2.1 you have acknowledged that there are potential psychological/emotional risks to participants. However, you have not said what you will do to minimise the affect on participants. Please clearly state how you plan to protect your participants before recruitment begins.

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name:

Student number:

Date: 12.02.2020

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

<mark>YES</mark> / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐ HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐ MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☑ LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*:   Martin Willis

Date: 10/02/20

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard