Pupil Premium for Looked After Children: its allocation, use and impact on educational outcomes for children aged 5-12

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Abstract

Looked after children (LAC) in England achieve less well than their non-looked after peers and as such they receive pupil premium plus funding. This study explores what is an under researched topic: how the pupil premium plus is used to support educational outcomes of LAC, with specific foci on professionals' planning processes, the supports and interventions funded using pupil premium plus, and how the impact of the funding is tracked and monitored.

Focussing on key stages one and two (ages five to twelve), this study employed a qualitative evaluative case study of two local authorities and employed semi-structured interviews with 20 professionals: ten designated LAC teachers, eight social workers, and two virtual school heads. Document analysis was also used to analyse 20 school pupil premium strategies. Taking a social justice perspective, Humanism (Rogers, 1967), Social Pedagogy (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Stephens, 2013; Cameron, 2018) and Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1968) were used collectively as a theoretical tool to analyse the data with the focus on planning, using and monitoring the pupil premium plus.

The research demonstrated that the pupil premium plus is valued by professionals and seen as an important, supportive tool, going beyond the academic to include social and emotional interventions and curriculum enrichment. Importantly, colleagues using the funding were committed and caring individuals who know their young people well and want them to succeed. Participants identified some challenges around logistics and bureaucracy, and it was evident that it was not always easy to demonstrate impact of the pupil premium plus. Because of the diverse and complex needs of some LAC it is debatable whether the pupil premium plus is sufficient to make up for disadvantages linked to prior experiences. This research argues that policy makers should rethink the purely attainment focus of the policy and enable schools to employ longer term interventions. It also recommends that professionals explore ways of measuring the impact of pupil premium plus on different educational outcomes, and that a blend of individual and whole class interventions should be employed via the pupil premium plus.

Key Words: Looked After Children, Pupil Premium, Primary School, Achievement

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I must acknowledge from the outset that this has been a challenging task (rightly so, it is a doctorate after all) and as I'm sure is not uncommon for doctoral students, I have experienced frustration, self-doubt and thesis fatigue. I am very lucky therefore to have benefitted from the support of different people who I will thank here.

My parents have always supported me in everything that I have done, and this has been no different. I think that probably they feel that this has been dragging on rather too long, and that I really should have just got on and finished this some time ago. They are not alone in that, as I have felt the passing of time through this as much as anyone. They really want me to do well though and I know that they will be delighted and proud when I can say that I have passed.

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1 – Introduction

Looked after children in England achieve less well than their non-looked peers (DFE, 2020a). For example, in 2019, 7.2% of LAC achieved a pass in GCSE English and mathematics (grade 5-9) in comparison with 40.1% of non-looked after children (DFE, 2020a). There is a similar picture in primary school where 65% of non-looked after children achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of year 6, against only 37% of LAC (DFE, 2020a). This data will be explored in more detail later but in summary non-looked after children significantly outperform LAC in almost every key educational indicator. This includes attainment in primary and secondary school, academic progress, incidence and severity of special educational need, likelihood of being long-term NEET (not in education, employment and training) and incidence of fixed term exclusions (DFE, 2018a, 2020a). This should be deeply concerning for all professionals working with and for this group of vulnerable young people.

A looked after child is a person under the age of 18 who (DFE, 2020a):

- is accommodated by the local authority for a continuous period for more than 24 hours;
- is subject to a care order;
- is subject to a placement order.

A child becomes 'looked after' in the UK because (NSPCC, 2020a):

- The parents have agreed because they are unable to take good care of him or her (e.g., because of an illness or disability);
- The local authority feel that the child is significant risk of harm;
- The child is an unaccompanied asylum seeker arriving in England with no responsible adult.

This is enshrined in law in England and Wales via the Children Act of 1989 which also stated for the first time that local authorities had a responsibility to promote the welfare and well-being of looked after children, as opposed to the physical accommodation which had previously been the focus (Children and Young Persons Act, 1969). What is

clear is that these children are in situations where lower outcomes are the norm frequently because of the choices and actions of adults who should be protecting them. The debate is a complex one and will be explored fully later but in short, the status quo is unacceptable from education, social care and social justice perspectives. This thesis therefore looks to explore what is happening now via one key policy intended to support LAC (i.e., the pupil premium plus) to identify effective practice and benefit young people and the adults working with and for them.

Legislation

Following the Children Act of 1989, legislation has continued to make reference to the needs of this vulnerable group. Some of the key legislation applying in England is outlined here:

- Children (Leaving Care) (2000) – set down how local authorities should support young people aged 16-21 when they leave the care system;
- Adoption and Children Act (2002) – local authorities must provide an adoption service and post-adoption support;
- Children Act (2004) – local authorities have a duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children;
- Children and Young Persons Act (2008) – local authorities must provide high quality care and services for looked after children;
- Children and Families Act (2014) – adopters are able to foster looked after children whilst waiting for the adoption to be granted by court; looked after children are able to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21;
- Children and Social Work Act (2017) – emphasised the importance of the corporate parent hearing and acting on the views, wishes and feelings of LAC, and prioritised the accessing of services provided by the local authority and other agencies.

As the 2004 Children Act and the Education of Young People in Public Care guidance (DOH, DFEE, 2000) suggests, there has historically been an identified issue of looked after children not achieving well in educational indicators. For example, in 2001–02, only 8% of LAC who had been in care for a year or more achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher, in contrast to 50% of all children (SEU, 2003). Furthermore, in the same cohort of year 11 pupils, 42% of LAC did not sit GCSEs (or equivalent), in

comparison to just 4% of all children (SEU, 2003). There is limited longitudinal data for this group but research by Cheeseborough (2002, cited in SEU, 2003) indicate that low attainment of children who had spent time in children's homes in the 1970s and 1980s could be at least partly linked to their in care status.

Terminology

The terms 'looked after child' and 'looked after children' have already been defined. The term 'child looked after' (CLA) is often used by local authorities (e.g., Knowsley, Milton Keynes, Islington), as are 'Children in Care' and 'Child in Care' (e.g., Kent, Cornwall, Bristol). All of these terms have the same meaning but for the purposes of this thesis, 'LAC', 'Looked after Children' and 'Looked after Child' will be used throughout as this is used by the Department for Education. Of course, it must be acknowledged that these terms have some negative associations. Wood and Selwyn (2015) found that when children identified themselves as being in care, others either felt sorry for them, or assumed that they were trouble-makers. Mannay *et al* (2017) explain that the 'in care' label is too often associated with failure, but also note that some young people feel that being 'looked after' just identifies them as being different to other children. Lewis (2019) suggests that the abbreviation LAC is unhelpful because it could be interpreted by some as if the children themselves are *lacking* something. A study by TACT (2019) (a fostering agency) alongside thirteen children in care councils and the Children's Society found that young people preferred the terms 'another home away from home' and 'living with a different family in a different home' to 'in care' (p. 8). Instead of 'LAC' or 'foster child' the children preferred the term [local authority's name]'s children (p. 9) because they felt that all children are looked after whether they live with parents or in foster care. There is no perfect solution therefore, but it is hoped that with this research, alongside the other good work going on in this field, some of which will be explored in chapter 3, that the narrative around looked after children can be changed. Of course, the pupil premium plus can help with this, if it is used effectively, by supporting these young people to achieve and succeed.

Looked after children should not be confused with the following groups:

- Adopted Children – As per the Adoption Act (1976) which applies in England and Wales, adoption is a permanent move, where the adoptive parents receive all legal rights and responsibilities, as if he or she was born into that family. Children must be under 18 and unmarried (Barnardo's, 2020).
- Children on Special Guardianship Orders – As per the Children Act (1989) and the Adoption and Children Act (2002), these are children who are not looked after by the local authority and are legally more secure than looked after children, though the legal link with birth parents is maintained, unlike with adopted children. Special guardians are usually relatives of the child or the child's former foster carers (DFE, 2017a).
- Children on Supervision Orders – These children still live at home with parents, but their care is supervised by social services because of concerns over their safety and / or well-being. They are not classified as looked after children. The order can last up to one year, but on application can be extended to three (Children Act, 1989).
- Children in Need – Section 17 of the Children Act (1989) defines these children as those needing services provided by the local authority in order to 'have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development' and those whose health and development would be impaired without local authority support. These children are not looked after, though often children who are in need do become looked after in due course.

This work refers to a number of key professionals and processes: virtual school head, social worker, designated teacher, independent reviewing officer, foster carer and personal education plan. A glossary of these roles can be found towards the end of the thesis.

Pupil Premium Plus

The pupil premium was introduced in England by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in April 2011, with the aim of raising the attainment of disadvantaged children from reception to year eleven.

In its initial implementation, schools were allocated around £400 per pupil who was either eligible to receive free school meals, or who had been in local authority care continuously for six months or longer. A broad aim of raising the achievement of

disadvantaged children was set, though with little detail as to how it should be achieved. For example, the Liberal Democrats' manifesto suggested that schools could use the pupil premium to reduce class sizes to 20 but for the vast majority of schools this would have been difficult to achieve. Subsequent years saw the following changes and expansions (DFE, 2015a, 2020b):

- Children with at least one parent in the armed forces attracted pupil premium (initially £300, now £310); this is known as service premium;
- The free school meal pupil premium increased in stages to £955 for secondary age children, and £1345 for primary age children; this now includes children who are not currently eligible for free school meals but had been at some point in the previous six years;
- The children in care pupil premium (pupil premium plus) increased gradually to £2345 and the six month 'buffer' was removed;
- Children who had been adopted from care, or left care under special guardianship, a child arrangements order (previously known as a residence order) also now attract pupil premium plus at £2345 (though children who leave local authority care to return to parents do not);
- An early years pupil premium, for children aged 3-4, was introduced of approximately £302 per child meeting the in care, previously in care, or deprivation indicators.

This research aims to explore how the looked after children (LAC) pupil premium plus is being used and monitored to improve the outcomes for LAC. The guidance from DFE (2015b, 2018b, 2020a) states that this should be used to narrow the attainment gap which exists between the educational outcomes of LAC and non-LAC. This will be analysed further in chapter 2. Therefore, the intention is to examine how pupil premium plus use is planned, who is involved, how the funding is used, and how professionals evidence its impact. The attainment focus is an interesting one, especially given the range of needs that LAC can present with and the many outcomes in which LAC trail their non-looked after peers. This will be explored fully later in chapter 3 but it is clear that given the complexity of the issues at hand, schools interpret this guidance differently and so it will be important to look at what this looks

like in practice. The research will also explore the work of local authorities, including the role of the 'corporate parent' for LAC, in pupil premium plus processes.

Despite its high profile (BBC, 2012), during and following the 2010 general election, and its overall cost (£136,210,600 for the LAC pupil premium plus in 2019-20, DFE, 2020c) this is an under-researched topic. Some of the research that has been undertaken (e.g., Ofsted, 2012a; EEF, 2019) seems to explore pupil premium as a whole rather than the different groups, while others look in detail at the role of the virtual schools (see Glossary). Given the disparate needs of LAC, to be analysed in chapter 3, an exploration into the processes around pupil premium plus and the identification of recommendations, should be a priority and this research will go some way to addressing this.

Supporting Looked After Children

As previously stated, the Children Act of 1989 was the first legislation that explicitly made reference to the additional needs of looked after children (NSPCC, 2020b) although previous legislation did make reference to court proceedings and accommodation of LAC (for example the Children Act, 1969). This 1989 Act stated that local authorities had a duty to safeguard and promote welfare and to ensure that services that were available to non-looked after children were also available to those in local authority care. However, it was legislation in the Children Act of 2004, applying to just England and Wales, that required local authorities to promote the education of looked after children. This in itself is surprising because the link between children's welfare and educational outcomes is long established (McInerny, 2013). The 2004 Act followed a report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) which identified contributing factors for looked after children as:

- Spending too much time either excluded or without a school place;
- Emotional and mental health needs not being met;
- High level of instability in foster placement and school placement;
- Lack of support in school if they fall behind;
- Lack of support from foster carers because they are ill equipped to do so, or not expected to do so.

Hayden (2005) explored this fully, identifying that a lack of understanding of the pupils' needs, pre-care experiences, inappropriate expectations and fewer opportunities and resources were also major contributors to this issue of poor educational attainment. She also states that inadequate corporate parenting is a factor. This is a position taken up by Cronin (2019) who suggests that decisions are too often taken based on cost and that the reliance on foster care is not effective because of the diversity of LAC needs. There does need to be a deeper analysis though, of some of the wider social causes because, Berridge (2007) argues, it is too simplistic to lay the blame at the feet of the care system without looking at the huge impact of some family breakdowns and the related traumas that precede entry into the care system.

This will be explored fully in chapter 3 but what is clear though is that the impact of these educational challenges are far-reaching, affecting a young person's likelihood of educational success (Pears *et al*, 2013) and successful integration into adult society (Jackson and Hojer, 2013; Gypen *et al*, 2017). Indeed, it is the case that sometimes these early, pre-care experiences continue to have implications into adolescence and adulthood (Henderson, Jones and Woods, 2017). These young people are particularly at risk of social exclusion and the range of negative outcomes that come with it, such as accessing welfare, homelessness, addiction, early parenthood, poor mental health and crime. Emphasising this point, Bullock and Gaehl (2012) demonstrate that over a 25-30 year period children previously in care have an increased risk of offending and a higher mortality rate when compared with the general public. The mortality figure is linked to early experiences of abuse and neglect that some looked after children experience.

Of course, some LAC do very well in school and make progress at or above the expected rate for all children (the statistics to come demonstrate this). Martin and Jackson (2003), in a study involving 38 adults who had been high-achieving students (according to A-Level results) and had spent at least one year in residential or foster care, identified the importance of a close network of professionals working together for the young person. They concluded that it was negative stereotypes and at times a lack of basic resources that put them most at risk of not succeeding.

Healey and Fisher (2011, p.1824) focus on a different theme suggesting that the most effective support needs to be around emotional challenges, to 'buffer the impact of

abuse and neglect'. They propose that this needs to happen as early as possible because of a relatively small window of opportunity where damage can be repaired. The importance of schools working with and supporting these vulnerable young people is key also, with Pears *et al* (2013) identifying 'school engagement' as a key factor. This concept synthesises academic success, behavioural support, high attendance, extra-curricular engagement, and social connectivity, amongst other things as being crucial in supporting the most vulnerable children in foster care: those who have been previously 'mistreated'. Mendis, Lehman and Gardner (2018) explore a similar theme, emphasising that some of these factors contribute to an environment which is conducive to learning for LAC. In agreement, Berridge (2012a) identifies the importance of schools avoiding exclusions (both formal and informal) and school changes wherever possible. This research also shows that looked after children need motivation through involvement with inspirational role models.

The characteristics of these sorts of successes and understanding LAC's challenges must be central to decision-making around the use of pupil premium plus. The importance for schools and other professionals to get this right is emphasised by the assertion of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) that it is unrealistic to assume that the attainment gap can be closed simply by giving schools additional public money. Therefore, a thorough analysis of what is working well will feature in chapter 3 and indeed, this thesis aims to explore in sharp focus how this funding can be planned for, used and monitored.

Accountability

The Department for Education holds schools and local authorities to account for the use of the pupil premium plus. DFE (2018b) state that virtual school heads must ensure that the children who are eligible for pupil premium plus are identified promptly and that the method for allocating the funding is simple so that delays are minimised. VSHs must also ensure that funding meets the needs set down in each child's Personal Education Plan and that they can demonstrate the impact that the pupil premium plus is having. Of course, much of this accountability is shared with the schools and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) places emphasis on the support for vulnerable groups like LAC. Ofsted is the government's department that is responsible for inspecting

schools, early years settings, initial teacher training providers and local authority social care services. Ofsted's previous framework, the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) for schools made reference to inspectors making judgement on the outcomes for children who are looked after and those eligible for pupil premium (Ofsted, 2015). Ofsted (2015 p. 5) state that 'inspection supports improvement in education by setting standards…and raising expectations of performance'. The streamlined Education Inspection Framework (2019a) which replaced the CIF is shorter and does not identify specific groups, instead, having the same high expectations around progress, attainment, behaviour and safeguarding for all learners. In addition, there is an expectation under the new framework that schools provide the lead inspector with a list of pupils who have open cases with social services (Ofsted, 2019a). Furthermore, the accompanying inspection handbook (Ofsted, 2019b) which sets down what inspectors will do while in schools, explains that they should evaluate the impact of the curriculum on pupils eligible for pupil premium, and whether pupil premium decisions are made using sound evidence.

The intention is that Ofsted's high level of scrutiny and accountability helps ensure that all children, including the most vulnerable, achieve and fulfil their potential. This is worthy of further exploration though because there is research (e.g., Galton, 2008) that identifies reform agendas and accountability procedures amongst other things, as a significant source of stress and that this can result in teachers feeling that they are unable to accomplish their duties satisfactorily. If these duties involve planning for and addressing the needs of LAC, then an already challenging task is made even more so. In a similar vein Perryman (2007) identifies that the stress of the inspection procedure negatively affects the emotional consistency needed for teaching, and in some cases results in staff not being able to continue their work.

Main Aims and Research Questions

The key themes that need to be addressed in further detail include:

- the policy around allocation of pupil premium plus at national and local levels;

- the role of local and central government in influencing practice regarding pupil premium plus and looked after children, via policy and evaluation; the extent to which this coheres with schools' decision-making will be explored;
- the needs of looked after children and the reasons for the attainment gap; this provides important context around the issues that pupil premium plus are intended to address;
- the support that looked after children receive in school and elsewhere; this identifies what effective support may look like and so parallels can be drawn between existing research and that collected in this study.

These will all be explored fully in subsequent chapters. Summarising the aims, this research looks to examine the current situation, highlight areas of good practice, and show how, through various professional roles, the needs of these young people can be effectively met. As such the main research question is:

- How does the pupil premium plus improve the educational outcomes of LAC in primary schools?

This is supplemented by the following sub-questions:

- What are the priorities and processes used in planning for the use of pupil premium plus?
- What are the interventions and supports that LAC receive via the pupil premium plus?
- How is the impact of pupil premium plus tracked and monitored?

These questions resonate with guidance set down by DFE (2018b) regarding the support for looked after children. This, in summary, explains that timely and effective cooperation between professionals is important, as is a clear focus on closing the attainment gap that exists between looked after and non-looked after children. There should also be a focus on personalised learning for these children, and a range of interventions and strategies. There should be detailed monitoring of these approaches and the evaluation of attainment and progress should extend to the virtual school head (DFE, 2018b).

In the initial planning of this research, it was decided that the focus would be on children in key stages one and two (i.e. five to twelve years old). This was partly to do with providing boundaries for the case study (Lichtman, 2011; Candappa, 2017; Yin, 2018) but it also resonated with my own professional experience, which will be outlined presently. Furthermore the attainment gap appears to actually increase as children get older (DFE, 2020a). This will be explored more fully in chapter 2 but it highlights the importance of early intervention for LAC (Cocker and Allain, 2013; PSE, 2016; Martindale, 2018). It was hoped that meaningful findings and recommendations about the primary age phase would translate to benefits for LAC in primary school, that might endure into secondary.

Given the current lack of research around the impact of pupil premium plus, this study adds significantly to the existing body of knowledge in this field, to the benefit of a wide range of professionals and academics, and ultimately young people. It has already been identified that currently, much information related to pupil premium, seems to deal with all pupil premium groups universally and so this research will enable a sharper focus on looked after children in particular. This is crucial because, as will be discussed more fully in chapter 2, LAC are outperformed by the non-LAC peers in almost all educational indicators. Furthermore, the number of LAC in England continues to increase steadily (DFE, 2020d) so these questions and themes apply to more and more children each year. Therefore, looking at the LAC pupil premium plus in isolation, without conflation with other pupil premium groups, will identify how the funding is being used to support these vulnerable young people. It should be noted that generally, this research will refer to pupil premium plus, i.e., the looked after children pupil premium. On occasion, for example when a participant, report or article refers to pupil premium more broadly, I will reflect this by omitting the 'plus'.

Researcher Background

Prior to taking up my current position as a senior lecturer in primary education and early childhood at the University of East London (November 2014), I was assistant head teacher of a virtual school. Every local authority in England must have a virtual school head teacher (VSH), with responsibility for the educational outcomes for all the children in the care of that authority (DFE, 2015a, 2015b, 2018b). The local authority that

employed me chose to employ a multiagency team, staffed with education support officers, education welfare officers, participation apprentices (many of whom were care leavers), as well as deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers.

This role followed three years as an extended services centre manager in Kent and around ten years as a teacher and senior leader in two primary schools. During my time as a class teacher I taught between five and ten looked after children or previously looked after children. My uncertainty around the number is partly to do with how long ago this was and also because I now realise that I was not always clear about the legal status of some of the children. On reflection I also now acknowledge that I was not always sure of the best way to support LAC, nor if I should have been doing something different to support them. Whether this was the case for my colleagues is unclear, but I am sure that I received very little, if any specific training around LAC. Therefore approaches that were undertaken were based on my understanding of how to support vulnerable children generally, or linked to an individual pupil's other needs, such as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Of course, not all LAC would have an additional need but I was aware that the likelihood of having such a need was higher than for other children. I also became aware very quickly that trust was important; the children needed to be able to trust what I said, and believe that what I was doing was in their best interests. How I communicated with the children was therefore something I thought very carefully about. Other themes that I began to notice and prioritise were well-being and socialisation. Even though I knew that all of my children needed to progress academically, I also knew that how children felt, their well-being, influenced how likely academic progress was. It was also clear that for some LAC socialising with other children, resolving disagreements and maintaining positive relationships, was a challenge (some of the reasons for this will be explored in chapter 3). This in turn influenced how well they were able to engage and progress academically.

The core business of the extended services study centre was after school sessions with children from local schools. These sought to develop English, mathematics and IT skills, as well as self-esteem and motivation, via an engaging sport-based curriculum. My study centre also offered sessions in the school holidays specifically for LAC. This was via a link forged between my service and the team that would later become the virtual school.

Through this work I became more aware of some of the specific challenges that looked after children faced (e.g., social and emotional needs, gaps in knowledge) and the onus on local authorities to provide supportive services for them to help to address these needs. Throughout my time working in school and in extended services I was not aware of the processes and potentially supportive mechanisms that would have been ongoing for these young people. For example, I would sometimes attend LAC reviews for pupils I was teaching but I did not really understand the purpose of these meetings, nor the potential outcomes. Of course, this would develop when I moved to the virtual school. At that point I was not an expert in LAC but I did know that these pupils appeared to do less well than their peers, frequently seemed to present with social and emotional challenges, and were not expected to achieve as much as some other children. This did not sit well with me from a social justice perspective, nor simply as a teacher who felt that all of his pupils should have equality of opportunity.

As assistant head teacher of the virtual school my role was to have oversight of the looked after children in specific areas and to work with schools, social workers and foster carers (see Glossary) to ensure that education and health outcomes were positive. For the majority of the three years that I was in post, pupil premium plus was paid directly to schools and the responsibility for allocating it sat with head teachers and senior leaders. As such, a role of the assistant head would be to discuss pupil premium plus spend and sometimes challenge schools, if it was not evident that the funding was used as per DFE guidance, though funding could not be reclaimed. In April 2014 government published statutory guidance (Promoting the Education of Looked After Children, DFE 2014a) which made the virtual head role statutory (i.e., required by legal statute) and saw that funding was allocated to the VSHs and not automatically to schools. In my local authority the decision was taken that schools would have to apply for it, state what it would be used for, and how it would benefit the young person. One of my roles would be to review and approve or decline applications from schools.

Reflecting on this experience it is clear to me that both before and after the change of allocation rules, many schools would use the funding effectively, creatively and individually. The most common uses of pupil premium plus included:

- Staffing costs (to include teachers and teaching assistants);
- Resources such as sloping desks, mobility cushions, verbalisers, tablets, etc.;
- One-to-one or group tuition;
- School trip costs / contributions;
- identifying and implementing support from a specialist professional (e.g., speech therapist, occupational therapist, educational psychologist).

Schools could make the case that all of these may have been positive uses of pupil premium plus assuming that they matched the needs of the young person (though evidencing the need was something that schools sometimes found difficult). Other schools though would pool funding to pay for additional resources that may or may not have benefitted the children in question (e.g., specific equipment, counsellor, support staff). Others would be unable to clearly identify what it was spent on. These schools in particular would have been the ones that would not have received the pupil premium plus had they used the same approach on having to apply for the funding. There has been some limited research, which will be outlined presently, on the best uses of pupil premium funding but to what extent schools use this is unclear. It would appear, based on my experience that there may be significant variation in practice both nationally, and within local authorities. It is clear that there is a need to identify good practice around how this funding is used, planning processes and the involvement of key stakeholders, and how schools can evidence the impact that it is having. Ultimately of course the intention is that this will be of benefit to LAC, positively impacting on the support that they receive. I hope also that this research will be useful to policy makers in government, local authorities, schools, social care professionals, and anyone else working with and for LAC.

Social Justice

I have already stated that my interest in this topic is underpinned by an ethos of social justice and this section will outline how I see social justice within the context of this study. There are a number of different conceptions of social justice within the social sciences (e.g., Rawls, 1972; Young, 1990) but for the purposes of this research, I will be applying Gewirtz's (1998; 2006) position. Providing this overview is important because

not only does social justice link to the rationale for the research, it also informs the analytical framework which is used to discuss the data gathered. This framework will also be introduced shortly.

It is important to begin by stating that social justice is a far from simple concept. Cribb and Gewirtz (2005) suggest that attempting to work justly can often result in the practitioner having to balance irreconcilable demands because addressing one situation in a just way can result in another situation being neglected. Furthermore, in many cases people who wish to apply social justice to their work find themselves with limited control because of hierarchies and systems that are in play (Gewirtz, 2006). It is also context and level dependent (Gewirtz, 2006) because, even though some of the principles may be the same, socially just decisions and behaviours will look different for social workers, teachers and policy-makers.

Acknowledging this complexity, Gewirtz (2006) suggests that social justice can be distributive, recognitional or associational. Distributive justice is about the way that rights and resources are distributed in society. When this is done in a just way there is an absence of exploitation, marginalisation and deprivation. This has particular relevant for LAC because there is an associated stigma with being in care (Edwards, 2016), and because there is a serious question as to whether the systems that are in place within education and social care enable LAC to succeed (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; APPG, 2012). Recognitional justice occurs when different cultures, values and ways of life are recognised as being of equal worth, and there is an absence of disrespect and domination towards any one specific group. Again, there are links for LAC here in relation to the way that the group is perceived as being less able (Tideman *et al*, 2013) and more likely to be in receipt of welfare in the future (Gypen *et al*, 2017). Associational justice is where disadvantaged groups are given due and fair representation and the removal of systems that prevent people from participating in decisions that affect their lives and this is something that LAC may experience in some situations (Brewin and Statham, 2011). In addition to these three types, there are some more generic exemplifications that should be noted, including equalities of opportunities, outcomes and conditions, including that which goes beyond what might normally be expected for a particular individual or group; avoiding the culture of surveillance, control and power

(Gewirtz, 1998); face-to-face relationships which are built around sensitivity and respect (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2005); and teaching enhanced by imaginative approaches, creativity and critical thought (Gewirtz, 2000).

During my time working with LAC in different roles, I had not considered all of these elements that contribute to social justice. On reflection I can see now that I was concerned about many of these factors: whether I as a teacher had enough knowledge to support LAC; whether the children received what they needed to progress; whether there was an inherent negative perception based on the LAC label, as opposed to individual needs; and whether they had the opportunity to give their views about what they needed. It must also be acknowledged that this is challenging because some of these positions may be in conflict with one another (Gewirtz, 2006). For example, children need to be denoted as LAC in order to receive the pupil premium plus. However, the LAC label may be associated with lower achievement and social and emotional challenges, and this may not accurately reflect that young person's profile. Furthermore, Gewirtz (2000) raises questions about whether the mechanisms that governments use to measure quality in education can truly come from a social justice perspective, because, she suggests, they subjugate and control teachers, parents and children. This is a theme that will be revisited later on in relation to the data gathered in this research.

Analytical Framework

On beginning the research an analytical framework was not immediately evident. This was partly to do with the way that this work extends across education and social care, and also because knew that I needed to maintain the social justice focus throughout. Furthermore, it was difficult to envisage a single theory that would provide a lens that would encompass the different themes that are linked to the research questions. Indeed, Lederman and Lederman (2015) explain that sometimes in qualitative research a single theory cannot sufficiently support the understanding of a problem, nor the development of new knowledge. Therefore I felt that a combination of theories should be employed. This was a lengthy process and some theories were considered and then discounted. These included Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work around the influence of different, and in the case of LAC, potentially damaging systems in which

the child exists and Goffman (1963) who understood the impact of stigma and the things that people do to mask perceived shortcomings. These were rejected eventually because Bronfenbrenner (1979) does not place enough emphasis on the individual development of children (MacBlain, 2018) and for LAC in particular this concept of individuality and personalised support is important. Goffman's (1963) work on the other hand is too specific and does not do enough to explore children's learning and academic progress.

Ultimately, I decided that more than one theory would be required to understand and interrogate the findings further. I have already outlined some elements of my professional background and the reasons why I felt that this was an important study to undertake. To reach a final decision it was to these principles that I returned. These broad themes included the low or underachievement of LAC, the way that LAC and pupil premium plus policy influences decision-making, and effective pedagogy for LAC. Therefore, the following theories were applied: Rogers' Humanist theory (1967) analysing the achievement of LAC; Social Pedagogy (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Stephens, 2013; Cameron, 2018) analysing LAC and pupil premium plus policy; and Freire's Critical Pedagogy (1968) analysing what works pedagogically with LAC. Crucially, all three also have a strong underlying emphasis on social justice, participation, relationships and holistic wellbeing. Each of these will now be introduced in turn, with discussion about how they relate to LAC and their needs. Later, in the Discussion chapter, direct links will be made between these theories and this research's findings.

Rogers' Humanist Theory

Carl Rogers was a therapist and clinical and educational psychologist. Much of his work is therefore rooted in a therapeutic background and focuses on counselling and supporting the development of the whole person via meaningful, dialogical encounters (Rogers, 1951). Drawing on this understanding of relationships Rogers also explored how best to facilitate learning (1967). Of course, there are many theories of pedagogy that provide explanations for how children learn and while Rogers' theory (1967) is often included and discussed amongst them it is not usually thought of first. This may well be because Rogers discusses the role of the adult in the classroom as being more of a facilitator than a direct teacher, or because some other theories are more explicit when

implemented practically. For example, Skinner's (1953) theory of operant conditioning can be seen in action in many classrooms, particularly in behaviour management (MacBlain, 2018), but also in the way that teachers provide feedback to children (MacBlain, 2014). Similarly, teachers regularly expect children to learn by modelling from their own demonstrations in the way that Bandura (1977) might have proposed in his social learning theory. The work of Vygotsky (1978) continues to influence the way that adults support children via discussion and questioning to enable them to achieve challenging tasks, and there are other eminent theories that are also effective and relevant today in explaining children's achievement (e.g., Piaget, 1947; Bruner, 1960). However, these theories all intend to explain learning for children generally, rather than children from specific groups with particular needs. In my view, none of these theories are sufficient in explaining why LAC achievement is lower than that of non-LAC.

Therefore, considering achievement from a humanist perspective made sense because of its focus on facilitating learning through empowerment and understanding of needs (Bates, 2019) and this resonates with Gewirtz's (2006) distributive justice. Initially, Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs (1943) was considered. The low achievement of LAC could be linked to lower-order needs (e.g., safety, nutrition) and high-order needs (e.g., self-esteem and belonging) potentially not being met. However, on reflection the achievement of LAC is more nuanced and complex than this. For the many LAC who do not achieve as well as their non-looked after peers, it is too difficult to isolate a single, specific reason for this, and ranking needs hierarchically is too simplistic. So while Maslow does have relevance, the work of Rogers (1967) is more appropriate in that it provides the necessary flexibility and alignment with LAC and their achievement. Central to Rogers' theory are three key elements that are required for young people to be supported effectively and therefore develop appropriately. These are congruence, prizing and empathy.

Congruence or realness (Rogers, 1967) is about the importance of adults and children entering into a positive, genuine relationship with one another without façade and it clearly aligns with Gewirtz's (1998) emphasis on inclusive, oppression-free relationships. Rogers suggests that this is very important, with children being unable to fulfil their

potential without these meaningful ongoing relationships. Congruence means that adults are far more likely to be able to understand what it is that children need to progress. This has particular resonance for LAC (APPG, 2012) and was clearly in evidence in many of the interviews in this research with DTs having a sound understanding of these young people. It should be noted that developing these sorts of relationships is made far more difficult when children are experiencing placement or school moves and without this, setting appropriate expectations is more challenging for school staff. LAC may also be more likely to experience attachment disorders because of their prior experiences and so this could impact their ability to form such relationships (Cairns, 2002; Henderson, Jones and Woods, 2017).

Prizing or trust requires the adult to care for and accept the child, valuing his or her feelings, much as Gewirtz (2006) values respect for all groups in her recognitional justice. In order to succeed, Rogers' view (1967) is that the learner needs to feel that he or she is trusted and has potential. This is aligned closely with the needs and experiences of LAC because their pre-care experiences, and potentially the act of actually being taken into care, mean that children often feel let down, abandoned and disrespected by the adults that should be caring for them (Berridge, 2007; Poyser, 2013). Similarly, LAC frequently feel that they are not consulted about, nor involved in, decisions that affect them (APPG, 2012).

Empathic understanding (Rogers, 1967) in this case is very important, but also quite difficult for professionals because in most cases professionals have not experienced being in care, nor the challenges of the care system. This makes it hard for adults to see things from the standpoint of a looked after young person. Teachers do not always understand the challenges of being looked after, nor their prior experiences and this makes it difficult sometimes to predict or understand LAC's reactions and behaviours. LAC often feel as if they are being treated differently, e.g., with less tolerance around their behaviour and lower than necessary expectations (McClung and Gayle, 2010). Effective empathy means that the adults are sensitively aware of how things appear to LAC. This is made more difficult for teachers of course because of the pressures that they feel in meeting standards set down for them from DFE, but a lack of empathy does directly and indirectly have implications for LAC's mental health. This

principle is very similar to that of mutuality (Gewirtz, 1998) which helps to overcome 'fragmentation, disintegration and chaos' (p. 475).

Crucially, in comparison with Maslow, with Rogers there is no order hierarchy, nor any indication that achieving one of these elements is more important than another. This resonates with LAC well because of their varied, complex experiences which clearly do not result in the same outcome from person to person. Making assumptions about what might appear to be similar experiences leading to similar outcomes for LAC is unhelpful. Indeed, as will be explored later on, schools in this research frequently adopted an individual, needs-led approach to support, rather than providing a standard LAC offer of support.

Social Pedagogy

Policy relating to LAC and pupil premium plus needs to bring together elements of education and social care; these are children whose challenges, at least initially, stem from social care issues, and yet these issues come with them into their educational settings to continue to disadvantage them. Social Pedagogy (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Stephens, 2013; Cameron, 2018) is a theory that brings together social care and education. Holthoff and Eichsteller's (2009, cited in Cameron and Moss, 2011) diamond model has particular relevance for LAC because of its emphasis on all humans being precious, valuable and having potential to succeed (i.e., diamonds that can be polished). It prioritises elements such as active engagement with the world around us, empowerment and socialisation, and positions these as being important for holistic, multi-dimensional learning, which is not just based on academic outcomes. Crucially Social Pedagogy understands and accounts for the fact that the world in which young people exist, particularly vulnerable young people, is challenging and difficult to negotiate. Social pedagogy is clearly underpinned by social justice with, for example, Gewirtz's (2006) associational justice requiring the representation and empowerment of disadvantaged groups, and the removal of barriers that prevent participation.

The finer details of Social Pedagogy also have value and link with what should be considered as priorities for work with LAC. These include an acknowledgement that some children may feel isolated because of, for example, bullying (Harker *et al*, 2004) or placement moves (Become, 2020a) and that the way to support reintegration is via

developing their skills (social and practical) to enable them to have a role within different groups. It was noted earlier that a feature of social justice is face-to-face relationships (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2005) and the social pedagogue also advocates for flatter hierarchies between adults and children, and a focus on developing skills of collaboration and communication (Cameron, 2018). Social Pedagogy aims to build capacity in children so that they are able to develop talents and follow ambitions over the long term, and this will frequently involve creative, expressive activities, aligned with Gewirtz's (2000) view of social justice, which enable children to experience different emotions, and successes in different areas of the curriculum. Indeed, this was something that was in evidence in the Findings chapter, with schools prioritising dance, trips and musical instruments if it filled a need and aligned with children's interests.

These ideas resonate strongly with LAC who, for example, clearly do find navigating their social world a challenge (DFE, 2018b); whose well-being cannot simply be measured quickly via exam results; who may have only experienced failure in academic subjects but have skills and goals in other areas; and who have moved schools too frequently and so found themselves without a consistent peer group (APPG, 2012). Therefore, this theory is appropriate in analysing the pupil premium plus policy and the extent to which it is able to lay the foundation for effective use of the funding and support for LAC.

Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Freire (1968) discusses the oppressive nature of a traditional education in which there is a clear power imbalance between teacher and learners. In what Freire refers to as the banking concept the teacher knows everything, controls everything, does all the talking and makes all the choices, while pupils passively comply, listen and are disciplined. Learners are receivers of information, over which they have no say. This is deposited and memorised, to be repeated in the future for the relevant assessment, but provides little or no value for their future lives. This could position children as commodities, based upon what they can offer the school in results, which is at odds with what social justice informed education (Gewirtz, 2000) should be like. Indeed, it is this sort of practice which leads to the oppression that Freire takes issue with and while he is not discussing LAC, rather all learners, there is an alignment between this idea and LAC. Freire discusses the value of communication, co-intentional education and shared

control in effective pedagogy, acknowledging that this needs to be explicitly targeted to be achieved for all children. Vulnerable groups of children like LAC are less likely to be involved in decisions that affect them (Berridge, 2012a) even though they may benefit from participation and empowerment as much as any other group. Indeed, LAC are more likely than non-LAC to have missed periods of school (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008; Cocker and Allain, 2013) and therefore would benefit from the opportunity to choose what they study and how. This resonates with associational justice (Gewirtz, 2006), a feature of which is people being fully involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Freire also questions the extent to which pedagogy includes creativity, risk-taking, children's questions, opportunities for reflection and problem-solving. Again, these sorts of approaches are valuable and meaningful for all children but in particular should be prioritised for LAC because the higher likelihood of time spent out of school means that an enriched curriculum, rather than a narrow one should be the target (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008). Given the poor outcomes that LAC achieve in relation to non-LAC (DFE, 2020a) it is important to analyse the pedagogical approaches that are used in schools, and the strategies that are being used more widely to support them. Freire's views around Critical Pedagogy are relevant for all children, and even more so with LAC's vulnerabilities, and so this theory is relevant for analysing what effective support for LAC looks like.

International Significance

Pupil premium is an English policy; it does not apply in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. However, that is not to say that the low achievement of LAC is solely an issue in England as this challenge appears to be one which many countries face. This research does not intend to explore which countries are tackling this issue most effectively. Indeed, because different countries collect and measure different data, making these sorts of comparisons can be very difficult (Munro and Manful, 2012). Furthermore, some countries (for example, Canada) use provincial, rather than national reporting which would add a further complication (McMurty, 2015). What is evident from the outcomes data that is accessible is that the attainment gap between LAC and non-LAC is not something exclusively found in England. For example:

- In Scotland in 2018/19, 35% of LAC school leavers achieved one or more grade 5 qualifications (the equivalent of a GCSE grade 4-9 in England), against 85% of all school leavers (Scottish Government, 2020).
- In Northern Ireland in 2017/18, 79% of LAC at age eight achieved the expected standard in Communication, against 87% of all children; 79% of the same LAC cohort achieved the expected standard in Using Maths, against 88% of all children (Information Analysis Directorate, 2019).
- In Manitoba, Canada from 1997/8 to 2011/2, 15.5% of children who had been in care at some point had to repeat a year, against 3.1% of those who had never been in care. From 2009/10 to 2011/2 when assessed at age eight, 49% of children who had been in care met the expected standard in Numeracy, against 79.6% of children who had never been in care. The equivalent figures for reading were 57.3% (LAC) and 85.5% (non-LAC) (Brownell *et al*, 2015).

It is also evident that LAC in other countries faced some of the same challenges as those in England. For example, in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017) there is a focus on positive collaboration between professionals, having high academic expectations and understanding the young person's individual needs and circumstances. Similarly, in Australia, there are issues around placement stability, consistency of caseworker, and a lack of information for children as to why they are in care (AIFS, 2018). In Northern Ireland, many LAC come from the most deprived areas and have low expectations for their own outcomes. At the same time they do not always have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them, would welcome a more supportive educational environment and may be without an advocate to ensure that they are listened to (Bywaters *et al*, 2020; Department of Health / Department of Education, 2018). These and other issues will be explored more fully in chapter 3.

Of course, there are differences in the ways that different countries support LAC. Sometimes these may be linked to a particular outlook about how children should be raised. In Northern Ireland, Bywaters (2018) explains, there tends to be less state interference and greater local solidarity. This results in fewer children being in care in Northern Ireland. In Australia there is a much greater use of kinship care (i.e., living with extended family) with about 44% of LAC being in these sorts of placements as opposed

to about 11% in the United Kingdom (Munroe and Manful, 2012). Residential care is also seen quite differently in other countries. While it is used sometimes in England for adolescents, it is rarely used for younger children, but this is not the same in Germany where children as young as six may be placed in residential homes (Wilkinson, 2012). Boddy *et al* (2014) have also shown how England's emphasis on supporting children to move back home, is not shared in other regions, like Scandinavia. In Denmark, children are much less likely to return home and this helps to maintain foster placements and reduces the likelihood of children 'yo-yoing' in and out of care (Boddy *et al*, 2014). Munroe and Manful (2012) found something similar in Norway where children are less likely to be taken into care but once they are, are likely to remain in care for a longer period of time.

In terms of support which is specifically educational there are different approaches taken. In Wales, for example, LAC may benefit from a Pupil Development Grant which is managed by regional consortiums and so not all children receive the same amount (Welsh Government, 2017). Wales and Northern Ireland, like England use Personal Education Plans to support LAC (Department of Education, 2011). Australia emphasises the importance of early intervention via its Additional Child Care Subsidy (Department of Education, 2016) which is available via application to parents and carers of children who meet certain deprivation indicators. Being in foster care is one of these, but like the pupil premium it is available to other children as well. The aim of this subsidy is to ensure that children access high quality care and education in the early years. There is a different focus in the USA where a Foster Care Transition Toolkit (US Department of Education, 2016) provides resources, advice and guidance for older LAC who are seeking employment and further education as they leave care. In New Zealand, very clear guidance is given to teachers (Ministry of Education, no date) about how to support LAC with emphasis on the impact of trauma, the importance of secure relationships and the challenge of transition. Scotland has a similar approach via its Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) which conducts research, provides support and offers training for those working with and for LAC, and puts significant emphasis on schools undertaking self-evaluation around their work with LAC (CELCIS, no date).

What this evidences is that there is no single acknowledged way of supporting LAC even though there are similarities in how their needs and challenges present in different countries. While this research focuses on an English policy and an English context, it is hoped that there will be clear messages about support for LAC that will be transferable. Similarly, related issues such as multi-agency working and accountability and surveillance, and evidencing impact are likely to feature in this research, and these will also apply in different contexts however LAC are supported.

Structure

The remainder of the thesis will be organised as follows:

- Chapter 2 will provide context around legislation, and the attainment and characteristics of the LAC cohort; it will also explore in detail the pupil premium policy and governmental monitoring of its implementation and impact.
- Chapter 3 will explore in detail the needs of LAC and the challenges that they may face in education; there is also an analysis of effective processes for supporting LAC within education.
- Chapter 4 will provide a review of the research methodology to include discussion of the case study approach, an overview of the sample, analysis of the sampling method, ethical considerations and discussion of the method of data analysis.
- Chapter 5 will explore the findings collected with sub-chapters looking at the planning process and who is involved in it, how pupil premium plus is used, and how impact of pupil premium plus is tracked and monitored. This is divided into two distinct sub-chapters which each focus on one local authority.
- Chapter 6 will discuss key themes drawn from the findings using the analytical framework previously outlined; further links to the research questions are made.
- Chapter 7 will provide a brief summary of findings and makes some wider recommendations for professionals working within the context of LAC and pupil premium plus. This section will also acknowledge the limitations of the research and challenges faced, and identifies some avenues for future research.

The thesis is supplemented by a reference list of sources used, an appendix of supporting documentation (ethics form, consent and information form, research

instruments), and a glossary that discusses and defines the professional roles and processes linked to the support of LAC.

2 – Literature Review: The Policy Context and Government Monitoring

Literature Search and Inclusion Criteria

The literature used in this thesis has been sourced predominantly via the University of East London library. This means that journal articles have been drawn from databases including: British Education Index, EBSCO, Education Research, JSTOR, ProQuest Central, Sage and Taylor & Francis. In some cases important reports and articles are available in open access rather than via the databases (Ebeling and Gibbs, 2008) and these have been accessed via internet search engines. Sources have been chosen for their relevance to pupil premium and looked after children in sufficient a scope as to address the research questions (Denner, Marsh and Campe, 2017). Where these are research based, they are mostly from a UK context, to ensure relevance in relation to our school and social care systems. In around ten cases, research from USA, Canada or Sweden have been included. These studies have been used principally to provide information around some of the possible outcomes or implications of being in care, or to show how these children have been supported successfully.

Many sources used in this literature review have been published since 2012, when pupil premium was introduced. However, researchers and governments have been concerned about the low achievement of looked after children for much longer than this. Therefore, I did not apply a specific age range to the literature search because to do so may have excluded some of the research which informed the introduction of the pupil premium and other support mechanisms for LAC like virtual schools. Important studies from the likes of Berridge (2007), Connelly and Chakrabarti (2008), Harker *et al* (2004) and Hayden (2005) needed to be included. These will be outlined in the coming chapters.

The vast majority of sources included in the literature review chapters are either published books, peer-reviewed journal articles, or statistics and policies published online by the Department for Education. A small number of sources fall outside of these categories, most notably the Social Exclusion Unit's (2003) report *A Better Education for Children in Care* and the All Party Parliamentary Group's (2012) *Education Matters in*

Care: A report by the independent cross-party inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children in England. While decisions to include grey literature must be taken carefully, doing so increases the comprehensiveness of a literature review and provides context and balance (Paez, 2017). Indeed, Adams *et al* (2016) argue that in some cases the inclusion of these grey sources can help researchers and practitioners understand why interventions exist and whether further evaluation may be needed. This does resonate with the two reports in question, with the SEU (2003) report making specific reference to closing the attainment gap being a priority for professionals, and this still influences the pupil premium plus policy now. In addition, the report by the APPG (2012) recommends making the virtual school head role statutory, and the introduction of the pupil premium plus. Of course, there may have been political motivations behind these recommendations and therefore, elements from these reports that appear in this thesis will frequently feature in sections and paragraphs alongside references from other, peer-reviewed sources. This shows that these reports help to contribute to the developing picture around LAC and pupil premium plus, but they do not dominate it. It should also be noted that both the reports by SEU (2003) and APPG (2012) draw on information from researchers and professors in the field, charities like Barnardo's and the Frank Buttle Trust, virtual school heads and other professionals who work with LAC, and young people. This strengthened the rationale for their inclusion in the literature review chapters, which together provide a detailed context in relation to this research's key themes.

Introduction

The significant needs and poor outcomes of looked after children have resulted in UK governments introducing a range of measures and interventions, some of which have already been outlined. This chapter will look at the pupil premium, with a particular focus on pupil premium plus, to include its background, research basis, policy context and implementation. It will also explain how central government have attempted to assess the pupil premium's impact. Gewirtz (2000) argues that when governments have very narrow views around what constitutes quality within education, they tend to neglect the participation of stakeholders and this is at odds with a social justice ethos. Therefore, an analysis of the policy context is essential. This also resonates with the

research questions for this research, which include coverage of planning, using and monitoring pupil premium plus and professionals' work around as these areas are all informed by government policy. It should be noted that pupil premium applies in England only and not Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland.

The Number of Looked After Children

There has been a steady increase in the number of looked after children in England over the past ten years. As of the end of March 2020 there were 80,080 looked after children at (DFE, 2020d). This equates to an increase of 2% from the equivalent figure in 2019 when the figure was 78,140. In 2010 there were 64,470 LAC and the number has increased every year up to 2020. The majority of these young people (72%) are living in foster care, while fewer children (around 15%) are living in secure units, hostels, residential schools or residential homes (DFE, 2020d). Generally these children are those with the most significant needs, such as those with very challenging behaviour or in need of therapeutic support (Diamond, 2015). Around 7% live with parents but under the supervision of the local authority or in a shared care arrangement (DFE, 2020d). The remaining young people are living independently (3%) or are placed for adoption (3%).

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Included within the wider LAC cohort, are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). Of the 80,080 children in care in England on 31 March 2020, 5000 (6.2%) were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (DFE, 2020d). This represents a decrease from 2019 (5140 children) but still indicates a significant increase in UASSC numbers over the last seven years; in 2013 there were 1950 UASSC, 2.9% of the total LAC (DFE, 2020d). These young people, on arrival in the United Kingdom immediately become looked after by the local authority if they are without their parents or another responsible adult and are assessed as being minors (DFE, 2020d). There is a far higher number of these children looked after in local authorities where there are ports and what schools and authorities must acknowledge is that while they are officially recognised as looked after, they may have a different set of needs (Hopkins and Hill, 2010). Those most pressing are the significant emotional, psychological and social challenges related to the traumatic experiences they have faced in travelling from home without parents and the various challenges that they have met during that journey. With these factors in mind,

Rivers (2018) argues that supporting these young people is extremely difficult. This has historically been compounded by support services that have varied in quality across the country and have too often been found to be inadequate (Free, 2005). The Hillingdon Judgement (2003) addressed concerns relating to the care of these young people. In many cases UASC were treated as Children in Need (under section 17 of the 1989 Children Act) rather than as LAC (under section 20 of the 1989 Children Act). As a result the services they received (including level of supervision, quality of accommodation, allocation of social worker) were not adequate given their needs and experiences. Children under S17 were also not eligible to access leaving care services on reaching adulthood. The Hillingdon Judgement, Free (2005) explains, addressed this ensuring a gradual shift from S17 to S20. Often relevant also are the events that led these young people to leave their home country initially, and the fact that often their leave to remain in the UK would be in question when they turn 18. Hopkins and Hill (2010) conclude that often these pupils are very keen to succeed educationally and so support needs to be tailored appropriately. Given the scale of the overall theme I do not intend to explore UASC in my thesis.

The Attainment of Looked After Children

The DFE (2020a) release data annually showing the attainment of looked after children in England, and the relative attainment gaps to non-looked after children. In this context the term 'attainment gap' is, using any form of assessment (for example, SATs, GCSEs), the difference between the percentage of looked after children meeting national expectations, and the percentage of non-looked children meeting national expectations. At Key Stages 1 and 2 the percentage of looked after children achieving the national expectations has increased slowly but not always consistently (DFE, 2015c, 2019a), and changes to the SATs in 2016 and 2019 (key stage 1 only) mean that comparisons between the most recent results and those before are not possible (DFE, 2020a). Despite these gains the attainment gap in Key Stage 1 (school years 1-2, age 5-7) remains significant:

- Reading – 52% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 75% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 22%.

- Writing – 43% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 69% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 26%.
- Mathematics - 49% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 75% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 26%.
- Science – 60% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 82% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 22%.

At Key Stage 2 (school years 3-6, age 7-11) 37% of looked after children reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, while the figure is 65% for non-looked after children. This constitutes an attainment gap of 28% which is slightly smaller than the attainment gap from 2018 (30%) (DFE, 2020a). The data for the individual subjects is as follows:

- Reading – 49% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 73% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 24% (no change since 2018).
- Writing – 50% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 78% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 28% (it was 29% in 2018).
- Mathematics - 51% of LAC achieve the expected standard; 79% of non-LAC achieve the expected standard: an attainment gap of 28% (it was 29% in 2018).

Although this research focusses on the primary age phase it is still worth looking at how this attainment gap endures into secondary school. At Key Stage 4 (school years 10-11, age 14-16) the most recent data (DFE, 2020a) shows that only 7.2% of LAC achieved a grade 5 pass or better in English and mathematics, in comparison with 40.1% of non-LAC. This is an attainment gap of 32.9% and this has actually increased from 2018 (32.5%) and 2017 (32.1%).

It is also interesting to look at the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) data for these children because there is a stark contrast here as well. In 2019 3.1% of all children had an Education and Health Care Plan (formerly Statement of Special Educational Needs), as opposed to 27.2% of looked after children (DFE, 2020a). This means that LAC are around nine times as likely to have an EHCP than the whole school population. Indeed, Sebba *et al* (2015) argue that the attainment gap between LAC and non-LAC is significantly reduced if allowance is made for SEND. Similarly relevant for how schools use additional funding to support disadvantaged children is the number of

permanent and fixed term exclusions. In 2013, looked after children were nearly twice as likely to be permanently excluded than non-looked after children (DFE, 2015c). This figure has now decreased and in 2018, LAC were actually less likely to be permanently excluded than non-LAC. However, for fixed term exclusions LAC are approximately five times as likely to receive a fixed term exclusion (11.67% of LAC) than those who are not looked after (2.33%) (DFE, 2020a). Another important measure is the percentage of children who, on leaving compulsory education at the end of year 11, continue to sustained education, employment or training, i.e., avoid becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). DFE do not publish a non-LAC figure for sustained education, employment or training, but 94% of all pupils do meet this indicator (2019b). In contrast, only 78% of LAC do so, which is another significant difference.

Gender

Of the 80,080 children looked after in England at the end of March 2020, 35,090 (44%) were female, and 44,990 (56%) were male (DFE, 2020d). Cairns (2013) suggests that boys' greater propensity to suffer from hyperarousal makes them more likely to be taken into care than girls, and less likely to be adopted. Indeed, Francis, Bennion and Humrich (2017) found that following a play-based therapeutic intervention, looked after boys' stress levels actually increased, while looked after girls' decreased. Of course, the boys in this study may have had more complex needs to begin with, and it is too simplistic to link being in care purely with the young person's own behaviours.

At Key Stage 1 girls who are looked after outperform boys who are looked after in all subjects assessed by the Key Stage 1 SATs (DFE, 2020a):

- Reading – 49% of boys achieved the expected standard; 56% of girls achieved the expected standard.
- Writing – 35% of boys achieved the expected standard; 52% of girls achieved the expected standard.
- Maths – 49% of boys achieved the expected standard; 50% of girls achieved the expected standard.
- Science – 58% of boys achieved the expected standard; 62% of girls achieved the expected standard.

There remains a significant attainment gap when separating LAC by gender, e.g., the gender gaps between looked after boys and non-looked after boys, and looked after girls and non-looked after girls are very similar to the attainment gaps between all LAC and all non-LAC (i.e., within 2% in all cases). Furthermore, the Key Stage 1 attainment gap between boys and girls overall is similar to the attainment gaps between boys and girls who are LAC (DFE, 2019c; 2020a):

- Reading – for all children the attainment gap between boys and girls is 8%; for LAC it is 7%.
- Writing – for all children the attainment gap between girls and boys is 13%; for LAC it is 17%.
- Maths – for all children the attainment gap between girls and boys is 3%; for LAC it is 1%.

Science attainment for all children is not published by gender, nor do the DFE publish equivalent figures regarding LAC and gender for the Key Stage 2 SATs, nor for GCSEs. Nonetheless, it appears that the attainment gap between boys and girls for all children, also endures for the LAC population, albeit with fewer pupils meeting the expected standards. This position is supported by the work of O'Sullivan *et al* (2013) and Sebba *et al* (2015) who, exploring GCSE data from 2013, found that female LAC achieved better than male LAC, although this difference was much greater for boys who had short spells in care, than for those who were in care for longer, and consistently. Of course, the guidance from the DFE (2015b; 2018b) does not make a distinction between how girls and boys should be supported via the pupil premium plus, despite the higher attainment of girls. This is because of the need to ensure that the individual child is progressing and it would be unhelpful, for example, to mandate certain interventions for boys, and different ones for girls. With this in mind, this research does not explicitly focus on gender as a theme, though when participants refer to either girls or boys it is acknowledged and noted. It may be that there is some important work to be done around LAC and gender, including how gender affects how children are perceived and supported, but it not central to this research.

Ethnicity

As of the end of March 2020 the ethnicities of LAC were as follows (DFE, 2020d):

- White – 59,320 (74%);
- White and Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean – 7,780 (10%);
- Asian or Asian British – 3480 (4%);
- Black or Black British – 5860 (7%);
- Other ethnic groups – 2930 (4%);
- Refused or information not available – 710 (1%).

Of course, professionals working with LAC from different ethnicities need to be aware that the children may feel isolated because of differences around language, cultural and religious beliefs and diet (Cocker and Allain, 2013). These differences have implications for foster carers and Kirkton (2016) argues that foster carers need specific support regarding fostering children of different ethnicities. There are, Kirkton (2016) continues, significant differences between local authorities in the number of foster carers of different ethnicities, which can make it difficult to match children with carers of the same ethnicity. This is not necessarily the aim for all children but would be positive in some cases, although Pithouse and Rees (2015) argue that it can be difficult to fit some LAC into broad categories.

There is limited research around the attainment of different ethnicities of LAC and the DFE do not publish these figures. Luke, Sinclair and O'Higgins (2015) found that LAC who are from ethnic minorities generally, though not those from a gypsy background, outperformed those who are white at GCSE if they are in care for longer than a year. However, there does not appear to be a causal link here as both Sebba *et al* (2015) and Melkman (2020) found that ethnicity was not a significant predictor of academic outcomes of LAC. A systematic review by Townsend, Berger and Reupert (2020) did not find a consensus around the outcomes for LAC from ethnic minorities, but did highlight that there are always other factors at work: socio-economic status, level of education of carers, and whether it is a single-person household. Townsend, Berger and Reupert also noted that the broader ethnic minority population may also face disadvantages and these would still apply to those children who are in care. It should be noted that this study included both foster care and kinship care so it may not be directly aligned with my research. So while it is important to acknowledge that not all LAC are the same, and that there may be a need for further research into the experiences of LAC of different

ethnicities, it was not a theme that was explored explicitly in this research. There are 'no generalities encompassing what success might look like' (Pithouse and Rees, 2015, p. 29) for LAC and the expectation is that schools support LAC via the pupil premium plus based on their individual needs (DFE, 2015b; 2018b) and not on the basis of their ethnicity.

The Inception of Pupil Premium

The pupil premium was introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in April 2011, with the aim of raising the attainment of disadvantaged children from reception (i.e., age 4-5) to year eleven (i.e., age 15-16) (DFE, 2019d). In 2010, 36% of LAC achieved the expected standard in English and Maths in their key stage 2 SATs (i.e., age 10-11) in comparison with 74% of all children (DFE, 2010). In the same year only 12% of looked after children achieved five A-C grades (including English and mathematics) in their GCSEs (i.e., year 11, age 15-16), against 53% of all children (DFE, 2010). As such LAC were a group who were deemed to be disadvantaged and underachieving academically. The pupil premium was originally a policy in the Liberal Democrat 2010 Manifesto, stating that:

> Too many children are still leaving school without the knowledge and skills to be successful. And your family background still has a huge effect: a typical child from a poor family will fall behind a richer classmate by the age of seven and never catch up. We will seek to ensure that all pupils leaving primary and secondary education have the skills they need.
>
> (Liberal Democrat Manifesto, 2010 p.33)

This initial proposal did not specifically name which children would be eligible for the pupil premium (though reference is made to the importance of wealth), nor was there information about how much money schools would receive per pupil, nor exactly what the funding should be spent on. Instead, the manifesto explained that £2.5bn would be set aside for the pupil premium, the name was included in this early stage, and that it would 'boost opportunities for all children' (2010, p.34) and be available for head teachers to use in the 'best interests of children' (2010, p.34). The manifesto continues with some suggestions for what the money could be used for including reducing class sizes, one-to-one tuition, financial incentives for good teachers and catch-up classes.

The implication here is that schools would be able to choose what the funding would be spent on, but with a clear focus on teaching. The Introduction chapter indicated that the issues for LAC are very much based around early trauma and related social and emotional difficulties and this will be discussed at length in chapter 3. In short, the initial focus from the pupil premium on teaching did not necessarily address the importance of children's early experiences.

Pupil premium was also included in the 2010 Conservative Manifesto, though to a lesser extent, with an acknowledgement of a 'growing gap between rich and poor' (Conservative Manifesto, 2010, p. 51) and a 'pupil premium - extra funding for children from disadvantaged backgrounds' (p. 53), though there was no further detail provided about who would benefit, how much schools would receive or what the funding could be used for. The Introduction section established that the amount of funding that schools receive for looked after children has increased from the initial £400 to £2345 per pupil, and that the number of groups that are eligible has also increased to include (albeit with different funding amounts)

- 'service' children;
- Children who were previously looked after and who are then adopted, on special guardianship orders or child arrangement orders;
- children aged 3-4 who meet any of the in care, previously in care or deprivation indicators.

There has been a clear, consistent message from DFE in relation to pupil premium, namely, that the funding should raise attainment and close the gap between eligible, disadvantaged children and their peers. Department for Education guidance for schools (2019d) is relatively succinct, focussing mainly on how much they will receive, which children are eligible and when schools will receive the money. Schools are directed towards the Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, 2020a), which will be discussed shortly, and to information regarding Pupil Premium Awards, for innovative spend and positive outcomes. The accountability message is also brief, stating that schools must be transparent with parents, carers and governors about what they spend the pupil

premium on, and identifying what schools need to publish on their websites. Local authority schools (DFE, 2020e) therefore need to show:

- their pupil premium allocation (though not broken down into the discrete groups);
- barriers to the progress of these children;
- how the funding has been spent in the previous year;
- the impact of this funding on eligible children and other children;
- how the school intends to spend the money in the coming year;
- how the school intends to measure the impact;
- when the strategy will be reviewed.

Guidance for academies and free schools is almost the same except there is no mention of impact of funding for non-eligible children. Also, unlike with local authority schools, the guidance is recommended rather than mandatory (DFE, 2018c).

Looked After Children and Pupil Premium Plus

Despite the high profile of the pupil premium (BBC, 2012) and significant spend that the government has committed (over £2.4bn in the financial year 2019/20) there was only a brief mention of it in DFE's 2010-15 looked after children and adoption policy paper (2015a). Instead this document looked in more detail at the importance of stable placements, the quality of foster care and standards in children's homes. The VSH role becoming statutory was included but without reference to the pupil premium. This policy document seemed to imply that placement and education are separate and need to be addressed differently. The extent to which this is true is debatable: children who are stable in placement are much more likely to succeed educationally (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003) and challenges in school can destabilise the care placement (Jackson and Hojer, 2013). An opportunity may have been missed here to acknowledge and explore this.

Revised statutory guidance regarding the education of looked after children was issued in 2014 (*Promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children*, DFE, 2014a) which took into account policy changes such as the statutory VSH role and the provision of pupil premium plus. The needs of LAC will be explored fully in the next chapter but there are key policy elements which will be outlined here. The message around pupil

premium plus being used to improve attainment and close the attainment gap is reiterated and it states that:

> VSHs, working with education settings, should implement pupil premium arrangements for looked after children in accordance with the latest conditions of grant published by the department and any supplementary departmental advice it issues.
>
> (DFE, 2014a, p. 9)

There was a lack of specific detail here and this indicated that guidance around the funding was subject to change and that VSHs and schools need to be able adapt accordingly, based on evolving policy. However, the *Promoting* document (DFE, 2014a) identified a number of key issues for looked after children. These included the importance of children's views being heard, multiagency working, school staff being appropriately trained, avoiding fixed term and permanent exclusions, identifying individual needs, careers advice and the implementation of support to help the child realise their aspirations and achieve expected levels of progress (DFE, 2014a). Many of these elements could, in varying degrees, be addressed by effective use of pupil premium plus, whether that is individually allocated or pooled with other funding. Of course, this research will explore this in detail; for example, training features in the data collected from VSHs, and many professionals talked about the importance of using pupil premium plus to target LAC's individual needs. However, pupil premium plus was infrequently included in the guidance (a short pupil premium section of nine lines and two other mentions) and more emphasis seemed to be placed on the Personal Education Plan (PEP, see Glossary chapter). The role of PEPs is important because their prominence emphasises the need for additional, personalised support to address the long standing educational underachievement of looked after children (DOH, DFEE, 2000). It is acknowledged that use of pupil premium plus could be included in the PEP (DFE, 2014a) but again it seems that opportunities are missed here to show how the funding could be used effectively. This is another reason why a thorough exploration of the pupil premium plus is so important.

The 2014 Promoting document (DFE, 2014a) was replaced in 2018 by *Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children* (DFE, 2018b). This updated statutory guidance actually is very similar to the previous 2014 edition. The main change is a requirement for VSHs and Designated Teachers (DTs, see Glossary) to have oversight of children who were previously in care and to provide advice, guidance and signposting regarding the education of these children. This includes adopted children and those on special guardianship orders. There is also a short 'Getting the most out of Pupil Premium Plus' table produced by Darren Martindale (a VSH). This identifies some recommended approaches around individual needs of LAC, using evidence-based approaches, raising aspirations and supporting transition (DFE, 2018b).

DFE (2015b) did provide further information for VSHs regarding pupil premium plus and how it should be managed. This guidance outlined an important policy change: the funding was not to go directly to schools but to go to the VSH who could then allocate it as he or she felt appropriate. This could involve passing on more or less than the full, per pupil amount, something which will discussed later in the Findings chapter of this research. This gave VSHs much more responsibility and added to the role so that it became more than just discussing, supporting and challenging schools regarding their use of funding, to also having to be accountable to senior colleagues for pupil premium plus decisions that VSHs had made. The guidance also, as with schools, identified the role of Ofsted in making judgements regarding the use of pupil premium; this time in inspections of services for looked after children (DFE, 2015b). Precedent was set in this guidance for virtual heads to be more creative with the funding, acknowledging the benefits of pooling funding. It gives examples such as paying for training for groups of teachers, and pooling pupil premium plus with other pupil premiums to fund larger interventions which might benefit more children (DFE, 2015b). How this has been interpreted by schools and translated to practice will be explored by this research. The guidance (DFE, 2015b) also explained that VSHs could use the funding that had not been distributed to schools to encourage looked after children to be more interested in their education, or to ensure that PEPs are useful and relevant. With the exception of a small number of examples, little detail was given here, though this does indicate the assumption that DFE makes is that at least some LAC are not engaged in their education,

and that PEPs are not always effective. It is unclear how these conclusions are reached because no evidence is presented.

Pupil Premium Plus and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

DFE also published guidance for social care professionals regarding the new SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) code of practice (DFE, 2014b). It should be acknowledged here that not all looked after children have special educational needs and / or disabilities, and that being looked after does not mean that a child should automatically be on a school's SEND register. There is a higher incidence though of SEND amongst LAC than their peers with 27.2% of LAC having an Education Health and Care Plan, against just 3.1% of non-looked after children (DFE, 2020a) and so social workers and other professionals do need to have a good understanding of the code of practice and how they can work with schools effectively (DFE, 2014b). Pupil premium plus should be a key part of supporting these children, given its emphasis on closing the attainment gap. However, while there is a clear focus in the guidance around multiagency working, involving the carers, parents and children in decision-making, liaison with the virtual head, etc. there is no mention of pupil premium plus, its use, nor evaluation of impact (DFE, 2014b). This omission would seem to be at odds with the importance of interagency collaboration (Mannay *et al*, 2017) and does not seem to acknowledge the negative impact that pre-care experiences and a lack of understanding of children's needs has on success in school (Hayden, 2005; Berridge, 2007). Social workers should be well-equipped to advise and support schools on these issues and should play a significant role in supporting educational achievement (Jackson and Hojer, 2013). Indeed, the role that social workers play in both planning for the use of pupil premium plus, and monitoring its impact, will be explored in this research.

The Role of Ofsted in Monitoring Pupil Premium Plus

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects a wide range of services and settings for young people including schools, early years providers, colleges, children's social care, secure training facilities, and services for looked after children, as well as those for child protection and safeguarding (Ofsted, 2019c, 2020). As such Ofsted has a significant role in reviewing, evaluating and assessing the roles of professionals, services and stakeholders involved with the allocation and

monitoring of pupil premium (Ofsted, 2014a, 2019b, 2020; DFE, 2018a). Ofsted also featured in the data collection in this research, for all participants, and therefore it is important here to explore the way in which Ofsted has monitored pupil premium plus previously. This has relevance for the fourth research question: *How is the impact of pupil premium plus tracked and monitored?* because, as will become evident in the Findings, monitoring happens beyond just the school.

When pupil premium was initially introduced to schools in April 2011, schools were subject to inspection according to the Framework for School Inspection (Ofsted, 2009). Of course, given the date of publication, this made no reference to the pupil premium. However, there was no mention at all within the inspection framework of looked after children. This does appear to be somewhat at odds with the Children Act of 1989 which identified that local authorities had a statutory duty to promote the welfare of looked after children, and the revisions in 2004 which extended this duty to the promotion of educational achievement. Furthermore, the Education of Young People in Public Care guidance (DOH, DFEE, 2000) marked the introduction of statutory Personal Education Plans for all looked after children but there is no mention of PEPs within the framework either. However, the priorities of inspectors are identified:

> …inspectors give particular priority to…evaluating the achievement and wider well-being of pupils as a whole and of different groups of pupils, and assessing the extent to which schools ensure that all pupils, including those most at risk, succeed… assessing how well schools promote equality of opportunity, and how effectively they tackle discrimination…checking schools' procedures for safeguarding – keeping children and young people from harm…assessing how effectively schools work in partnership with other providers in order to promote better outcomes for pupils.
>
> (Ofsted, 2009, p. 5)

Many of these priorities are relevant for looked after children (and indeed for the other pupil premium groups) though the lack of explicit reference made to LAC may have resulted in their specific needs not always being addressed. Indeed, these themes:

partnership working, pupil well-being, stigma and equality, will all be highlighted as areas of need in the next chapter of this research.

The introduction of pupil premium was followed by the Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit (previously known as the Sutton Trust Toolkit), which will be discussed presently (EEF, 2020a), a new Ofsted inspection framework in 2012 and a report into how schools are using the pupil premium funding to 'raise achievement for disadvantaged pupils' (Ofsted, 2012b, p.1). The new inspection framework (Ofsted, 2012a) maintained a focus on some of the same priorities as previous versions: achievement, behaviour and safety of pupils, leadership, teaching quality, etc. but with one specific reference to pupil premium, identifying the need to evaluate achievement of eligible pupils and their quality of learning in mainstream, and other lessons.

The focus on evaluation of evidence perhaps suggests that inspectors at this relatively early stage were interested in the way schools track and monitor attainment data for these children. It is also relevant that Ofsted are looking at children *eligible* for support. As such inspectors would be interested in outcomes for looked after children, even if they had not received any additional support or intervention. Such a situation, i.e., a school saying that they had not provided any additional support for a LAC, would be unlikely. Indeed, schools taking part in this research were able to outline at length the different supports and interventions they had in place.

Changes in Inspection Framework

The following Ofsted framework, the Common Inspection Framework: Education, Skills and Early Years (Ofsted, 2015) placed greater emphasis on the outcomes and support for disadvantaged children. For example, the framework identified a number of groups that inspectors would pay particular attention to. Within these are looked after children and care leavers, and disadvantaged learners (which the framework explains, includes any child eligible for support from pupil premium) (Ofsted, 2015). However, other groups included are, for example, children with special educational needs, children with English as an additional language, children in specialist or alternative provision. Because

of the array of needs that LAC often present, it is likely that some children within these groups would also be looked after.

An important change for looked after children in the new framework is the inclusion, via a slight change in definition, of small independent schools:

> This definition brings into the scope of an inspection a number of very small independent schools, many of which have dual registration as an independent children's home and provide exclusively for vulnerable looked after young people who may also be disabled or have a special educational need.
>
> (Ofsted, 2015)

This is important because, by definition, these are the looked after children with the highest level of need and so it is vital that the provisions which are supporting their needs are inspected to ensure that they are meeting all requirements educationally. Ofsted (2014a) had already identified a link between the quality of leadership and management and the positive impact of pupil premium, and this was emphasised in the Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2015). Inspectors would judge schools on the extent to which leaders have high expectations for all learners, evaluate provision and take account of children's views, plan and manage learning programmes so that all children get a good start, actively promote equality and diversity and promote safeguarding and welfare (Ofsted, 2015).

A new, streamlined Education Inspection Framework was published by Ofsted in 2019 and this has no mention of looked after children, nor pupil premium. Instead the focus is on high standards and expectations for all learners, with few specific groups being highlighted. This may promote the idea, as Edwards (2016) does, that being looked after is not a reason to expect less in terms of progress or outcomes. However, it is also at odds with a system which provides additional funding for vulnerable groups because they may need additional support to close the attainment gap. It is important to note that the EIF (Ofsted, 2019c) is accompanied by a much lengthier School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2019b) which outlines activities that are carried out during inspections. This explains that inspectors will gather evidence regarding the school's

use of pupil premium, the evidence used to inform decision-making, and the curriculum's impact on pupil premium eligible children. It also adds that inspectors will evaluate the experiences of LAC (Ofsted, 2019b). It should be noted that schools taking part in this research had experienced different levels of Ofsted questioning around LAC and pupil premium plus and this will be discussed later.

Inspection of Children's Services

Ofsted also has a role in inspecting local authorities' services for looked after children and safeguarding and child protection. The current framework for inspection of local authority's children's services (Ofsted, 2020) does not make mention of the pupil premium plus but does include a focus on the work of the virtual school and its headteacher. This includes looking at the virtual school's impact on outcomes for LAC by interviewing the VSH, reviewing the virtual school's annual report and analysing pupil data such as attendance and attainment (Ofsted, 2020). This is part of a wider evaluation on the local authority's support for the education of children in care which would be informed by discussions with head teachers, looked after children and their foster carers. Of course, children's services inspections focus on social work practice more broadly and so multi-agency working, safeguarding and protection services, children's health, training for foster carers and management oversight, all of which have relevance for LAC, feature strongly.

This framework does include some relevant changes in comparison with the previous edition (Ofsted, 2014b). Like the current version, the 2014 framework did not make reference to pupil premium but also the virtual school heading was absent from the document. By this time the role was statutory and would have been a senior manager with significant responsibility in all local authorities. Instead there was a broader and more detailed coverage of the role of the authority in supporting vulnerable children, delivering early intervention, multi-agency working, narrowing the attainment gap and being an effective corporate parent (Ofsted, 2014b). This included the importance of measurable improvements for vulnerable children, value for money, access to timely specialist support, minimising disruption to education. This is interesting because even though the 2014 framework did not mention pupil premium these key points could all

be achieved via pupil premium and there are far fewer of these specific examples in the current inspection framework.

The Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit

The Teaching and Learning Toolkit, initially published in 2011 and then referred to as the Sutton Trust Toolkit, is research (conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation, 2020a) which describes and rates 35 interventions for the average rate of academic progress that children make in months, the cost to the school, and the strength of the supporting evidence. Collaborative learning, peer tutoring, meta-cognition and self-regulation (i.e., learning how to learn), oral language interventions and pupil feedback are all examples of interventions that the toolkit highlights as having a significant impact at a low cost. Some activities such as aspiration interventions, setting or streaming by ability and repeating a year are shown to have no impact or a negative impact on pupil progress (EEF, 2020a). DFE (2018b, 2018d) have recommended that schools use this in deciding how to allocate the additional funding. However, the toolkit is recommended for pupil premium use generally and is not specific to looked after children. Indeed, some of the interventions are much more clearly targeted towards children eligible for free school meals (e.g., provision of school uniform) than they would be for LAC. In contrast, an intervention like counselling which might have significant value for LAC does not feature in the toolkit. It should also be noted that it does not (with one exception: homework) distinguish between primary and secondary age phases, or ages of pupils and some interventions match much more closely with older or younger children. For example, phonics interventions are far more likely to be used with younger children, while attainment grouping is much more common with older children. A potentially more significant issue in relation to LAC is that the toolkit's progress measure is academic only and, in some cases, other gains, such as social or behavioural may be a priority initially (Morris and Dobson, 2020). In short, it is too simplistic to assume that all children who are disadvantaged struggle academically because of the same reasons. Indeed, reasons for children's attainment are complex and will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. As such, adopting the same approach for all disadvantaged groups, both in terms of the intervention and how its impact is measured, is likely to be ineffective.

Initial Evaluation of Pupil Premium Spend

Ofsted (2012a) published research in September of 2012 based on analysis of data collected in England from 143 inspections and 119 telephone interviews in April and May of the same year. The focus principally was around what schools were spending pupil premium on. The most common use of the funding at that time was to pay for staff with three quarters of schools using pupil premium to maintain or enhance staffing. Around 40% of schools used the funding to employ teaching assistants or higher level teaching assistants, while about a third of schools employed teachers. A number of other roles were funded or part-funded by the pupil premium but to a far lesser extent (about 10% of schools), including behaviour support workers, counsellors, inclusion managers, attendance workers and speech and language specialists. Given that the educational challenges for LAC are often related to pre-care experiences, a lack of understanding of pupils' needs (Hayden, 2005; Berridge, 2007) and emotional difficulties stemming from earlier abuse and neglect (Healy and Fisher, 2011), it would appear that decisions to employ teachers and teaching assistants may not have been addressing needs requiring more specialist support. Furthermore, while reducing class size and support from teaching assistants do both lead to attainment gains for young people (three months and one month respectively) (EEF, 2020a) these are among the most expensive interventions and so may not represent value for money. Of course, these relatively modest gains would not be sufficient to close the existing attainment gap.

After staff costs, the next most common use of pupil premium was to fund 1:1 tuition (Ofsted, 2012a) and this is also featured in this research's findings. This does clearly link with the priority of closing the attainment gap between looked after and non-looked after children, though again it does not necessarily show engagement with the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, 2020a), which showed that while it does positively affect children's attainment (plus five months) it is among the most expensive of the interventions in the toolkit. This research will help to build on this initial evaluation to look in detail at what pupil premium is being used for, and the decision-making process that informs these choices.

At that relatively early stage in 2012, just a year after the initial allocation of funding, schools found it challenging to evaluate the potential impact of the funding on the attainment gap or more generally outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (Ofsted, 2012b). This was because schools found it difficult to separate support from pupil premium, from other interventions that they were using with the same groups. Only a few schools were able to identify measurable evidence in relation to the attainment gap. It was also identified that governing bodies had relatively little focus on the funding (Ofsted, 2012b).

What the report does not do, is separate the pupil premium groups or show how schools may have used funding for one group differently to another. This is emphasised by the identified uses of funding which included subsidising trips, out of school hours care and uniform and equipment (Ofsted, 2012b). While in theory these could have benefitted looked after children as well as children receiving free school meals or service children, these all imply support for parents on lower income. This should not be the case for looked after children as foster carers are employed by the local authority or private agencies, and should therefore not require this sort of financial support. This indicates, either from some schools, Ofsted, or both, a singular perspective on supporting children who attract pupil premium. This is emphasised later in the report (Ofsted, 2012b), stating that school leaders felt that pupil premium was having a greater impact in the highest free school meal quintiles by enabling them to maintain and enhance provision, as well as raise awareness of the needs of that group of children. The implication here is that the needs of looked after children are either being considered to be the same as those with free school meals, or not considered at all, which highlights the importance of this study which focuses on just LAC. One of the key indicators in which looked after children do less well than their peers is in fixed term exclusions (Berridge, 2012, DFE, 2020a). However, while schools generally identified changes that they had made in relation to supporting children's behaviour and engagement, most (about eight in ten) felt that pupil premium had not affected their approach to exclusions in any way (Ofsted, 2012b). In short, only about one in ten of school leaders felt that the pupil premium had significantly changed how they supported children from disadvantaged backgrounds and about one in six said that it had had no impact at all (Ofsted, 2012b). It is also worth

noting that there seemed to be few commonalities between the ways that schools were using pupil premium, and the interventions most recommended by the Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, 2020a), despite it being recommended by the DFE (2018b, 2018d). This may have been because of the relatively short time between the toolkit being published and the research being undertaken.

Pupil Premium and Department for Education Research

In 2013 DFE published research based on 39 case studies and 1240 20-minute phone surveys undertaken with English academies and local authority schools between June 2012 and February 2013. While this research does identify looked after children as being eligible for pupil premium within the key findings section, the majority of the document refers to disadvantaged children generally, with specific mentions of children in receipt of free school meals. It was identified that schools frequently looked to support all disadvantaged children, whether they attracted pupil premium or not. As a result schools would often encourage parents to register for FSM because of the benefit that this would bring (to the school and the child). This registration issue of course does not apply to looked after children. This research does show that schools understood that while the focus needed to be around children's attainment and closing the attainment gap, that there are different ways to achieve this:

> Some support focused on wider issues in children's and families' lives, particularly where schools perceived these to be a 'barrier to learning' and felt that dealing with them would lead to improved attainment.
>
> (DFE, 2013, p. 5)

In keeping with the findings of Ofsted (2012), this research also acknowledged that decision-making around the spend was based more on schools' own experiences about what was successful and evidence from other schools, rather than research evidence. There was evidence though of many schools (around 70%) working with other schools, local authorities and external providers to provide services that would not have been possible otherwise (for example, educational psychologists). However, the most common use of the funding was on additional staffing (around 75%) and while schools

felt that this was important in supporting disadvantaged children, it again does not link well with the Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, 2020a) and does raise the question as to whether schools are using pupil premium to pay for existing staff. In the research, albeit with a relatively small sample of all schools, many settings (around 60%) reported a reduction in overall budget and this needs to be acknowledged when reviewing schools' spending decisions, and this is also a theme that featured in interviews undertaken in this study. Indeed, over 80% of schools felt that the level of pupil premium funding was not sufficient to cater for the needs of their disadvantaged children. This is perhaps reflected in the subsequent increase in the amount of pupil premium per eligible pupil (from initially £400 to £2345 per pupil per year), and to the number of pupil premium groups. Nonetheless, the extent to which pupil premium plus is sufficient to make an impact is a theme that will be revisited in this research's Discussion chapter. The research does highlight that schools were monitoring impact of the interventions and support and that this extended beyond just attainment to other indicators such as attendance, behaviour and confidence (DFE, 2013).

While there is other research that identifies positive methods of support for LAC (these will be discussed in chapter 3), that of the Education Endowment Foundation is the only research explicitly recommended by DFE online and in guidance documents and as such the seemingly limited use of this research may indicate that either the messages were not communicated well enough to schools, or that school leaders did not sufficiently value these findings. Indeed, as will be seen in this research's Findings chapter, interviewees did not commonly make mention of the EEF's research.

The research concludes with recommendations and identifies 'a tension between the criteria that are used to allocate Pupil Premium funding and the criteria that have been used by schools to define and respond to educational disadvantage' (DFE, 2013, p. 9). This is correct in a sense because of the complexity of disadvantage. This research, however, may actually contribute to this difficulty by treating disadvantaged children as a single group in this report and making no reference to looked after children within the body of the research. Indeed, this is something that this thesis sets out to do, to specifically focus on LAC and how they are supported by pupil premium plus, without conflating their needs with other vulnerable groups.

Another recommendation is that external expectations (i.e., from Ofsted and DFE) need to be made clearer (DFE, 2013). This is important because schools may face competing priorities when it comes to providing support for vulnerable children which, whether successful or not, will not impact on the school's overall performance and position in league tables. Importantly the research concludes by identifying, as Ofsted did (2012a), the challenge of specifically ascertaining the impact of pupil premium when it is combined with other funding to support groups of children, and the importance of drawing on robust research-based evidence. DFE (2013) rightly acknowledges that wider research does not take into account the particular contexts and situations of schools and localities. This research will help to address this with a more specific focus in two local authorities and an exploration of what informs school leaders' choices around funding allocation.

Additional Evaluation

Further research was published by Ofsted (2014a) based on evidence collected during 151 inspections during 2013 and a text review of 1600 inspection reports published between September 2013 and March 2014. However, this research only refers to the use of pupil premium for children eligible for free school meals. None of the other pupil premium groups are included. Again, the concern here is that firstly pupil premium becomes inextricably linked to FSM children, and secondly, that the needs of FSM and LAC are considered one and the same. Because of this sole focus on FSM, the report's findings on uses of the funding, the extent to which the attainment gap is closing, and the progress schools made are not included here. However, what is relevant is the report's findings regarding school leadership because the way that pupil premium for FSM is tracked and monitored should be similar to that for LAC. Ofsted (2014a) explain that the most effective schools promptly and accurately identify needs and then 'track progress…meticulously and make sensible amendments…as a result of monitoring and evaluation' (p.10). The research also shows that the best leaders ensure that eligible pupils are taught by the best teachers and supported by skilled additional adults. This is a point that is reiterated by the EEF (2019) who argue that the best way to help vulnerable children close the attainment gap is to put them in a class with a good teacher who understands their needs, and this is a view echoed by some participants in this

research. Furthermore, schools that are most successful have a strong governing body who have the highest aspirations for all learners and hold leaders to account for pupil premium related decision-making and interventions (EEF, 2019). These key points around accuracy in identification of need, rigorous tracking and thorough evaluation are central to this research project and the extent to which they are present and effective will be explored thoroughly.

DFE continued to work with Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation on the use of pupil premium, promoting the use of the toolkit (EEF, 2020a) and their ongoing research and recommendations (Sutton Trust and EEF, 2015; Sutton Trust, 2016, 2019). Indeed, there does seem to be evidence that schools began to draw further on these recommendations when making decisions about pupil premium with subsequent research (Sutton Trust and EEF, 2015) showing that 31% of schools were funding early intervention programmes – then the most common use of pupil premium and an increase from 16% in 2012. However, the second most common response to a question asking about the main priority for extra spending was 'don't know', the third was one-to-one tuition and the fourth was teaching assistants (Sutton Trust and EEF, 2015). As has already been noted, one-to-one tuition is deemed to be effective but expensive, while teaching assistants do not necessarily have a significant impact on attainment (EEF, 2020a). This suggested a growing engagement with the toolkit, but not extensively and the same research showed that 32% of primary school leaders were using the toolkit to inform decision making around the spend for disadvantaged children.

The most recent pupil premium polling (Sutton Trust, 2019) shows that 22% of primary schools are having to use the pupil premium to plug gaps in school budgets. Fifty-five percent of school leaders felt that the pupil premium was helping to close the attainment gap and the participants that did not agree commonly suggested that the funding amount was not sufficient to make a difference. The use of research evidence and the EEF Toolkit to support decision-making continued to improve with 60% of primary senior leaders using the toolkit (Sutton Trust, 2019). However, still the most common answer to this question was using previous experiences with 76% of senior leaders stating that this was how approaches were selected. Only 12% of respondents

stated that they consulted with the local authority regarding this, and this does raise questions as to what extent the virtual schools are influencing this decision-making.

Research by Sutton Trust and EEF does lead to recommendations for schools and for government. These include (Sutton Trust and EEF, 2015, Sutton Trust, 2016):

- continued support for disadvantaged children;
- funding based around disadvantage rather than prior attainment;
- continued use of evidence to inform decision-making;
- training for staff on how to use research data effectively;
- further support for schools in identifying children who are eligible (via the FSM indicator);
- high accountability for schools based on their use of the funding.

While these are relevant and valid there is perhaps a lack of clarity in some areas. What sort of evidence should schools be using? What does high accountability mean in practice? What would Ofsted expect to see during an inspection? How might this accountability benefit children? These themes will be revisited in the Findings and Discussion chapters. There is a particular need to explore how these recommendations are understood and interpreted by schools, and to see how accountability influences practice; this is central to the research questions around decision-making and monitoring.

Clearly much of the research that has been conducted by the Sutton Trust and subsequently been promoted by DFE has focussed on usage, rather than impact. This is partly because vulnerable young people are often involved in different projects and interventions and there are many variables which can be hard to isolate. This is a point that will be revisited as it was also made by participants in this study. Furthermore, within the government research document above (DFE, 2013) the pupil premium groups often seem to be dealt with as a single cohort of children, or work focusses exclusively on children receiving free school meals. So while pupil premium should be highlighting

the needs of looked after children, it could be argued that again the challenges they face and the specific support that they need could be overlooked, and the same case could be made for children on special guardianship orders, children on child arrangement orders, children adopted from local authority care and service children. This is emphasised by the speech of Nicky Morgan MP (former secretary of state for education) at the 2015 Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Foundation Summit (Morgan, 2015) which discussed disadvantaged children generally, noting that children may have their options limited by 'other people's expectations…circumstances beyond their control…where they live or because of the family that raises them (Morgan, 2015 p.2). While some of these conditions could relate to looked after children, this does not go far enough to identify specifically the reasons for LAC underachievement, and further on reference is made to the poorest pupils, schools with a high level of deprivation and a lack of educational and financial support from families, and these circumstances should not usually apply to looked after children. Government policy and the research that it recommends must be enabling for all the children that it is intended to support, not targeted towards the majority with different, though still complex needs.

Conclusions

Following the inception of pupil premium both the Department for Education and Ofsted conducted evaluations and published the results. This was with the intention of supporting schools in their work with vulnerable children and justifying the use of public money. It is unclear why there have not been any further evaluations in recent years. Of course, the DFE continues to recommend the Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, 2020a) which continues to be updated, but this supports schools in what they use the pupil premium for, rather than evaluating its impact. The EEF was set up by the Sutton Trust but it is interesting to note that while the DFE does signpost schools to the toolkit, it does not appear to actively promote some of the other research that the Sutton Trust conducts. It is unclear whether that is because the most recent polling (Sutton Trust, 2019), shared in this chapter, highlights the budgetary constraints that schools are facing, and the effect that this has on pupil premium use. It is hoped that this research will help to address this gap in evaluation,

particularly around LAC. It is also clear that the issues of accountability, school budgets, Ofsted oversight and demonstrating impact will feature strongly in this research.

3 – Literature Review: Looked After Children in Primary Education and Beyond

3a – The Needs, Circumstances and Challenges of Looked After Children

Introduction

This chapter begins with a more detailed analysis of the needs of looked after children and the challenges that they may face. While principally this thesis focuses on educational outcomes, the issues for LAC are not confined to what happens in schools and nurseries, as they may face challenges in all aspects of their lives. This chapter will clarify these and show how they have implications for their performance in primary school and their subsequent educational outcomes. This is important because patterns of association (Gewirtz, 2006) exist linking LAC with certain expectations and at times excluding them from some discourses of success. Given that the main research question for this thesis is:

How does the pupil premium plus improve the educational outcomes of LAC in primary schools?

it is essential that there is understanding of the current debates around the educational outcomes of LAC and why they are, in general, poor. Furthermore, many of the challenges outlined in the coming sections will feature again in the Findings, with participants discussing how they address these needs via the pupil premium plus. This chapter will also make links to the roles of professionals (see Glossary) and provide context around the attainment gap between LAC and non-LAC. The chapter begins, however, with a discussion around the low educational achievement of LAC.

Achievement

As explained in the previous chapters, LAC achieve significantly less well than their non-looked after peers. At Key Stage 2 (school years 3-6, age 7-11) in 2019, only 37% of LAC achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, while 65% of non-LAC met this benchmark (DFE, 2020a). For this indicator this equates to an attainment gap of 28% (i.e., 65%-37%). This gap remains through secondary school: at Key Stage 4 (school years 10-11, age 14-16) in 2019, 7.2% of LAC achieved grade 5-9 in GCSE English and Mathematics, against 40.1% of non-LAC (DFE, 2020a). This attainment gap is 32.9%.

Chapter 2 outlined these figures in more detail, as well as noting significant discrepancies in the data around fixed term exclusions, incidence and severity of special educational needs and disabilities, and likelihood of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). This underachievement or low achievement (Berridge, 2007) has been widely acknowledged over a number of years with much research similarly identifying poor outcomes for LAC (Jackson, 1988; SEU, 2003; Harker *et al*, 2004; DFE, 2010; APPG, 2012; Connelly and Furnival, 2012; Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013; Gypen *et al*, 2017).

Before exploring this issue of poor outcomes in detail it should be acknowledged that educational achievement is not the only indicator of success in life (Berridge, 2012a; APPG, 2012) but gaining qualifications and skills provides an advantage in a competitive jobs market and can foster personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement (Berridge, 2012a). Furthermore, it would be unfair and inaccurate to state that all LAC achieve poorly. Many young people in care achieve well academically and in other aspects of school life. These children though are the exception (APPG, 2012). It is also important to clarify that even children who do not meet national expectations and therefore seem to be underachieving, do still make academic progress. In many cases LAC make progress at the same rate as non-LAC (Heath, Colton and Aldgate, 1994, cited in Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013) but because of a lower starting point they do not manage to close the attainment gap. This can leave these young people feeling as if the work that they have done has been unrewarded (Forrester, 2008) especially when they may have made gains in other areas such as readiness to learn and social skills (Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020). With these factors in mind, Sebba *et al* (2015) argue that actually progress is a more appropriate measure of success for LAC, than academic attainment.

So while, overall, there is no doubt that LAC achieve less well than their non-looked after peers the extent of the issue is debated, with some suggesting that the problem may not be as significant as is often reported (Harker *et al*, 2004; Forrester, 2008) and others stating that greater understanding of the various contextual issues that exist for this group is needed (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013; Berridge, 2017). There is also no consensus around the core reason for the underachievement. Connelly and Chakrabarti (2008, p.348) concluded that being in care could have a 'devastating impact' on

children's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, while Tideman *et al* (2013), Jackson (1998, 2007) and Goddard (2000 in Cocker and Allain, 2013) felt that the care system did not provide the right environment for educational success, and questioned the extent to which education was seen as a priority by the corporate parent. However, there is another view that not enough focus is placed on children's pre-care experiences and long term effects that these have on children's well-being, vulnerability and likelihood of educational success (Stein, 2006; Berridge, 2007). In agreement, Mannay *et al* (2017) argue that the *failing* label is too readily assigned to children who are in care. The complexity of this issue is such that both perspectives have merit (Cocker and Allain, 2013) and as this chapter continues both issues, pre-care experiences, and the impact of the care system itself, will be explored. This debate has relevance for this thesis because it highlights the difficulty that exists in compensating for these disadvantages, and raises the question as to whether the pupil premium plus will be able to do so effectively. Indeed, this is a question that will be explored further in the Discussion chapter.

Stability

Stability of placement (SEU, 2003; Berridge, 2007; Maxwell *et al*, 2006 cited in McClung and Gayle, 2010; Cocker and Allain, 2013; Sebba *et al*, 2015; Gypen *et al*, 2017) and stability of educational setting (McClung and Gayle, 2010; APPG, 2012; Sebba *et al*, 2015; Townsend, Berger and Reupert, 2020) are consistently highlighted as contributing factors to the underachievement of LAC, and poorer life chances in general (Jackson and Hojer, 2013). A stable care placement is essential in enabling children to bond with foster carers (SEU, 2003) and feel safe and secure, and to form the sort of consistent relationships that help to develop resilience (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008). This should also enable continuity of school (SEU, 2003; Cocker and Allain, 2013) which can help to mitigate educational disadvantage (McClung and Gayle, 2010) and ensure that when a change of school is needed it can be well-supported and happen at an appropriate time (Brewin and Statham, 2011).

This continues to be an issue though with instability frequently resulting in LAC's education being overshadowed by 'interruptions, diversions and false starts' (APPG, 2012, p. 15) and while most LAC have only one care placement while looked after (SEU,

2003), 32% of LAC had more than one care placement during the 12 months to 31/3/15 and 10% had more than two (Become, 2020b) (The Department for Education no longer publish this data). Statistically LAC who have experienced the most placement moves perform less well academically and only 6% of children who had moved ten or more times achieved any GCSE passes at all (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). The young people themselves understand and value the importance of placement consistency, with LAC ranking stability as their number one priority (with education second) (APPG, 2012). The young people's concerns do have foundation with too few children being involved in decision-making around their placements (APPG, 2012). Change here would see children being empowered to play a more active role in these choices (HCESC, 2016) and help to guard against children receiving little or no notice when changing placements which was the case for nearly 25% of children in 2011 who were not told about a placement change beforehand (APPG, 2012). A potential result of placement changes implemented without notice and consultation is children feeling as if they have been 'displaced' (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007, p. 68). Taking children away from networks, environments and relationships that they are familiar with (whether at home or in previous care placements) can leave children feeling confused and struggling to cope:

> '[Displacement]…may compel the young people to work hard to recreate the web that they know that can fit into – even if it was a web defined by a culture of abuse.'
>
> (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007, p. 68)

This does not mean that these children will be, again, victims of abuse, but indicates that when faced with the unknown they are more likely to seek to instigate what they know: chaos, trauma and instability. In agreement, Wellbourne and Leeson (2013) note that children who are in care as a result of abuse may have less capacity to attain stability in their subsequent placements. The impact of pre-care experiences will be explored more fully later in this chapter but the links between issues are clear (Berridge, 2012a).

There may be a perception that a change of care placement inevitably leads to a change of educational placement (Cocker and Allain, 2013). This is not always that case though

and depending on the nature of the placement move, a school place can be maintained. This should generally be the aim, but a poorly planned change of care placement can still impact on educational outcomes, even if the school does not change (APPG, 2012) with potential impacts on children's consistency, attachments and routine. If the young person is able to stay at the same school, and effective planning and communication is in place, school can provide the structure that is needed at a challenging time, and help to promote educational successes, whether they are academic or non-academic, such as in sport or music (APPG, 2012). Children who are, or who have previously been looked after, also receive priority in school admissions (DFE, 2020f) which may not assist with maintaining a school place, but is important for selecting an appropriate school at transition times. This is important because sometimes a school move will be necessary outside of the normal transitions and when this is the case, careful planning can ensure that the number of days missed can be minimised. Rivers (2018) argues that any school day missed will affect attainment and school moves that result in multiple days away from school are likely to be particularly impactful.

While not necessarily associated with being in a stable placement, children who are brought into care earlier (before age 12), and are in care for longer, seem to academically outperform children who come into care as teenagers (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Sebba *et al*, 2015). The inference here, albeit with many variables, is that children who are settled in foster care for a longer period of time, are less affected by some of the negative aspects of instability and frequent placement changes. The same study by McClung and Gayle (2010) also noted that the time spent in care (i.e., the assumption that more time in care is better for the young person) was more significant to children's achievement than the number of placements that they had experienced. It should be noted though that this part of McClung and Gayle's research was based on a small sample and so the reliability of the findings are debatable. Sebba *et al*'s (2015) research, drawing on a much larger sample, also notes that children who enter care at a younger age are only more likely to do well educationally if their looked after period is not interspersed with numerous reunifications with birth families, and changes of foster or school placement. What is clear is that instability of school place is related to the high rate of exclusions for LAC and a lack of understanding of the needs of these children

(McClung and Gayle, 2010; Connelly and Furnival, 2012). Similarly, difficulties in school can also lead to the care placement becoming unstable (Jackson and Hojer, 2013). It is not always easy to determine which instability (i.e., care or education placement) comes first and for different children, this will not be the same. What is clear is that instability in one can affect the other. These issues will be addressed next and the relevance for stability at home and school will be evident, as will the challenge in isolating and dealing with these challenges individually.

Supporting Looked After Children in School

The lower attainment of LAC indicates that more help is needed with their education and the provision of the pupil premium plus is intended to address this and help to close the attainment gap with non-looked after children. The view is sometimes held that schools and teachers do not do enough to provide targeted support for LAC, the quality of teaching is not always good enough and best practice policy and guidance is not always followed (McClung and Gayle, 2010; APPG, 2012). In places this may be accurate, but it is important to acknowledge in the first instance that LAC have, by definition, experienced challenging pre-care experiences (Berridge, 2007, 2012a) which will have implications for their ability to engage with education and learn effectively (this will be discussed fully later in this chapter). Furthermore, as previously stated, LAC are much more likely to have special educational needs and disabilities than non-looked after children (DFE, 2020a). The extent to which schools can address some of the impacts of pre-care experiences is contested. Berridge (2012a), for example, argues that schools have less of an impact on the outcomes of LAC than the families that they were born into, while O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke (2015) could find little to support the position that being in care was detrimental to educational outcomes. Schools and teachers are a vital part of the LAC network and this was indeed evident in many of the interviews undertaken in this research, so it is important to identify where there may be issues in practice as these are likely to diminish the impact of pupil premium plus.

The Stigma of Being Looked After

One area which is regularly identified as being of concern is expectations and stigma. LAC want to be treated the same as other pupils but frequently feel as if the stigma of being looked after influences the perceptions of staff (McClung and Gayle, 2010;

Edwards, 2016). This stigma often translates to staff expecting less from LAC and having lower expectations of their achievements (Harker *et al*, 2004; APPG, 2012; Edwards, 2016). For example, as previously noted, LAC are more likely to have SEND than non-LAC but sometimes teachers incorrectly assume that all LAC have a learning disability (Berridge, 2007), labelling them as lower achievers based on their care status rather than academic ability (Tideman *et al*, 2013). Indeed, during my time at the virtual school, I would occasionally find that LAC were placed on a school's SEND register more on the basis of their LAC status than their educational need. In fact, Mannay *et al* (2017) suggest that many LAC are educationally aspirational but are sometimes 'excluded from discourses of success' (p. 696) by schools who wish to reduce academic pressure on children who they perceive to have chaotic lives. This lack of understanding of children's needs (McClung and Gayle, 2010) leads to children feeling frustrated at support not being specific enough and that their uniqueness is not recognised (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007). It would be unfair to suggest that all schools do not support children well enough and, as the Findings chapter will discuss, DTs in this research often knew their children well and thought carefully about how they should support them. Indeed, many teachers provide meaningful, appropriate emotional support for LAC and other vulnerable children (Harker *et al*, 2004; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). The young people themselves highlight this as important with Sebba *et al* (2015) finding that many LAC wanted to feel that teachers genuinely cared about them, and would not let them down. It may be that the good work that is taking place in schools is perhaps inconsistent and not shared well enough (APPG, 2012). This was certainly something that I experienced during my virtual school work, where, for example, schools working together or sharing approaches was infrequent. Schools may need to do more to foster a positive sense of worth in LAC (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013) but also need to be supported further by social care colleagues with information that could aid school staff to be more understanding of the challenges that LAC face (Edwards, 2016).

Children who are looked after sometimes feel that they are different to their peers, and there is negative stigma that is attached to being LAC. With this comes an increased likelihood of being bullied (Harker *et al*, 2004; McClung and Gayle, 2010; Brewin and Statham, 2011; Tideman *et al*, 2013). LAC are often perceived to be easy targets for

other students because they appear to be vulnerable, alone and unlikely to seek help (Poyser, 2013). This can become a source of trauma and perceived failure for children who may have already have a history of these feelings (Reupert, 2019). LAC's trust in adults, which may not be secure anyway, can be adversely affected by this situation if they do share concerns and the problem is not properly addressed (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). Moreover, children who have experienced abuse or negative relationships at home may not actually see bullying for what it really is, further exacerbating the issue and making that much harder to remedy (Poyser, 2013). Ultimately, this can cause further difficulties in both physical and mental health for a group who are already vulnerable in these areas (McClung and Gayle, 2010).

Even well-informed teachers may have difficulties supporting the most vulnerable children and so the lack of training which is available, particularly around children's mental health is an issue (Parker and Gorman, 2013; Poyser, 2013). Counselling staff in schools are becoming more common but it is unlikely that these colleagues would have the expertise to deal with the more acute mental health needs that some LAC exhibit, but they can signpost for specialist care (HCESC, 2016). The implications for teachers of working with highly vulnerable children should also be identified as it is common for school staff to have negative feelings (e.g., sadness, anger, incapability) because of challenging situations that the children are in (Edwards, 2016). This can lead to teachers not wanting to form attachments with the children, which is counterproductive because secure attachments are often what LAC need at times of stress (Brewin and Statham, 2011; NICE, 2015).

Support During Transition

Attachment is particularly relevant for LAC at times of transition. It has already been discussed that LAC may be disadvantaged by frequent changes of school, (SEU, 2003; McClung and Gayle, 2010; APPG, 2012) but any transition, even those at the normal times (such as starting secondary school) is important and needs to be managed well (Berridge, 2007). For LAC, leaving people and places behind has a particular resonance and can be associated with negative experiences and memories (Brewin and Statham, 2011). Frequently adults do not do enough to acknowledge the challenges that this creates for LAC, and similarly opportunities for a fresh, more positive start (perhaps

without stigma or negative perceptions) are not always capitalised upon (Brewin and Statham, 2011). Therefore, the process needs to be carefully managed with a set schedule for events to support stability (Strolin-Goltzman *et al*, 2016). Transition is more likely to be difficult for children who display challenging behaviour (Dent and Brown, 2006 in Brewin and Statham, 2011), are susceptible to bullying (Daly and Gilligan, 2005) or face psycho-social adversity (Reyes *et al* 2000) and this could apply to many LAC. So while transitioning to secondary school can import abilities that help children deal with other challenges (Gilligan, 2007) the normal concerns that children have around being fearful of getting lost, worrying about strict teachers and making new friends are more prevalent for LAC (Brewin and Statham, 2011). Adults at the receiving school need to understand that this may be a difficult time for LAC, possibly because of previously negative transitions, and avoid making judgements about why they may be behaving in a certain way because this is unhelpful (Poyser, 2013). Similarly, it is important for schools to identify and exploit opportunities for support (through pupil premium plus perhaps) and not assume that LAC will find this process easier because they are used to change and are in receipt of extra support (Brewin and Statham, 2011).

Time Spent Out of School

The most recent guidance from DFE (2018b) around the education of LAC is clear that appropriate education should be a full-time provision, ideally in a school rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. This emphasis is related to the need to address the ongoing issue that LAC spend too long out of school, or receiving a significantly reduced allocation of hours (SEU, 2003). This is usually because they do not have a school place, have been excluded, are not in mainstream school, are receiving only a few hours of tuition or are not attending (SEU, 2003; Cocker and Allain, 2013). As discussed earlier, LAC may be affected by instability at home and at school, and by insufficient support in school and these issues link clearly with children potentially missing long periods of education.

Exclusion

LAC view their education as being extremely important, second only to placement stability (APPG, 2012), and yet the rates of fixed term exclusion are five times higher for LAC than for their non-looked after peers (DFE, 2020a). A key contributing factor to

these statistics is teachers' lack of understanding of the needs of LAC (McClung and Gayle, 2010), and schools and care placements not collaborating well enough (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008) which can lead to children not being supported to improve their behaviour. The virtual head should be looking to avert exclusions wherever possible (DFE, 2018b) and will sometimes need to challenge schools on this issue. This was something that I did have to do on occasion during my time at the virtual school. Sometimes discussions were able to take place and alternative solutions found but in my experience, prevention and averting exclusions was more successful than attempting to overturn them. The need for this support from the local authority is clear as previously children were not supported to question decisions around exclusion (McClung and Gayle, 2010) and local authorities did not do enough to pre-empt and avert exclusions, nor support the children well enough after they had been excluded (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). It should be noted that the advent of virtual heads and subsequent advocacy for LAC may be having an impact on exclusion given that exclusion rates for LAC fell when the role started to become more common: 12.6% of LAC received a fixed term exclusion in 2009/10, against 9.78% in 2012/13 and 0.27% of LAC received a permanent exclusion in 2009/10, against 0.11% in 2012/13. It is also the case that Ofsted view LAC permanent exclusions negatively and this, alongside the work of the virtual schools, seems to have had an impact as the permanent exclusion percentage has remained low (0.1% of LAC received a permanent exclusion in 2017 (DFE, 2020a). This figure is the same as for all children which is positive as previously LAC were twice as likely to be permanently excluded as non-LAC (DFE, 2015c). Unfortunately this impact has not been replicated with fixed term exclusions as the rate for 2017 was 11.8%, which is a slow, steady increase from 2013. However, as will be seen in the Findings chapter, some primary school DTs in this research spoke passionately about how they worked hard to avoid exclusions for their LAC. On occasion an exclusion from school is linked to a young person becoming looked after and in these cases it can actually lead to some positive outcomes (Harker *et al*, 2003). This is because it can trigger additional support or see the child move to a more appropriate educational placement.

The close scrutiny of the virtual head and other professionals is therefore crucial in ensuring that children's needs are central to decision-making around appropriate

education. While schools may sometimes struggle to manage the behaviour of LAC, their priority should be around working with the VSH and the local authority to support these children's needs (DFE, 2018b). Exclusion should be a last resort (Barron *et al*, 2000 in McClung and Gayle, 2010; Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008; Timpson, 2019) and not influenced by other factors not related to the young person. For example, schools may be more inclined to exclude a looked after child if another setting, such as a residential placement, may be available (Connelly and Furnival, 2012). While in this sort of situation, another school could be better placed to support the child, the emphasis would be on all professionals involved to work together to manage such a move in an appropriate, positive way (DFE, 2018b). Fixed term and permanent exclusions will frequently result in children attending pupil referral units (PRUs). There are a number of issues associated with this. Often PRUs will have a shorter school day than mainstream schools, which could mean that children are not receiving full time education (SEU, 2003). PRUs may also employ a narrower curriculum and this is also not ideal for LAC (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008) who may have already missed out on opportunities in school because of other periods of time out of school. PRUs are sometimes viewed as 'dumping grounds for pupils unwanted elsewhere' (Howell, 2011 in Poyser, 2013, p. 129). This would be extremely concerning given that these children have, by definition, already experienced loss, neglect, trauma, etc. Poyser (2013) also identifies other crucial issues. Firstly there is a worry that staff in PRUs are not equipped to support and address the significant mental health needs of LAC (this will be discussed later in this chapter). In addition, PRUs too rarely achieve their formal aim of supporting children to be able to return to mainstream and therefore LAC who are excluded and move to a PRU are likely to remain there rather than getting a second chance in mainstream (Poyser, 2013). Of course, all of these issues assume that alternative education is available and Rivers (2018) points out that this is not always the case.

Placement Changes

It is not just exclusion that leads to LAC spending time away from school. It is clear that LAC experience too many care placement changes (SEU, 2003; Berridge, 2007; Maxwell *et al*, 2006, cited in McClung and Gayle, 2010; Cocker and Allain, 2013; Gypen *et al*, 2017) and that this will sometimes lead to changes in educational setting. Emphasis is placed

on social workers and the VSH to work together to ensure that education is discussed as part of any changes in a young person's care plan (DFE, 2018b) to try and address the issue of a young person moving to a new foster carer and then needing to find a school. This is of course recommended and would represent best practice but because of the nature of LAC there are times when children move urgently in an emergency (Harker *et al*, 2004). In these situations the local authority must have secured a new school for the young person within 20 school days (DFE, 2018b). While attaching a statutory timescale to this is positive, it would still represent a gap in schooling of up to four weeks. Further measures that the local authority can employ are LAC being 'excepted' pupils, meaning that schools can go over the planned admission number to accommodate them, LAC having the highest admission priority (DFE, 2018b, 2020f), and the local authority having the power to direct local authority schools (though not academies) to admit LAC (DFE, 2014c).

Pre-care Experiences

While the care system can prove to be a challenging environment for young people to grow up in (Tideman et al, 2013; Mannay *et al*, 2017), and acknowledging that there is certainly more that the corporate parent can do to support the education of LAC (Jackson, 2007; Mannay *et al*, 2017), it is too simplistic to blame the underachievement of these children on social care (Berridge, 2007; O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke, 2015). The first acknowledgement that must be made is that for the majority of children, the act of being taken into care is deeply traumatic (Poyser, 2013). Given that it is likely that the young person will have experienced other loss, abuse, neglect, etc. while at home, then the impact of these collective events is likely to be significant (Berridge, 2007). The care placement that the young person moves to should provide greater stability, support and encouragement (Harker *et al*, 2004) to, in effect, feel familial rather than contractual (Brown *et al*, 2019). This may enable LAC to overcome some of these initial disadvantages and Berridge's (2017) research indicates that the majority of LAC feel that coming into care resulted in a significant improvement in their lives. Indeed, children who come into care at younger age, for example during primary school, are more likely to be successful (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013) and those who come into care as babies and remain in care until adulthood tend to achieve as well as children living at home

from the same socio-economic group (Berridge, 2007). Similarly, children who come into care when they are older, for example during secondary school, and have experienced abuse and neglect are more likely to exhibit physical and mental health issues and learning disabilities (Cocker and Allain, 2013).

LAC feel that they are viewed and treated differently by others (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Edwards, 2016) and the basis for this is set very early on for children living in chaotic households as children's identities are formed by their early relationships, values and lifestyles (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007). This has implications for who the child thinks they are and the behaviours that are normal and this can lead to misinterpretation from adults who do not understand their background (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007; Edwards, 2016). Furthermore, the majority of LAC (though not necessarily all) come from chaotic households (Connelly and Furnival, 2012) and the APPG (2012) suggest that some of these families have little aspiration for achievement and these attitudes and patterns of behaviour can become ingrained early on (Berridge, 2012a). Couple this with economic disadvantage and other parental factors it is clear that these children are highly vulnerable before coming into care (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). Berridge (2007, 2012a) explores this fully, noting that LAC usually come from families exhibiting a number of these key risk factors, including poverty, family breakdown, socio-economic group, the level of parental education and engagement, all of which can lead to low achievement in all children, not just LAC. In actual fact, children who come into care from families who were unable to provide resources such as computers, or afford trips and clubs, should actually benefit from becoming LAC, as these poverty-related issues should no longer be an issue. It should be noted that often, with good intention, the focus of social care to attempt to keep families together can lead to children remaining in potentially negative, chaotic households for longer (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007). It can also be difficult for children to adjust to a care placement even though it may represent a more 'regular' household. In many cases LAC who were previously involved in caring for siblings or parents and moving to a foster placement where the expectation is that the child will then be dependent, can also create anxiety and instability (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007).

As discussed earlier LAC are extremely likely to have experienced trauma and loss (Berridge, 2012a) and in many cases this has meant abuse and / or neglect. In short, children who have been maltreated are less likely to achieve academically (Mills, 2004; Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). These young people are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression and low-self-esteem (Berridge, 2007) and these issues may not be improved by placement stability (Heath, Colton and Aldgate, 1994, cited in Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). These difficulties often manifest themselves as aggressive, uncooperative behaviour (Mills, 2004), hyperactivity and inattention (O'Connor and Russell, 2004) or as complete withdrawal (Mills, 2004), all of which would be likely to impact on achievement in school. Moreover, emotional abuse and neglect is likely to negatively impact children's cognitive development, problem-solving and the ability to cope in stressful situations (Newman, 2004, cited in Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). There may also be implications for children's language development (Scannapieco, 2008, cited in Wellbourne and Lesson, 2013; Cross, 2018) and the constant hyperarousal and fear may affect brain development (Glaser, 2003). LAC may also suffer from post-traumatic stress which can have extensive effects on children's ability to learn (Cairns, 2013) with significant implications for children's memory, coordination and ability to perceive and construct meaning. Children may also become physically and emotionally numb, hypervigilant and lose the ability to relate to others (Cairns, 2013).

Given the extensive range of challenges that children face before they become LAC it is worth questioning whether placing the majority of the blame at the care system is valuable, or whether this is an obstacle to addressing the significant disadvantages that they face (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). For example, the disproportionately high rate of SEND among LAC is not due to the care system (Berridge, 2012a). When planning for and allocating pupil premium plus schools need to think about the needs of the individual and the best ways to provide support. This is likely to be most effective if it is child-centred and not influenced by perceived issues with the care system. Indeed, personalised intervention and a pupil-focused approach to support was evident in many of the interviews undertaken in this research and these will be explored more fully in the Findings chapter.

Looked After Children's Health and Well-being

The pre-care experiences of LAC have significant implications for children's health and well-being (Berridge, 2007; Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007; CFCA, 2014). Some of the outcomes of trauma and neglect have already been explored but the results of pre-care experiences are extensive. Some children, for example, have a developmental delay because of the neglect that they suffered and others becoming disaffected and depressed because of chaotic home life, which is then followed by the constant changes in care and education placement (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007) that can make diagnoses more difficult (SEU, 2003). Others may have speech, language and communication issues because socio-economic disadvantage, attachment difficulties and abuse all make LAC more vulnerable (Cross, 2018).

Issues with Health Support

A central issue here is inconsistency in assessments of children's health (particularly mental health) when they become looked after (HCESC, 2016). Staff completing these assessments are too often not fully qualified mental health professionals, or do not have a solid enough understanding of the needs of LAC (HCESC, 2016). Following initial assessments there is again inconsistency in the ongoing support for not just mental health but also physical and emotional health (McClung and Gayle, 2010) with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) unable to meet the scale of need that exists (Poyser, 2013; Barrett, 2018). The SEU reported that waiting times were as long as 12-18 months in 2003 and this remains an issue with a Freedom of Information request made by Health Service Journal (Moore and Gammie, 2018) showing that hundreds of children still wait over a year for specialist mental health treatment. The issue of support is not just to do with scale though as CAMHS thresholds for support are high and require children to be in stable placements (HCESC, 2016). By definition this would result in some of the most vulnerable children being unable to access support and this is something that will be revisited when participants' interview data is explored. It should also be noted that demand for mental health services continues to rise (generally, not specific to LAC) and funding for services such as school nurses and early intervention grants has 'stagnated' (Local Government Association, 2020).

Of course, the responsibility for supporting children's mental health is shared and LAC are subject to multi-agency intervention from a range of professionals. School, if consistent, has the opportunity to support children's self-esteem and confidence and provide access to health and education and exercise opportunities (SEU, 2003). Children will spend the majority of their time with foster carers and teachers and so there is a need for training and awareness of the needs of LAC (Parker and Gorman, 2013; Poyser, 2013). There is not enough focus on it though and this could particularly be an issue for trainee and newly qualified teachers who may be ill-equipped to support the mental health needs of some of their pupils (HCESC, 2016). Similarly, Webber (2017) suggests that teachers are often not well-equipped to support children with insecure attachments. Training is something that was discussed by both virtual school heads in this research and so will be revisited in the Findings chapter. It should be noted that despite these challenges for professionals working with LAC and the constraints of the care system, children's welfare does improve when they are in care and similarly tends to decline when children leave care to return back home (Forrester, 2008).

Perceived Failings of the Corporate Parent

It is clear that the pre-care experiences of LAC do put these young people at a significant disadvantage in terms of education, health and well-being (Berridge, 2007, 2012a). Similarly clear though is that the care system should be there to support children and compensate for this early vulnerability (Berridge, 2007; Brown *et al*, 2019) but the extent to which it does this is debated, and it is felt by some that educational success can be more challenging to achieve for LAC (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008).

Education therefore needs to be seen as a priority but too often the highest representatives of the corporate parent, the elected members, do not show enough awareness or interest in the LAC population (APPG, 2012). There needs to be greater responsibility for educational achievement taken by the corporate parent and in particular better communication between the various services (such as education and social care) that are working to support LAC (Barnardo's, 2006; Connelly and Furnival, 2012; Mannay *et al*, 2017). A greater emphasis on educational success from the corporate parent would help to address the low expectations and aspirations from social

workers and foster carers that can hold these young people back (Bentley, 2013; Jackson and Hojer, 2013). This did not appear to be the case with the social workers who participated in this research though more broadly there can be an assumption that LAC are incapable of success and this is particularly concerning and damaging when it comes from those professionals that should be supporting and advocating for the young person (Berridge, 2012a). This is sometimes evident in children's care plans, which should set out the plans for that young person to enable them to be successful in all aspects of their lives, but sometimes include little focus around education and not enough evidence of multi-agency working (Connelly and Furnival, 2012). Too often education is not prioritised (Mannay *et al*, 2017) and more value should be placed on the importance of working together and sharing information because sometimes decisions made by the corporate parent hinder this. For example, Brewin and Statham (2011) identify that sometimes changes in social worker happen at inopportune times, such as during a change of school, and this leads to incomplete information being shared. Social worker instability continues to be an issue with over 45,000 LAC experiencing one or more social worker change in the year 2017/18, and over 20,000 experiencing two or more changes (The Children's Commissioner, 2019). For some LAC having to get to know a succession of new workers leads to apathy and frustration as they see little point in making effort to build new relationships. For other children feelings of rejection and distress are more common and lead to further instability (The Children's Commissioner, 2019).

Hearing Looked After Children

Central to the role of social workers and other professionals working with LAC is listening to and acting on their wishes and feelings (Children Act, 1989; Children and Social Work Act, 2017) but there does appear to be some inconsistency in how effectively this happens. Ideally children should be involved in the decisions that affect them but sometimes care placement instability or lack of educational support at home is related to poor choices of foster carers when children have not been consulted (Berridge, 2012a). Similarly, children may be placed far away from home, again without discussion with the young person. These choices may be made for good reason but involving LAC, explaining decisions and hearing their views is the role of a good corporate parent (Berridge, 2012a). Capturing of wishes and feelings also relates to education and school

choice needs to be based around what is most appropriate for the child, with their views listened to valued, rather than being to do with what might be most convenient for the foster carers (Bentley, 2013). Help in school should be viewed in the same way but often LAC are not asked about the sort of support that they would want to help them to achieve more (Sugden, 2013). The emotional cost of working closely with vulnerable young people, with painful stories, should not be overstated and more work is needed to ensure that social workers have the emotional competence to engage effectively with LAC (Leeson, 2010). Indeed, the need to continually go 'above and beyond' results in increased pressure and feeling overworked and Brown *et al* (2019, p. 227) speculate that this could result in the high number of social workers who leave the profession.

The corporate parent should want for LAC what any good parent would want for their own child and this includes support with their education while at home. This is not always the case though and sometimes foster carers do not do enough to prioritise education (Maxwell *et al*, 2006, cited in McClung and Gayle, 2010) and LAC may be disadvantaged by, for example, not having access to a computer or a quiet place to study (Mendis, Lehman and Gardner, 2018). Some foster carers may be well intentioned but are not always certain about what is required nor the best way to help (Griffiths, 2013). These examples may not be typical though as frequently foster carers do provide the stability, support and encouragement the children need to be successful (Harker *et al*, 2004; O'Sullivan *et al*, 2013).

It has already been noted that LAC suffer from stigmatisation and stereotyping (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Edwards, 2016) and it is possible that this stigma extends to the services that work with LAC. In that social care and education services are working with a group of children who are not achieving well, the perception of failure then extends to those groups supporting them (Forrester, 2008). It is important to bear this in mind when evaluating the work that the corporate parent does.

Conclusions

It is difficult to conclusively state that the care system is failing LAC because of the range of factors that exist, not least the varied and challenging pre-care experiences that these children have faced. Indeed, making comprehensive, catch-all recommendations is unhelpful because situations and backgrounds for LAC can be very different and in many

cases it is not known whether the care system is the problem or whether being in care is an outcome rather than a cause (Forrester, 2008). It is hard to deny that the pre-care experiences have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of LAC (Berridge, 2007, 2012a), as does the specific act of being taken into care (Poyser, 2013). Equally, in many cases the care system which is supposed to compensate for these disadvantages (Berridge, 2007) does not do enough to provide stability (SEU, 2003; Cocker and Allain, 2013) and nurturing support (McClung and Gayle, 2010). It is important though to look at the work of the care system objectively because the danger of viewing it as being ineffective, or worse damaging, is that vulnerable children could be left in chaotic, neglectful and abusive households for longer (Berridge, 2012a).

More robust data is needed to include how long children have been in care, when they came into care and whether this was interspersed with periods at home (Berridge, 2007). Information is also needed around why children became LAC as children who come into care as a result of their own behaviour tend to achieve less well than those who come into care because of the actions of others (McClung and Gayle, 2010). The amount of progress, principally academic, but also social and emotional, children make is also important to look at as are the other factors that influence educational outcomes such as poverty and SEND (Berridge, 2012a).

What is clear though is that in many cases LAC are unlikely to achieve their academic potential without additional measures (McClung and Gayle, 2010) such as those provided via the pupil premium plus. Given that LAC have often stated that they do not like to be singled out or treated as being different (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Edwards, 2016), a challenge exists for professionals, such as those in this research, in getting the balance right between addressing children's needs and not making them feel different (Brewin and Statham, 2011). It is possible for LAC to recover their educational potential but significant resilience is needed, as is stability, self-esteem, and support to understand why they are in care and to address the effects of neglect (Wellbourne and Leeson, 2013). Without this, attitudes and behaviours can develop, and while these may previously have kept them safe, they may be incompatible with learning (Cairns, 2002). Ultimately, the lower or underachievement of LAC is related to a number of interlinked factors and systems and not the fault of these young people. Of course, this research is

about how the pupil premium plus can help to support LAC and given these factors it is clear that focusing purely on academic support is unlikely to be successful for all these young people. Knowing LAC as individuals, as many of the participants in this research clearly did, is important because it is this understanding that will inform what the children need and how the pupil premium plus should be used to greatest effect.

3b - Supporting Looked After Children

Introduction

This chapter continues with an exploration of research and literature on the ways that LAC can be supported successfully, and of course, methods of effective support for LAC should be central to the decision-making around pupil premium plus. Educational achievement is clearly a vital element and so the work that schools do will be central to this chapter, but as previously demonstrated, the support of non-school based professionals is important, as is the care that children receive at home. This has a strong social justice element because distributive justice (Gewirtz, 2006) occurs when rights and resources are distributed equitably and fairly and this should be central to professionals' work with LAC. Effective support for LAC can be complex and this will be explored fully during this chapter. Links will also be made to this thesis' research questions by analysing planning for effective support for LAC; appropriate interventions and resources; and methods of tracking impact on outcomes. There is also a resonance between these upcoming sections and the previous ones on the needs and challenges for LAC, but it will become clear that just because professionals may understand what some of these difficulties are, effectively addressing them remains challenging.

The Challenges for Professionals

LAC are significantly disadvantaged by a range of issues including, but not limited to, a lack of stability at home and school (SEU, 2003; APPG, 2012), stigma and low expectations (Harker *et al*, 2004; Edwards, 2016), too much time spent out of school (SEU, 2003; Cocker and Allain, 2013), inadequate health and well-being support (SEU, 2003; HCESC, 2016) and damaging pre-care experiences (Berridge, 2007; Poyser, 2013). These have consistently resulted in LAC achieving less well than their non-looked after peers in educational attainment and other educational indicators (DFE, 2020a). Understanding the impact of these issues, however, and being able to put support in

place to remedy them, is difficult. Support from foster carers, a good school and positive engagement with learning may all be ideals (Griffiths, 2013) but are not necessarily easy to achieve, especially when some teachers and foster carers may assume that the child is of low ability or has a learning disability (Tideman *et al*, 2013) or, when the young person is convinced that they cannot do well (Griffiths, 2013). The APPG (2012) identify high expectations, good quality teaching and learning and engagement of foster carers as key factors in supporting both academic and social progress, but this is rather simplistic and does not do enough to acknowledge the complex issues that these children face (Berridge, 2012a). Similarly, focusing on the child's strengths, an invigorating learning environment (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008), better teaching (Rowland, 2016; EEF, 2019) and a culture of learning at home (Gallagher *et al*, 2004) can also be positive, though this could equally be applied to all children and more clarity may be needed to show how the specific needs of LAC can be supported. Indeed, this thesis explores how the pupil premium plus can effectively promote positive educational outcomes for LAC.

Given the likely pre-care experiences of LAC (Berridge, 2007), care can and should be positive for these children and it would be a major oversight to ignore the significant power that education has to ameliorate some of the myriad disadvantages faced by young people in the care system (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). Townsend, Berger and Reupert (2020) argue that school can become a safe haven for LAC, via predictable, stable support. The role that early intervention plays here is significant (PSE, 2016; Martindale, 2018) given that for LAC poor social and academic performance in primary school can be an indicator for social challenges in the future. These may include a greater likelihood of substance misuse, dependence on welfare, homelessness, mental health problems and involvement in the criminal justice system (Tideman *et al*, 2013; Gypen *et al*, 2017). In England LAC are more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment or training) (DFE, 2018a) and in Sweden it was found that fewer LAC attend secondary or post-secondary education, when compared to non-LAC with similar cognitive capacity (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012). One of the reasons given for this is lower expectations from professionals and, in consensus, Connelly (2013) explains that teachers must not lower expectations for these children when it comes to planning,

setting targets, etc. It is also important though to understand that children need to be looked at as individuals and that, for example, *realistic* expectations are required for children who have been victims of abuse (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013) and that teachers need to understand that outcomes will be different for children depending on their specific situations (Stein, 2006). What all professionals need to do though is to think about why children's aspirations are often so low (Chowdry, Crawford and Goodman, 2009) and how, through working together, a positive desire for self-improvement can be fostered (Berridge, 2012a).

A potential influence on expectation and stigma is the application and presentation of interventions designed to be supportive of LAC. Berridge (2012b) for example identifies the Care Matters (DfES, 2007) green paper to be negative in tone and challenges the reintroduction of the term Children in Care, which had a stigma attached. In agreement, the work of Evans *et al* (2016) shows that LAC do not like to be participants in deficit-model interventions, which treat them like a problem to be solved, or as if they needed to be trained. This point emphasises the individuality of this group of children, and teachers, social workers and policy makers need to get the balance right between using statistical data and their knowledge of individuals. Statistics hide each child's nuances and achievements and instead seem to emphasise inadequacies, rather than successes (Connelly and Furnival, 2013). Moving forward professionals need to be open to and involved in debate which will help highlight the complex issues that LAC face (Forrester, 2008) and have a clear understanding of the focus for additional funding, which is not always the case with pupil premium (PSE, 2016).

While well-intended, too often decisions are made about the use of funding without sufficient use of research (Forrester, 2008). Morris and Dobson (2020) suggest that decisions around the pupil premium are more frequently based on previous experiences and this concurs with the Sutton Trust polling (2019) outlined in the previous chapter. Furthermore, sometimes interventions are employed and then not properly evaluated (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012). These are key issues: well-informed planning for the pupil premium plus; appropriate uses; and effective evaluation and monitoring of interventions. They link clearly with this research's research questions. The following

sections aim to explore these themes further and bring some much needed clarity and detail to the debate.

The Importance of Multi-Agency Working

It is widely accepted that effective multi-agency working is important in the support of vulnerable children and those with SEND (Wall, 2011; Davis and Ryder, 2016) and this principle applies similarly to the support of LAC with effective liaison between education and social services departments tending to result in higher commitment to educational success (Harker *et al*, 2003). Equally, positive communication and identification of relevant resources can be a result of good quality home-school liaison. A criticism often levelled at the corporate parent is that joint working is not consistent enough (Barnardo's, 2006; Mannay *et al*, 2017) and that knowledge is not shared effectively between services. Clearly work is needed to improve this (McClung and Gayle, 2010) but it is also essential that all professionals, not just teachers, value education and opportunities that it brings for vulnerable young people (Sugden, 2013). Indeed, Martindale (2018) highlights interagency collaboration as being key to effective use of the pupil premium plus.

Simply acknowledging the importance of joint working is insufficient as it requires an ongoing commitment to making it work (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013). Furthermore, professionals involved need not just comprehensive knowledge in their own field but also that of the roles of colleagues and a clear understanding of the unique educational needs of LAC (Stoddart, 2012). This enables professionals to be the strong advocates that LAC frequently need (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007) and promote their wishes and feelings and make decisions in children's best interests (Children and Social Work Act, 2017), with involvement of all key stakeholders (Stoddart, 2012). It is important to note that the network of stakeholders is not restricted to professionals working in education, health and social care, but also includes birth parents and families (Forrester, 2008). Assuming that this is appropriate and part of the child's care plan, including the child's parents can help the professionals to understand more about the young person's early experiences, which is crucial in planning and implementing support (Forrester, 2008; Webber, 2017).

With this move towards multi-agency working to support vulnerable children has come an acknowledgement that professionals need to do more to listen to those who are the recipients of services (Brewin and Statham, 2011) in both planning and evaluation (King and Ehlert, 2008). In this context those recipients are LAC and more is needed to effectively gather children's views about their educational experiences (Goddard, 2000 cited in Cocker and Allain, 2013; Harker *et al*, 2003) and a more complete joint working protocol can help to address barriers to communication, develop relationships, address behaviour concerns and reduce delays (Stoddart, 2012). This sort of approach should include LAC being involved, along with the other stakeholders, in decisions around their care placement (HCESC, 2016) and school placement, for example when choosing a secondary school (Connelly, 2008). Careful consideration is needed to consider how the school and child match, as would be expected of any good parent, but with the additional vulnerabilities of LAC requiring a sharper focus on standards of safety and care (Berridge, 2012a).

Personal Education Plans and Care Plans

One of the key mechanisms for promoting this collaborative approach is the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings (Hayden, 2005; DFE, 2018b, 2018d). Indeed, Read, Macer and Parfitt (2020) argue that a quality PEP is central to effective allocation of pupil premium plus and this was evident in the interviews undertaken as part of this research, though much less so in the pupil premium strategies. The content of the PEP (see Glossary) and the requirement for stakeholders to meet once a term to review the PEP (DFE, 2018b) give structure and provide a scaffold to promote meaningful discussion although some social care managers felt that PEPs tended to show what was going well rather than making improvements to what was not (Hayden, 2005). PEPs should also provide a forum for LAC to take part and share their views (DFE, 2018b) and primary schools need to ensure that there is flexibility in how this happens to most effectively meet the needs of the individual. The PEP should form the education component of the child's care plan and just as it is important that the likes of social workers and foster carers contribute to the PEP (DFE, 2018b) it is also crucial that teachers and other education colleagues can contribute to the care plan and take an active role in monitoring progress against relevant elements in school (Connelly, 2013). The care plan

should include children's aspirations and goals, including potential careers (Connelly, 2013) and clearly teachers have a role to play in this context, just as pupil premium plus can be a supporting tool. Similarly this sort of long-term planning needs to acknowledge and address the issues that are known to disadvantage LAC as they move towards independence, such as instability and stigma, and involve the children in decision-making about things that affect them (APPG, 2012). Berridge (2017) argues that support for LAC needs to also complement children's expressions of agency to that they can begin to take more ownership of important decisions. This sort of collaborative approach, coupled with adhering to key principles that are known to be effective (e.g., avoiding moving schools in SATs years, supporting school transitions, minimising placement changes, etc.) can lead to more positive outcomes (O'Sullivan *et al*, 2013).

Planning for Support

Later in this chapter the interventions that primary schools employ to support LAC's academic and emotional development will be addressed in detail. At this point though, and with resonance to this thesis' research question on pupil premium plus planning, it is important to consider effective planning of interventions, with a multi-agency approach (Rowland, 2015). Too often, Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy (2013) explain, interventions to address the needs of LAC are designed by schools, or other services, without proper consultation with carers and other professionals. Far greater success tends to be achieved with joint planning, sharing of desired outcomes and a multi-agency evaluation (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013). Furthermore, interventions are more likely to be successful if they are developed in consultation with the children themselves (Evans *et al*, 2016; Martindale, 2018). LAC will often have clear views about what helps them to succeed in education, citing things like: positive relations with staff; a personalised approach; people who care about them; activities that are motivational and related to real-life experiences; and access to educational and organisational resources, like transport (Sugden, 2013; Townsend, Berger and Reupert, 2020).

In many cases interventions carried out at primary school by teachers or at home by foster carers will be sufficient to address the needs of LAC. However, given the vulnerabilities and specific challenges faced by these children there will be times when greater expertise is required. As such the network supporting the child needs to be able

to identify specific colleagues that can make a difference based on need (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007). Indeed, children like to be advocated for by people who are experts and prioritise their well-being, without making decisions on their behalf (Evans *et al*, 2016). So the involvement of, for example, Education Welfare Officers, Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists at key times, providing they have in depth knowledge of LAC (Evans *et al*, 2017) can be very positive (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007; Sugden, 2013).

It is the responsibility of the corporate parent to ensure LAC have plans in place to support their education and that decisions are made promptly to minimise delay (Harker *et al*, 2003; Foster and Long, 2020). Among the most senior representatives of the corporate parent in relation to LAC is the VSH (DFE, 2018b) who needs to provide strong leadership and clear strategic planning (APPG, 2012; Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020). Given the complexity and scale of this task, the need for the VSH to promote and action joint working is essential (DFE, 2018b). Effective collaboration in this way helps to raise the profile of LAC, highlight professionals' responsibilities, link colleagues together and lead to better and more focussed teaching (Berridge, 2012b). Indeed, having an educational authority, independent to schools, is effective in managing and overseeing additional funding like the pupil premium plus (Evans *et al*, 2016) and can provide support and guidance for social workers who may be unsure of their position regarding, for example, support for SEND and challenging exclusions (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012). This is a theme that will be revisited in the Findings chapter as, in this research, there were different views around the virtual schools and some of their pupil premium plus processes.

Ultimately, the educational success of LAC requires a team approach, and a shared focus on academic and emotional outcomes, not just safety and protection of children (Stoddart, 2012). Professionals need to unite with an agreed cause and while some professionals, such as the designated teacher or social worker may have extra responsibility, the support of LAC is everyone's job (Harker *et al*, 2003).

Effective Training for Professionals

It is clear that there are quite rightly high expectations and accountability for staff working with LAC, particularly teachers, social workers and foster carers but it is too

simplistic to just state that they need to provide better standards of care and education. The issues and challenges that have already been analysed highlight the need for effective training for professionals and particularly inter-disciplinary training (Connelly and Furnival, 2013; Webber, 2017). This would enable, for example, teachers to have a greater understanding of the care system (Townsend, Berger and Reupert, 2020) or social workers to have greater understanding of educational issues and processes (Harker *et al*, 2003) and therefore more confidence in their work with schools (Hayden, 2005). That is not to say that there has been a dearth of training for teachers, social workers and other professionals. Indeed, VSHs in this research provided training in their local authorities and some DTs noted its importance in upskilling teachers. However, Everson-Hock *et al* (2011) note that sometimes evaluation of training is inconsistent and does not effectively show what the impact has been.

Leeson (2010) explores the importance of effective training for social workers in full, identifying that the quality of their care will be compromised by a lack of emotional competence. Without this they will sometimes find it difficult to hear the difficult stories that are inherent in their role and respond in an appropriate, measured fashion. As such training for social workers, including trainees (HCESC, 2016) must include communication and ethical and emotional engagement which can help them to support children and minimise the emotional cost to themselves (Leeson, 2010). Similarly, the role of the teacher goes beyond simply academic support and extends to promoting self-belief and emotional stability (Harker *et al*, 2003). This could apply to a teacher's relationship with all children, but it is especially relevant given the potential uncertainties and turbulence that LAC will have experienced. As such teachers need training to understand the potential problems and issues faced by LAC and some potential strategies for supporting them (Harker *et al*, 2003). For example, training needs to cover issues of discrimination and stereotyping (Martin and Jackson, 2002) and teachers need to be able understand emotional difficulties that LAC may face and identify the signs and underlying messages (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). As with social workers, schools need to understand the potential emotional cost that exists for teachers who work closely with LAC and promote a supportive ethos among the staff (Edwards, 2016). Robson (2016) also highlights that initial teacher training is lacking in

coverage of children's rights and this has resonance with LAC because, as has already been noted, they sometimes find that decisions are made for them, without the opportunity to participate.

More effective, fully evaluated training for teachers and head teachers, around the needs of LAC and the care system in general is very important (Parker and Gorman, 2013). This is because we need schools to show a greater willingness to admit LAC, particularly those with a high level of need (Hayden, 2005) and better understanding of these children and the systems in place to support them may help to achieve this.

Supporting Academic Progress

The attainment gap that has already been clearly established earlier in this thesis principally refers to academic attainment and this is also central to the research questions set down in the introductory chapter. Of course, the impact of emotional needs cannot be overstated (HCESC, 2016) and the ways that these can be supported will be discussed later. When looking at the ways that professionals can help LAC to make academic progress it is important to understand that these children do not have, by definition, a lower cognitive capacity (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012) although their pre-care experiences do have implications for the extent to which this is fulfilled (Berridge, 2012a). Furthermore, some LAC do achieve very well (Martin and Jackson, 2002) and many are educationally aspirational and wish to reject the negative perceptions associated with their in care status (Mannay *et al*, 2017). It is important that professionals understand that high quality education can help to counteract those earlier disadvantages (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). What has not always been evident though is a consistent, joined up, research-informed approach (APPG, 2012; Morris and Dobson, 2020) but there are key principles that do impact on academic progress and these will be outlined here.

Assessing Need and Ability

For all children it is important for teachers to have a clear understanding of their ability, attainment and therefore next steps. For LAC however, the need for accurate assessment of potential is crucial (Tideman *et al*, 2013) because of the likelihood of children's pre-care experiences affecting their academic performance (Berridge, 2007). This pre-testing and matching activities and targets closely to the child's ability (Griffiths,

2013) is the beginning of an individualised plan based on cognitive ability (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012) which can be shared and coordinated with other stakeholders such as foster carers and social workers (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013). In identifying individual strengths and weaknesses based on cognition, and not just the work that children have produced, schools should undertake detailed data analysis to show where pupil premium plus can be used effectively (Tickle, 2016). In building a clear picture of the child however, these numerical data must be supplemented with other sources of information (Sobel, 2014) such as discussions with the child and their carers (Coulshed and Orme, 2012). This sort of approach should help to ensure that an individualised approach is undertaken with each LAC because while there may be commonalities among this cohort, a different approach may be needed with each young person (Hayden, 2005; Berridge, 2017) and professionals should not assume that all LAC have the same needs (Tickle, 2016).

When planning to support the academic progress of LAC, perhaps via the pupil premium plus, it is recommended that activities are carefully planned and time-limited, with clear, tight objectives (Rowland, 2015; DFE, 2018b). These objectives should support the goals that the school has identified for the young person to be successful, but should also tie in with the child's own ambitions (Flynn, 2008). Progress against these objectives needs to be closely monitored at regular intervals (Rowland, 2015) with all stakeholders involved (APPG, 2012) so that teachers can ensure that these regular interventions remain relevant and specifically targeted (Sugden, 2013). It should be noted that there was discussion in this research about the appropriateness of short-term target setting for some LAC and this will be explored fully in chapter 6 when the challenge of meeting diverse and individual needs is analysed.

Individual and Small Group Support

In many cases primary schools use individual or small group tuition (often funded by pupil premium plus) as a means for meeting the academic needs of their LAC (Ofsted, 2012b) and this is something that LAC themselves have identified as sometimes being useful and enjoyable (Berridge, 2017; Sebba *et al*, 2015). Harper and Schmidt (2012) also found that this can be effective, noting that in their research, foster carers and social workers were involved and informed throughout. The Education Endowment

Foundation (2020a) also identify that, in this case individual tuition can be effective in closing the attainment gap, though it is more expensive per child than some other interventions. What would seem to be the key to the relative success of tuition is the quality of resources used by tutors (Martin and Jackson, 2002) and the extent to which the child's usual class teacher is involved in the planning of the tuition (Stoddart, 2012). This enables topics to be matched to the actual curriculum and can lead to greater impact on academic progress (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012).

One of the potential issues with a reliance on individual tuition is that topics may be streamlined with a focus on English and maths. These are clearly important subjects and filling gaps in these can help to promote success across the curriculum (Tideman *et al*, 2013) but, given that many LAC will have missed some school (APPG, 2012) they need to experience an enriched curriculum, rather than a narrow one (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008). As will be seen in the Findings chapter, the need for enrichment in learning was something that professionals consider and plan for. Careful thought also needs to be given to who delivers any additional interventions as LAC, given the large number of professionals that they will already be working with, tend not to like to be constantly being introduced to new staff for every new task or activity (Evans *et al*, 2016). Schools must also ensure that the way that interventions are presented and delivered is appropriate and should prioritise a non-compulsory, informal approach with high quality, engaging materials (Griffiths, 2013). Indeed, there is a danger that continually presenting LAC with new support and resources can position them as being in need of constant help and this can lower their own expectations (Mannay *et al*, 2017). Teachers should employ an element of flexibility to meet the sometimes changeable needs of LAC (Sugden, 2013; Rivers, 2018) and enable children to feel safe enough to raise specific concerns (Sobel, 2014). LAC will achieve better when relationships and interventions are such that their self-esteem, confidence and motivation are supported (Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2013) and children's own positive qualities are developed and their negative self-perceptions are sensitively challenged (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). Craske (2018) concludes that for some vulnerable children there is the need for children's fulfilment to have equal value alongside attainment, and that pupil premium can support this.

Engagement with the Learner

It has already been noted that involvement of children in things that affect them is crucial to the success of plans and targets (Evans *et al*, 2016) and many of the points already made will contribute to whether children do actually want, and see value in, the intervention that is being offered. If the methods employed are not acceptable to the child or children in question then it is unlikely to be successful (Evans *et al*, 2016). Robson (2019) explains that, given the opportunity, children are capable of sharing ideas around curriculum, making plans and showing respect for other contributors. Having implemented any targeted intervention, children need to be kept engaged throughout its duration and this can be achieved through effective use of incentives (Morgan, 2009; Stoddart, 2012) and via the teacher explicitly noticing their achievements (Harker *et al* 2004).

Supporting Emotional, Social and Mental Health Needs

While it is acknowledged that in many cases LAC are more likely to suffer from emotional and mental health concerns (Berridge, 2007; Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007; CFCA, 2014) far greater clarity is needed around these issues so that teachers and other professionals understand how best to support children to overcome some of these disadvantages. Detailed, meaningful information is therefore crucial and should be based around thorough initial mental health assessments (Pinto and Woolgar, 2015), followed by regular ongoing assessments (HCESC, 2016) which could then inform specialist, ongoing, tailored support (Pinto and Woolgar, 2015). This would highlight the importance of social and emotional competencies (Evans *et al*, 2016) and ensure that it has appropriate status in statutory child in care reviews (HCESC, 2016). This would require CAMHS to be part of the multi-agency team supporting LAC and, for example, give priority access to LAC and lower thresholds for intervention (HCESC, 2016) which currently stop some of the most vulnerable children from receiving support. This theme will be revisited in the Findings chapter as some participants questioned whether CAMHS could or should be doing more for their LAC.

Developing Resilience

One area in which LAC often appear to need support, because of their early experiences, is resilience (Berridge, 2012a, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018) which is an

important protective factor, like positive behaviour and social skills (Brewin and Statham, 2011). There are a number of views around resilience and what it is, but Winkler's (2014) is perhaps the most comprehensive identifying that it includes the ability to react positively to contexts or adversity, and stops normal functioning from being damaged. Adopting a resilience-led practice can involve continual support from children's self-esteem and helping them to see their own efficacy (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008). Children who are resilient will be able to cope better with situations they perceive as high risk, remain competent under pressure and recover from trauma (Martin and Jackson, 2002) and children with the self-awareness to note these successes may develop higher aspirations (Shain, 2016). However, resilience as a concept is often over-simplified and it is not something which an individual must acquire alone as this absolves institutions, in this case schools, of responsibility for helping to manage change and deal with uncertainty (Crutchley, 2020). Cameron and Maginn (2009) take up a similar position and argue that schools must build up children's resilience, but this is challenging. Positive relationships with the network of adults working with and for LAC is an important resilience factor (Gilligan, 2007) and can promote better engagement in their education (Wooley and Bowen, 2007). Schools need also to model and teach the right sort of values and behaviours, such as optimism, managing emotions, problem-solving and self-discipline (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). Another resilience improving approach is the reduction of risk factors in the child's social world (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018). This includes things like bullying and stigma. When all this happens effectively children are able to overcome some of their early negative experiences (Pinto and Woolgar, 2015). It should be noted though that some young people may not have the capacity to develop their resilience, irrespective of the activities and teachings they receive (Winkler, 2014). In these cases, therapeutic interventions may be required and therefore it is essential that social workers know their LAC well and understand resilience so that appropriate support can be put in place (Winkler, 2014).

School Ethos

The expectation from DFE (2018b) is that LAC should generally be attending schools that are rated by Ofsted as either good or outstanding. This policy makes sense in relation to emotional and social needs, as well as academic ones, given that children's attitude

and motivation is affected by the school that they attend (Gilligan, 2013). Moreover, schools that are welcoming to LAC, are committed to their success and advocate strongly for them, are better at helping children to form positive relationships and enter appropriate social groups (Berridge, 2012a). As will be evident later on, this care and commitment was evident in many of the interviews carried out as part of this research. Indeed, LAC are much more likely to achieve well if placed in schools that want to avert exclusions if at all possible (Berridge, 2012a) and spend time discussing behaviour with children and carers to understand what is going wrong, rather than apportioning blame (Stoddart, 2012; Webber, 2017). This sort of consultation can provide the support that children need in challenging times (Parker and Gorman, 2013) rather than making children feel, as many LAC do, that will never meet their potential (Lewis *et al*, 2015).

The Role of the Teacher in Supporting Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

Schools can effectively employ a unified low-profile approach to supporting LAC (APPG, 2012) so that staff are aware of who the children are and what their needs might be, without making them feel different, though it could be argued that this is at odds with some of the statutory mechanisms that only apply to LAC like health assessments and PEPs. It is also unclear to what extent teachers have the necessary knowledge and understanding to identify, assess and support children with emotional and mental health needs (HCESC, 2016) which resonates with my own experiences as a class teacher. Training for teachers may be an area for concern (Parker and Gorman, 2013; Webber, 2017) and it is clear that teachers need a better understanding of attachment disorder to address the different ways that LAC may behave (Cameron and Maginn, 2009; Connelly, 2013) and how they may present at times of stress, such as transition (Cocker and Allain, 2013). Teachers also have to deal with difficult daily decisions such as getting the balance right between providing much-needed support for LAC and developing their independence (Sugden, 2013), and how to promote skills like teamwork and presentation when self-confidence is so low (Lewis *et al*, 2015). School staff can begin to make progress in these areas by avoiding a narrow curriculum and providing a range of opportunities for LAC to use different, especially social, skills (Connelly, 2013). Filling any gaps in knowledge that exist because of time spent away from school (Tideman *et al*, 2013) and adopting positive behaviour management (Gushard-Pine,

McCall and Hamilton, 2007) can help LAC to develop confidence and social skills and demonstrates to them that professionals are interested in them and want them to do well (Gilligan, 2013). Showing children that their efforts are valued (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013), their aspirations are heard (Stoddart, 2012) and their achievements, however small, are celebrated (Cocker and Allain, 2013) makes them feel that they belong (Gilligan, 2013) and incentivises hard work and communication with staff (Parker and Gorman, 2013).

The Wider Network of Support

It is clear then, that teachers have myriad roles to fill when working with LAC (Sugden, 2013) and it would not be unfair to question whether it is realistic for teachers to meet these requirements equally. Therefore, having an effective network of people, both in and out of school, in different supportive roles is important in showing LAC that people care about them and their progress (Gilligan, 2001 cited in Martin and Jackson, 2002; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). One such group could be school-based counsellors who can provide low threshold emotional needs support and also make appropriate referrals when more specialist support is needed (HCESC, 2016). Another is the learning or behaviour mentor which many schools employ to good effect now in supporting more vulnerable students in a range of academic and social contexts (Gilligan, 2013). Relationships with mentors, if consistent, can be different to those with other staff and can make children feel valued and promote motivation and resilience (Martin and Jackson, 2002). They can also prove to be effective role models and LAC need these to change their perceptions and raise aspirations (Berridge, 2012a; Lewis *et al*, 2015). Peer mentors have also been found to have a positive impact on LAC, particularly if the mentor has also been in care, because LAC often feel that other people do not understand their feelings and experiences (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). Pupil premium plus has a role here and in the Findings chapter, there will be further discussion about the decisions that schools have made around staffing with their LAC in mind.

An effective network of adult support is also important in helping LAC make good choices about friendships. Being part of an appropriate peer group provides opportunities for play, social development and shared learning (Sugden, 2013) while also giving a degree of emotional support and a social bond at more challenging times

(Brewin and Statham, 2011). Strolin-Golzman *et al* (2016) even found that some LAC were inspired to prioritise or continue with education by positive, successful peers. As children get older, the benefits of joint work and study become more relevant (Harker *et al*, 2003) and schools should understand that LAC often prefer group interventions because of the social aspect, to individual ones (Evans *et al*, 2016). Of course, not all peer relationships are positive and children will need to be supported to ensure that they are not, for example, distracted from work (Morgan, 2009). Non-LAC friends may also need support to understand what it is like being in care and why some situations may be challenging for them (Harker *et al*, 2003). This may require proactive work from foster carers and, indeed, the foster carer is crucial to all aspects of effective support for LAC.

Support at Home

The importance of positive multi-agency working has already been clearly described (Harker *et al*, 2003; Martindale, 2018) and this specifically applies to the relationship between home and school (Griffiths, 2013). It is also something that was valued by participants in this research, and this will be explored fully later in the thesis. If high quality communication exists between the designated teacher and foster carers, as advocated by many of the DTs and social workers in this study, the school is likely to understand the child's needs more fully (Webber, 2017). This should mean that strategies can be shared to enable schools to, for example, more effectively address behavioural difficulties (Connelly, 2013) and make homework more effective (Griffiths 2013). Foster carers often initially lack confidence when dealing with school and educational issues and a positive working relationship can help to improve this (Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2013) which can lead to a more joined up approach to addressing things like children's anxiety and tiredness (Griffiths, 2013), celebrating their achievements (Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2013) and negotiating additional support (Connelly, 2013).

A factor in making this relationship successful is the extent to which foster carers are qualified and well-educated with some wanting to help but being unsure how to do so (Griffiths, 2013) and others not doing enough to encourage attendance, support homework and take part in school events (Harker *et al*, 2003). Having appropriately

educated carers, who place value on the importance of school motivates children to succeed (Martin and Jackson, 2002), providing they are well-supported themselves (Hayden, 2005) and get the balance right with emotional scaffolding of love and stability (Berridge, 2012a).

Training for Foster Carers

Just as for teachers and social workers, the need for effective training, both before and after starting work as a foster carer is an area of concern in that, in some cases, training has had little impact on the stability of foster placement, nor the emotional and mental health of LAC (Everson-Hock *et al*, 2011). Where foster carers do not have the necessary knowledge to support education at home, quality professional development can address crucial areas, such as additional needs (Connelly and Furnival, 2013) and understanding of culture (Berridge, 2012a). It can also help to emphasise the relevance of the home being educationally rich (Connelly, 2003; Connelly and Furnival, 2013) where carers are familiar with subjects and topics being studied, low expectations are not accepted, organisation is promoted, homework is supported (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018) and enthusiasm and expertise is demonstrated by carers. The educational ethos should be supplemented with good quality resources, including newspapers and magazines, and a quiet place to study (Harker *et al*, 2003). LAC should also have access to their own computer and be able to attend all relevant school trips (Berridge, 2012a) both of which could be funded via the pupil premium plus. It should be noted though that while schools may be expected to use their pupil premium to enable children on FSM to attend trips, this would not normally be necessary with LAC in that their foster carers should not be financially deprived. This emphasis on education should be balanced with a home environment which LAC see as safe and stable (Harker *et al*, 2003) while helping them eventually transition to independence (Connelly, 2013).

Foster Carers, School and Caring

Given LAC's likely pre-care experiences it is possible that in some cases foster carers will show more interest in education than birth parents (Harker *et al*, 2003) and certainly high quality foster care can help to counteract the negative effects of trauma and instability (Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2013). For this to happen most effectively carers need to provide genuine care, going beyond the contractual, to affectionate, enduring,

loving care (Brown *et al*, 2019). They also need to balance a positive culture of high expectations (Berridge, 2012a) with dedicated time to supporting children's emotional and social needs, and helping them to feel like they belong (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). With clarity of role provided for them by social workers and other professionals (Evans *et al*, 2016) foster carers can play an important role in the delivery of some interventions for LAC. Assuming that they role model appropriate enthusiasm (Connelly, 2013) and have the skills and subject knowledge (Griffiths, 2013) they can make a positive impact on, for example, LAC's early literacy, especially for less able children (Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2013). Indeed, LAC like to undertake activities such as paired reading with foster carers as this mirrors a 'normal' parent-child relationship (Evans *et al*, 2016).

In short, educational progress needs to be a priority for foster carers (APPG, 2012) and this needs to be evidenced via their willingness to encourage, mentor and celebrate (Cameron and Maginn, 2009; Strolin-Golzman *et al*, 2016). Similarly, schools can demonstrate that they understand this by making every effort to work with foster carers (APPG, 2012) and social workers can do likewise by making child-focussed choices in matching carers and children and supporting carers' development (Jackson and Hojer, 2013).

Extra-Curricular Interventions

As previously described, it is not good practice to narrow the curriculum for a group of children who may already have gaps in their educational career (Evans *et al*, 2016). Indeed, LAC enjoy and appreciate an invigorating learning environment and wider opportunities (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008). One of the ways that schools can address this is through open access to high quality extra-curricular activities (Tickle, 2016), taking place both before and after school (Shain, 2016). This can help to reduce LAC's isolation from what are considered regular activities for all children (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008) and helps to normalise their social experiences and become less inhibited.

While in many cases primary schools will be delivering these activities, often extra-curricular sessions will take place in other settings and so there is a responsibility on foster carers and social workers to be aware of what is available to them locally (Cocker and Allain, 2013) and help with children's positive choices (Griffiths, 2013) and active

participation (Harker *et al*, 2003). Support is needed for all LAC, not just the highest and lowest achievers, and including those whose areas of interest are more creative than academic (Martin and Jackson, 2002) such as sport, art, music, culture and animals (Gilligan, 2013). Success in these diverse fields can translate to academic progress with, for example, children who excel in extra-curricular drama activities making positive gains in reading and more generally, attendance at high quality clubs resulting in better engagement, resilience and attitude to work, particularly for vulnerable learners (Gilligan, 2013; Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020). In many cases, LAC choose to take part in sport as an extra-curricular activity and while, in general there is a lack of consensus about whether this positively impacts academic achievement (Broh, 2002), for LAC it enables them to be successful, to socialise in a normal environment, improve self-esteem and develop specific skills (Brewin and Statham, 2011).

For children who may struggle academically, success in other areas in supportive environments is important for the development of identity (Barber *et al*, 2005) and formation of positive attachments (McGhee *et al*, 2000 cited in Gilligan, 2013) and friendships through shared interests (Daly and Gilligan, 2005). As will be evident in this research, pupil premium plus can be used effectively beyond purely academic subjects and so this debate will be revisited in the Findings and Discussion chapters. If activities are well-chosen and the young person shows aptitude and makes progress, it can grant them a reputation and social status with peers that they may otherwise not have attained (Gilligan, 2013) thus helping to challenge the negative stigma that too often is associated with LAC (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Edwards, 2016). They can also present opportunities for LAC to develop important life skills, like cooking and gardening (Drew and Banerjee, 2019). These extra-curricular opportunities also enable children to engage in beneficial contact with skilled, amiable adults who can fulfil a mentoring role (Gilligan, 2013). Sometimes peers in these situations will also be LAC and it can be effective for these young people to spend time with others who understand the complexities and challenges of the care system (Evans *et al*, 2016). However, it should be acknowledged that engaging with non-looked after children can bring a sense of normality and efficacy which is also important (Martin and Jackson, 2002).

For professionals helping LAC to make good choices around extra-curricular activities, possibly using pupil premium plus, the focus should be on children being able to be successful, but also developing creativity and positive interactions with others (Lewis *et al*, 2015). Foster carers and social workers must also think ahead, with 'optimism grounded in reality' (p. 119), towards promoting abilities and professional skills that will help LAC achieve their goals in relation to potential future careers (Lewis *et al*, 2015).

Conclusions

Pupil premium plus is provided to support LAC but, in order to do this most effectively, a change of perception is needed; that is to see them all as requiring the highest quality services, just as we would want for our own children (Forrester, 2008). There is little doubt that local authority children's services have faced significant funding cuts over the past decade (The Children's Society, 2020). It is estimated that funding per child has decreased from £571 in 2010/11 to £425 in 2018/19 (The Children's Society, 2020). It could of course be claimed that the pupil premium since its inception in 2011 has gone some way to addressing this by targeting funding towards the most vulnerable children. More work is needed though to ensure that this funding is appropriately used (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013) and schools may still not get the balance right between academic and emotional needs support (Evans *et al*, 2016). Furthermore, some head teachers do not even see the pupil premium as extra funding because of the budgetary constraints they are facing (Morris and Dobson, 2020).

A number of principles have been set down of late including: beginning with clear objectives and making interventions unobtrusive (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013); using high quality materials and foster carers working with LAC (Griffiths, 2013); and promoting a range of opportunities, linking LAC with positive peers and empowering them to make good choices (Gilligan, 2013). The important message here is to treat these young people as individuals (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013) and not assume that being LAC they all need to be supported in the same way (Hayden, 2005). Being taken into care is viewed by most LAC as leading to an improvement in their lives (Berridge, 2017) and professionals must understand that effective, relevant interventions can positively impact on outcomes for children (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012) and they are not 'damaged goods' (p. 1089).

Consideration needs to be given though to the extent to which the work by professionals, and the pupil premium plus, are simply addressing the effects of inequality, rather than inequality itself (Berridge, 2012b). It can be argued that despite some barriers being partially challenged (such as access to funding and therefore better quality resources) the interventions that result do not address sufficiently the factors that determine disadvantage (Evans *et al*, 2016) and that this issue deserves a still higher profile (APPG, 2012). Another contributing factor is that there may be a discrepancy between what a young person may need to most appropriately meet their needs, and what is likely to show the greatest impact for those to whom schools are accountable (e.g., Ofsted) (Tickle, 2016). For example, a young person may benefit hugely from outdoor activities or music (Gilligan, 2013) but impact of this on results may be less tangible than work around English or maths, even though that may not be what is most relevant at that time. This will be revisited later in the thesis when the question 'what does success look like?' is discussed.

The debate remains as to whether the pupil premium provides sufficient funding to make a significant different to LAC (Foster and Long, 2020) and this research explores this more fully later on. Nonetheless, education, health and social care need to ensure that decisions made around funding and interventions are evidence based and part of a long-term strategy (Tickle, 2016). This is made more challenging by the lack of research with large samples that is available for professionals to draw upon (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012) but stakeholders can do more to evaluate and share the impact of their own interventions (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013). Schools alone cannot overcome all the disadvantages that LAC face (Berridge, 2012b) but with greater use of research and evaluation (Evans *et al*, 2017; Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020), clear individualised, impact-based objectives (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013) and better use of statistical data to set meaningful expectations for LAC with SEND (Connelly, 2013) outcomes can be improved. The worst-case alternative is that the care system replicates the issues that children faced before coming into care (Berridge, 2012b) and this is not acceptable.

4 - Methodology

Introduction

Effective research design is central to the research process and appropriate choices need to be made in relation to the research paradigm, research approach, sampling technique, participants and research instruments (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011; Swain, 2017). This chapter will explore each of these in turn, exploring the decision-making process and the relevant rationales, and showing how they link to this research's focus of looked after children (LAC) and pupil premium plus, and the participants. The research questions that have guided the process of literature review and the empirical research are as follows:

- How does the pupil premium plus improve the educational outcomes of LAC in primary schools?
- What are the priorities and processes used in planning for the use of pupil premium plus?
- What are the interventions and supports that LAC receive via the pupil premium plus?
- How is the impact of pupil premium plus tracked and monitored?

Beginning with the research questions and making design choices linked to them, rather than for example, beginning with the paradigm or sample, is most effective in fields like education with the research questions often being issues to explore or problems to try to understand and solve (Punch and Oancea, 2015). However, this chapter begins with a discussion of my ontological position. While it is the research questions that identify the phenomenon that the study hopes to explore (Johnson and Christensen, 2012), it is my ontology, i.e., the nature of reality and being, that frames the entire methodological process (Saldana and Omasta, 2022).

Ontology and Epistemology

Waring (2012) suggests that the first question a researcher should address is how he or she sees the social world. These ontological positions fall on a continuum ranging from realism, in which there is a single objective reality to be sought, to constructivism where multiple, subjective, realities are constructed by the individual (Waring, 2012). This

constructivist position acknowledges that these different realities may be in conflict with one another and that concepts, such as vulnerability, attainment, outcomes, are socially constructed (Mertons, 2015). This resonates with my own view about the social world because I see my role as researcher to capture participants' interpretations of their experiences, and in turn I bring my own subjective interpretation to that data (Alexander *et al*, 2008). For example, it is not subjective that LAC achieve less well than their non-LAC peers, according to the way that children are assessed in England today. However, it is subjective why this is the case, how they should be supported and whether the way that they are assessed is appropriate.

Epistemology takes these philosophies about the social world and asks *how* the researcher can know these truths, be they singular or multiple (Waring, 2012; Saldana and Amasta, 2022). As with ontology, there are a range of epistemological frameworks ranging from realism in which knowledge is gained through direct observation and measurement (Waring, 2012), to constructivism in which the researcher and participant engage more interactively and data is subjectively understood and influenced by the context (Mertons, 2015). Again, it is the latter position which I take up because I see my participants as social actors who construct meaning in relation to the world in which they live and work (Scott, 2017) and I believe that it is impossible to separate the two. This intuitive, epistemological position informs the study's methodological choices, which will be outlined shortly, as I choose to understand these themes via participants' explanations, motivations, and interpretations. For example, the purely realist position sees researcher and participant as independent, neither one influencing the other (Mertons, 2015). This does not represent the data collection in this study, as the interviews in particular prioritised a co-construction of knowledge, employing the mutuality identified by Gewirtz (1998) as a feature of social justice. The specifics of the research's sample and methods will be discussed in the coming sections. Linked to, and informed by, epistemology, is the research paradigm that sets down a researcher's beliefs about the problem in question, and how it can be explored (Fraser and Robinson, 2004) and this will be explored next.

Paradigm

In general terms a paradigm is a way of looking at the world (Mertons, 2015) but within the context of research a paradigm is a set of beliefs about how the various components of the research work together (Wisker, 2001). These assumptions, lenses and concepts (Waring, 2012) orient the research and guide the enquiries that we, as researchers, make and how we make sense of them (Wisker, 2001). As such, the paradigm helps to shape the research design and our perceptions of children and other stakeholders (Hughes, 2010).

Related to research paradigms, there are broadly speaking two ways of conceptualising and researching social reality (Tinson, 2009). These are positivism, aligned to the realist ontology, leading usually to a quantitative design, and predominantly measurable data, and interpretivism, aligned to the constructivist ontology, tending to result in a qualitative research design, and descriptive, non-quantifiable data (Coe, 2012a). It should be acknowledged at this point that authors and researchers do not concur in their use of vocabulary and that interpretivism in particular is sometimes referred to by other names such as relativism (Wisker, 2001) and constructionism, for which a clear distinction is not needed here (Gibson, 2017) though they may sometimes be defined slightly differently. Some sources (e.g., Donley, 2012) tend to mention qualitative or quantitative research designs, as opposed to the paradigms themselves.

It is not advisable to begin with the paradigm when setting out to research, as the research questions should be the start point for the researcher (Hedges, 2012) and it is these that guide decisions around paradigm, approach and instruments. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2011) summarise key assumptions from these two paradigms and it is clear that the answers to these questions will be very much informed by ontological and epistemological positions. First, they ask whether researchers are likely to consider social reality to be external to the individual, or as a product of individual consciousness. In relation to knowledge, they note that some researchers see it is hard and objective and probably gained through scientific means, while others see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique to the individual. Finally, Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2011) ask whether we see human behaviour as a predetermined response to the environment, or whether we are initiators of our own actions, creating our own

environments. A researcher who takes up the first position in these examples is likely to adopt a positivist paradigm, with a quantitative research design (Coe, 2012a), believing that an objective account of the world can be given and that explanations in the form of laws is the function of science (Punch and Oancea, 2015). In contrast, those aligned with the second position are likely to favour the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research design (Coe, 2012a), with the view that the world can be understood through the meanings that people construct about their lives and the different situations that they experience (Scott, 2017). These two positions will now be explored in detail.

Considering and Rejecting Positivism and Quantitative Research Design

Within the social sciences, positivist paradigms position the researcher as an observer of social reality, thus making the assumption that this single reality is there to be identified and expressed through laws and generalisations (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). As such, quantitative research design conceptualises this reality through variables which can be measured, and focuses on the relationships between said variables. Experiments are often used to make comparisons and identify correlations, and variables are manipulated and measured (Waring, 2012). Positivism does include further key cornerstones and characteristics and these include behaviour being regular and predictable and that research, through controlled conditions, aims to explain and make predictions via laws that can apply to populations rather than groups in context (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). There is a focus on forming and testing hypotheses which lead to support or adjustment of a developing theory (Wisker, 2001; Coolican, 2013). Ultimately this analysis of relationships between factors and measurement of themes to identify universal laws may not fully address the complexity of human behaviour (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011) and this will be explored fully later in this chapter.

In assessing the suitability of positivism for educational or social sciences research it is important to note that there is an acknowledgement that issues related to children are worthy of study and that scientific research has enabled developments in our understanding of, for example, physiology and medicine (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). It would also be a generalisation to say that positivist research only produces data which

is quantifiable and measurable, although this is frequently the case (Coe, 2012a) and statistics and numbers are not the way to best understand meanings, beliefs and experiences (Wisker, 2001). Furthermore, when researching with people and emotive issues, such as those in this thesis, it can be very difficult to remain objective (Coffey, 1999) which is key to positivism and in practice there will be elements of subjectivity in that, for example, the way that questions are written and asked, and answers interpreted, will depend on the individual researcher (Wisker, 2001). It should also be noted that the way that quantitative research design isolates and manipulates individual variables (Waring, 2012) is unlikely to apply well to this research. This is because looking at just one aspect of the complex, multi-stakeholder network around LAC is likely to look at that individual variable out of context, rather than the way that the network works together. So while quantitative research is extremely important and has, for example, highlighted some of the concerning statistics around LAC, like those outlined earlier in this thesis, its focus on the development of causal theories (Alexander *et al*, 2008) does not fit well with this work's research questions, nor my ontological position. As such, positivism was not adopted for this research.

Interpretivism and Qualitative Research Design

Interpretivism is based around the principle that each participant is an expert in his or her own life and therefore there is no single objective reality, rather reality changes based on individual perception (Privitera, 2017). The way that people interpret experiences and behaviours is context related and so a value-free objective truth cannot be deduced (Hartas, 2010). Instead, reality is viewed as a social, multiple construction (Greene, 2010) and subjective meanings are therefore created or constructed (or co-constructed) by people (Swain, 2017) and within social sciences it can be likened to story-telling (Green, 2010).

With this acknowledgement that interpretivism centres around the process of human interpretation of different experiences in context (Gibson, 2017), it makes sense that associated, usually qualitative, research design is naturalistic – studying people and things in their natural settings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This frequently involves face-to-face encounters with knowing participants, with all parties seen as unique in trying to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (Luttrell, 2010). A qualitative research

design enables the researcher to study people and events through multiple and critical lenses (Luttrell, 2010) with a focus on data generation or construction, rather than data collection, and reflection on how meanings are constructed (Gibson, 2017). Generally though not always, this will result in more data in the form of words than numbers (Denscombe, 2010) and in the case of this research some professionals have made reference to numerical data when discussing impact of pupil premium plus on attainment and other outcomes. Analysis of this qualitative data brings into focus natural experiences via comparison, identification of themes and patterns, contrasting of consensuses and obfuscations (Greene, 2010; Punch and Oancea, 2015). This should provide deep understanding of social phenomena and can, via intense contact with real-life situations and inside perceptions (Punch and Oancea, 2015) lead to the development of theories (Donley, 2012).

Interpretivism pays particular attention to the ways that people in particular situations perceive, account for, and act to manage specific situations (Huberman and Miles, 1994) and therefore needs to understand participants' sometimes intense feelings (e.g., joy, suffering) and qualities (e.g., integrity, resilience) in context (Luttrell, 2010). For this to happen effectively, the researcher needs to examine this complex data through the participants' eyes, rather than their own (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011) and as such it is important that those taking part are seen as research participants, rather than research subjects (Gibson, 2017). This can help the voice of the participant to be clearly evident and therefore brings a sense of authenticity that is essential in interpretivism (Hughes, 2010).

Just as the participant and their experiences are value-bound and inseparable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), so the researcher must acknowledge the values and perspectives that he or she brings (Pring, 2004) and how this impacts on the mutual construction of knowledge (Gibson, 2017). As a result, effective qualitative research design provides a unique understanding of behaviours from the perspective of the individual while acknowledging that these behaviours are experienced differently by each person and cannot simply be measured (Privitera, 2017). As such interpretivist researchers need to ensure that they capture multiple interpretations and perspectives of specific events and situations (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). Knowledge generated is

therefore time, place and value bound, and may be contested and locally and politically situated (Lincoln, 1990). That is not to say that interpretivist knowledge is somehow speculative, as it is authentically discovered and justified (Greene, 2010) providing a detailed, though not generalisable, insight into an issue, providing multiple explanations for actions and detailed information about a small population (Mertons, 2015).

The Suitability of Interpretivism

Interpretivist research is question-driven (Punch and Oancea, 2015) in that it begins with the research questions and then applies methods, instruments and samples to most effectively answer these questions. It is particularly appropriate therefore, and relevant for this research, when there is an identified issue or problem which needs addressing (Punch and Oancea, 2015). The problem in question in this research is the attainment gap between LAC and their non-looked after peers, and the effective use of pupil premium plus to address this, which is studied in its natural state, without manipulation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Complex issues such as this one cannot be reduced to simple interpretation and so interpretivism's acknowledgement of the multi-layered and complex nature of reality is important (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). Moreover, thick description that draws a picture of what is happening, how things are progressing, and accounts for what has happened previously, is crucial (Punch and Oancea, 2015). These principles were central to this thesis given the differing views around the reasons for the low attainment of LAC and the lack of research around effective use of pupil premium plus. Punch and Oancea (2015) conclude that interpretivism is effective in researching complex social problems and this is because it provides a deep understanding of people (Donley, 2012) and because understanding of the social world cannot be gained by simple application of theory, as is often the case with the natural world (Hughes, 2010). It is also arguable that interpretivist research has more concern for people than that using a quantitative research design (Edwards, 2010) and this is key given that this study's focus is on support for a disadvantaged group of young people, developing in a complex social world (Dunn, 2005; Edwards, 2010).

As discussed earlier, and aligned with my constructivist ontology, meaning drawn from interpretivist research is situated through language and culture of the participants and the researcher, and that therefore understanding is based in a particular social context

(Gibson, 2017). This aspect of the research design is important for this thesis because of the individuality of the participants, who are all living and working within their own complex reality (Edwards, 2010), and by bringing their own stories and understandings to the research, the discourse is enhanced (Greene, 2010). This is important as it can provide depth of meaning behind the numerical data (Donley, 2012) of which there is already a significant amount provided by DFE showing the low attainment of LAC and the attainment gap to non-looked after children (DFE, 2020a). This can show reasons, motivations, perceptions, beliefs, etc. and provide better understanding of the lived experiences of the professionals involved (and the children they support) (Hughes, 2010; Donley, 2012) and explore the meanings they make and why they make the decisions that they do (Luttrell, 2010). This enables the researcher to reconstruct the subjective, contextual meanings that different participants attribute to phenomena and show how these can be brought together to form a whole, using multiple, expert, invested perspectives (Greene, 2010). These principles also fit well the ontological position outlined earlier and it was important that this perspective of knowledge was maintained. Ultimately the value in interpretivist research depends largely on the interests of potential users (Greene, 2010), and with this research's focus on understanding the issue, rather than judging it (Bernstein, 1976), the outcomes are of interest to those invested either socially, educationally or politically.

The Limitations of Interpretivism

The principal criticism that is made of interpretivism is that research using this paradigm is neither scientific nor objective (Thomas, 2013). However, this position has been challenged with Donley (2012) arguing that it can be both, though without providing statistically significant data, nor generalisable outcomes. The fact though that interpretivism is strongly influenced by the individual beliefs of the participants and the way that these, and the interactions between people in the field, are interpreted by the researcher indicates that there is likely to be an element of inherent subjectivity (Wisker, 2001). Indeed, given that interpretivism draws knowledge from behaviours and dialogue and that they are likely to reflect different understandings and expressions (Wicker, 2001) it may be that a focus on balance and thoroughness, achieved in this

research via the diverse sample and research instruments, is more appropriate an aim than objectivity (Thomas, 2013).

This research is not looking to make generalisations about LAC and LAC outcomes given the diverse population of young people. Therefore, the low likelihood of making generalisations or establishing causation (Gibson, 2017) is not necessarily a limitation within the context of this research. Interpretivism does enable close attention to detail on the specifics of a phenomenon (Luttrell, 2010) and multiple reconstructions which can effectively generate context specific hypotheses (Greene, 2010) and this is relevant for LAC with their individual past and current situations influencing their areas of strength and challenge. With its focus on reconstructed understandings, interpretivist research may not benefit from internal validity to the same extent as positivism (Wisker, 2001) and Privitera (2017) argues that some interpretivists reject the notion of validity and reliability altogether, principally because comparisons between studies cannot be made and because the data generated does not link well to previous research (Luttrell, 2010). Instead, interpretivist researchers can draw on the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Privitera, 2017). These have been applied in this research via selection of a diverse, invested and knowledgeable sample and the identification of findings that can be used and applied by professionals, such as teachers, social workers and foster carers, in different but related situations. Additionally, data has been presented neutrally so that what has been reported is reflective of the participants' experiences and understandings. The case study approach, and the range of research instruments employed, which will be discussed later, have provided thick description (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) which will help to achieve the necessary investiture of potential users (Privitera, 2017).

The Case Study Research Approach

The case study is an in depth, situational exploration of a unique, contemporary phenomenon or instance in context and its natural setting (Pring, 2000; Wisker, 2001; Yin, 2014). Key elements that also demarcate a study as a case study are 'how' research questions and there not being a need for behavioural control over events or participants (Yin, 2018). In this research, there is no need, nor desire for manipulation of anyone involved and the study is exploring something which is happening now, as opposed to

reflecting on historical events. The main research question asks *How does the pupil premium plus improve the educational outcomes of LAC in primary schools?* as it aims to explore and evaluate, which are also characteristic of the case study approach (Thomas, 2016).

The case itself is the object of reflection (Freebody, 2003) and should be illuminating, interesting and significant (Tight, 2017). It can be a person, group, organisation, event, process, decision, setting or policy (Thomas, 2011) and in this research the case is the pupil premium plus policy. It is this policy and its related processes that are the focus of the research questions, and the data collection, which will be discussed shortly. The investigation of the case should be empirical (Robson, 1993; Yin 2018), drawing on systematic collection of evidence (Opie, 2004) from multiple sources including interviews, observations, field notes and document analysis (Freebody, 2003; Yin, 2018) and sometimes other methods more usually associated with other approaches such as survey or ethnography (Lichtman, 2011). No one research source or instrument should have priority or advantage over another as they are looked upon as complementary in attempting to answer the research questions and in supporting triangulation and validity (which will be discussed later in this chapter) (Candappa, 2017; Yin, 2018). While case studies can include generation of quantitative data (Candappa, 2017) there is usually a more qualitative emphasis (which is the case in this research) prioritising detailed information and a narrow focus (Stake, 2005).

This case has implications for schools and social services and this relevance for practice is important (Freebody, 2003) but the researcher must also identify that there is the opportunity and intent to explore the case, and that others have the knowledge and investiture to reflect on the outcomes (Shulman, 1996). This research focuses on real-life situations that I have experienced, focusing on specific, rather than general, instances of educational practice (Freebody, 2003). This specificity is important as case studies acknowledge that individuals (in this case teachers, social workers and virtual school heads) interpret social events differently and bring to them their own personal meanings (Candappa, 2017). This valuing of stakeholders' contextualised perspectives is central to the effective case study (Pring, 2000) which represents local concentration of wider, global processes (Hamel, Dufour and Fortin, 1993). The contextualisation and

rich description of the case is therefore key to other users being able to consider the extent to which the research is useful in other situations (Wisker, 2001).

In order to guide stakeholders as to the relevance of the case study, it needs to be bounded, identifying who or what the research is about, what is vital about it and over what time period it is taking place (Lichtman, 2011; Candappa, 2017; Yin, 2018). Within this research, some important boundaries have already been established, including a focus on pupil premium plus use in primary schools, the non-inclusion of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and collecting data from just two local authorities. It is these limits that, as well as supporting potential users, also make the research manageable (Lichtman, 2011) and inform the research's sample (Stake, 2005). It was important, for example, that social worker participants had experience of working with looked after children, rather than just children in need. This will be discussed in more detail in the next sub-chapter.

This research's case study is evaluative (Candappa, 2017) because of its aim to develop deeper understanding of the pupil premium plus policy and its associated planning and monitoring processes. Evaluative case studies are ideal when something has been introduced or adapted and there is a need to find out what is happening and how things are being implemented (Thomas, 2016). Yin (2018) explains that a clear rationale for implementing an evaluative case study is that it does not just look at the outcomes of an intervention or initiative but also the processes involved. This was very important for this research as I wanted to find out about planning for, and monitoring of pupil premium plus use, and how professionals approached this.

There are no specific guidelines for how case study data should be analysed or presented (this will be explored later) (Lichtman, 2011) and the findings may be a collage of different elements drawn together from observations, documents, transcripts and commentaries that link together into a narrative of theoretical and professional insights (Freebody, 2003). So while the case study does not set out explicitly to implement changes in practice (Opie, 2004) it does make recommendations around processes and dynamics of practice (Candappa, 2017) and there is an assumption that the research will impact on professionals' work (Freebody, 2003). This intention is reflected in this study

with the inclusion of two contrasting local authorities and a range of invested participants (which will be discussed later in this chapter). The challenge for any case study researcher remains though and that is to ensure that both theorising in isolation from practice, and analysing complex practice without showing how it relates more widely, are avoided (Freebody, 2003).

The Suitability of the Case Study Approach

Education is complex, ever-changing and uncertain and so its description and understanding needs to be drawn from specific, discrete approaches (Boaler, 1997 cited in Freebody, 2003) such as via engagement with knowledgeable, invested individuals. Particularly for areas of challenge and debate, such as the attainment of LAC, intense examination is needed (Lichtman, 2011) that pays attention to nuances and intricacies (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) to help researchers, and then professionals, find out more about problems and interactions (Wisker, 2001). The issue in question is suitably complex, affected by intricate context, and requiring in-depth examination, thus warranting the evaluative case study approach (Yin, 2018) with the intention of adding new information and insight (Lichtman, 2011) and identifying difficulties and making recommendations (Wisker, 2001). Despite changes in policy and legislation, attainment of LAC and the attainment gap between LAC and their non-looked after peers remains a concern for professionals and government (SEU, 2003; DFE, 2014a, 2018b, 2018d; APPG, 2012) and so case study, with its focus on decision-making, programmes, implementations and organisational change (Yin, 1994) is most relevant for this research. This is because the research questions focus very much on pupil premium plus decision-making around planning, interventions and support, and tracking and monitoring. The continued debate around the causes for LAC underachievement (Cocker and Allain, 2013) means that research is needed that is able to impact on practice and refine how it is theorised and understood (Freebody, 2003; Yin, 2018).

Case study, with its basis in practice, provides insight for stakeholders into similar cases (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This is important as other professionals, beyond the two participating local authorities, will need to see the relevance for them in their own contexts, while acknowledging the uniqueness of each case (Freebody, 2003) as

making assumptions about the similarity of LAC, or wider pupil premium groups, is unhelpful. With its focus on experiences of teachers, social workers and virtual school heads, as well as the ways that schools report their policies and outcomes, this research shows the significance of the localised experience, which is central to the case study approach, as it understands time, place and specific conditions are indigenous to each situation and perspective (Freebody, 2003). Researching with two contrasting local authorities enables this research to provide different examples and interpretations (Wisker, 2001) which is crucial given the myriad ways that poor LAC outcomes may be explained or evidenced. Furthermore, the case study can show decisions and behaviours made by teachers and other colleagues in action, including their consequences (Freebody, 2003) and insight into these sorts of circumstances is often not possible with other methods, where unique features and processes involved may be hidden (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). Again, this work's research questions require an understanding of professionals' choices and their outcomes regarding how pupil premium plus is used and how they know it has been successful.

In selecting a case, the researcher needs to ensure that there is potential for learning via the study and that the research design can draw out the key theories and concepts (Candappa, 2017). Given the lack of research currently in the field regarding LAC and pupil premium plus the potential for deeper understanding via this work is clear and resonates with case study's ability to focus on how the needs of children can be met (Saldana and Omasta, 2022). The appropriateness of the case study in relation to LAC is particularly important and it was chosen on the basis of its ability to advance knowledge around specific, naturally occurring social groups, rare cases and those suffering trauma (Privitera, 2017), all of which could apply to LAC. This can then draw out factors influencing social behaviours (Opie, 2004) and generate new knowledge via different encounters with stakeholders and an ethos which respects discrepancies between participants' viewpoints and regards all those taking part as equal (Simons, 1996; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Case study data can be analysed and presented in different ways (Lichtman, 2011; Tight, 2017) but what it should do is accessibly serve multiple audiences (Nisbet and Watt, 1984), while reducing unstated assumptions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) which

is central to this research given the previously stated preconceptions around LAC attainment and the effectiveness of the care system (Berridge, 2012). So by showing awareness of the sensitivity of the issue and looking at children holistically case study can be a 'step to action' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 292), contributing to the field by informing staff development, institutional self-evaluation and policy decisions, as well as identifying issues that have relevance for the wider educational and social care professional population (Tobin, Wu and Davidson, 1989).

Limitations of Case Study Research and their Management in this Research

The specificity of case study research and its focus on individual, unique phenomena (Pring, 2000), while enabling in depth case description and evaluation (Candappa, 2017), may also be considered a limitation with Smith (1991) identifying the case study as, logically, the weakest method, and stating that studying individual cases is obsolete. Adopting a scientific position, this view may have some value but in the study of naturally occurring though minority groups the case study can provide the depth of understanding required (Privitera, 2017) and in any case making assumptions or generalisations about groups such as LAC is ineffective because of the wide range of reasons for their low attainment. Researchers must ensure that there is an audience for the potential findings of any case study and that the scope is not so narrow as to only be of interest to the researcher (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

What is clear is that with the focus on just one case (or a small number) the researcher needs to ensure rigour is present in the research methods and in the analysis, as well as acknowledging that there is an element of subjectivity inherent (Wisker, 2001). Both the interactions with participants and the data generation in this research are experienced subjectively (Freebody, 2003), via my professional experience of working with schools and social workers and with knowledge of the inconsistency in the ways that pupil premium plus is allocated (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). As a result of prior experiences, researchers may bring bias in, for example, the case selection, the data that is recorded, or how it is analysed (Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Dowling and Brown, 2009). Similarly, researchers who are invested in the themes that they are studying may over or understate the relevance of some data, draw too much on their own memories

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) or be selective in how they report data (Yin, 2018). This potential for bias is minimised in this research with the inclusion of a diverse, knowledgeable sample from both education and social care standpoints, as well as different research methods to include both narrative and documentary evidence. The selection of participants and documents is informed by my prior professional experience, while the literature review chapters highlight the most significant elements to be focused on (such as multi-agency working, identification of need, tracking and reporting of impact) both individually and how they come together as a whole.

These research methods and the sample will be analysed later in the chapter, but at this point it is important to highlight the use of document analysis because case studies drawing on interviews are likely to generate data from a mixture of interviewees' knowledge and inference and it can be challenging to differentiate between the two (Dyer, 1995). Ultimately, the aim in this research is for the participants' data to speak for itself without judgement or inferred interpretation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

A criticism frequently made of case studies is that the findings elicited cannot be generalised from one case to another (Wisker, 2001), although Lichtman (2011) does not see this as a limitation describing it instead as simply a characteristic of case studies. The specificity of case studies does mean that data cannot easily be cross-checked against other situations (Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Wisker, 2001) but to focus on the lack of generalisability overlooks the precise focus on the specific case (Tight, 2017). Any identified findings should be tentative and cannot be applied to the whole population (Gilbert, 2008) though Candappa (2017) asserts that this should be not viewed as a valid criticism given that case studies by nature do not set out to make such claims. Instead, as is the case with this research, case studies can provide some relatability (Opie, 2004). By providing sufficient details about the sample and evidencing rigour in the research methods this research can enable professionals to judge the extent to which the findings can be related to their own individual circumstances (Mertons, 2015) where they can see similarities in their work with LAC, their virtual schools and allocation of pupil premium plus (Denscombe, 2010; Tight, 2017). In addition, this research includes two contrasting local authorities and this enables a greater claim for generalisation through

elements of both commonality and variety (Yin, 2014), acknowledging that there is difference between true statistical generalisation and a 'fuzzy' generalisation (Bassey, 1999, p. 14) which professionals can make based around likelihood of relevance. The latter applies in this research as professionals are encouraged to use logical, rather than statistical inference, based on the validity of analysis and the type of research design and its robustness (Freebody, 2003; Candappa, 2017).

In order for the research to be considered to have legitimate value, the case study needs to be able to demonstrate reliability and validity, which can be challenging because of likely inconsistencies with other research, including other case studies (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In this research, the following measures are employed to address potential issues around credibility and legitimacy (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011):

- Clarifying and defining the main contexts (LAC, primary education, pupil premium plus, etc.) to which the data generated relates and showing how and where this may relate more widely (external validity).
- Demonstrating that interpretations are drawn from the data, with supporting evidence, and that other explanations are considered (internal validity) (this will be discussed in the Findings and Discussion chapters).
- Using multiple sources of evidence in relation to the research questions (concurrent validity) (this will be discussed later in this chapter).
- Ensuring that there is consistency between the research paradigm, approach, research tools and sample (reliability).

Sampling

Sampling is the selection of participants, settings and cases for inclusion in research and importantly, how these decisions are made (Collins, 2017). Generally, a sample is chosen to denote a larger group of which the sample, e.g., of participants, is a part (Wisker, 2001). The researcher needs to initially identify who it is that he or she wants to find out about, i.e., the target population, so that an appropriate sample can be identified (Coe, 2012b). In the case of this research the target population is a range of stakeholders, including teachers, social workers and virtual heads, with knowledge and insight into the ways that pupil premium plus may be used to support the educational

outcomes of LAC. The following sections will outline the sampling choices made in this research and how these link to the aims of the study and what it hopes to achieve (Coe, 2012b) and also how the research prioritises roles, processes and relationships of participants (Luttrell, 2010).

This Research's Sample

Due consideration must be given to sampling in relation to different elements of the research (O'Connell, 2017) and so it does not just apply, for example, to interview participants but in this case to the local authorities and schools as well. It also relates to the sample size, the extent to which it is intended to be representative and how well the strategy fits with the overall intentions of the research (Collins, 2017). For this research the sample is as follows:

- Two local authorities, contrasting in size, location and in the number of LAC that they are responsible for.
- The first local authority (LA1) is large, both geographically and in terms of the number of LAC. It has 1800[1] LAC as of 31/3/20, which is an increase from 2019 (1600), though the highest figure in the last 10 years was 2300 in 2016. LAC number 50 children per 10000, so while the actual number of LAC is amongst the highest in England, in relation to the rest of the child population it is relatively small. For example, the highest number of any local authority is 223 LAC per 10000 children. The local authority also has a port which results in a high number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). There are no 2020 figures available showing the number of UASC in each local authority but in 2019 these accounted for 250 of the overall LAC in that authority which is the second highest in the country (DFE, 2017b; 2019e; 2020d).
- The second local authority (LA2) is one of the London boroughs. It has 400 LAC as of 31/3/20 which is a very small decrease from 2019 while the highest number recorded in the last 10 years was 450 in 2014. LAC number 60 children per 10000. The local authority had 50 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in 2019 (DFE, 2017b; 2019e; 2020d).

[1] All figures given in relation to LA1 and LA2 are approximated to maintain anonymity of local authorities.

- From each local authority four social workers with experience of working with LAC, and with knowledge of pupil premium plus were interviewed.
- From each local authority five teachers were interviewed. These were all Designated Teachers for LAC and had responsibility for supporting these young people within the school. They were all involved in how pupil premium plus was allocated though in many cases the head teacher, with responsibility for the budget, would have the final say.
- The deputy virtual school head from LA1 and the virtual school head from LA2 were interviewed.
- Document analysis of 20 primary school pupil premium strategies, ten from each local authority. These were accessed via school websites and selected at random. These settings were not schools at which the interview participants worked. The required content of the pupil premium strategy was explained in chapter 2.

Two contrasting local authorities were chosen for this research and this can be effective in helping to identify whether these differences in context lead to similar or diverse findings, and what the reasons are for this (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, they do not explicitly influence one another (Day Ashley, 2012a) so the findings can be analysed within their own individual contexts. There was no intention to make direct comparisons between the two authorities but choosing two quite different local authorities helped to explore how LAC are supported in different situations, and helped to extend the research's value and applicability beyond just one specific context.

In terms of the number of participants initially a larger sample was planned because a sample which is too small risks invalidity and a lack of representiveness which can skew results (Wisker, 2001). However, the assumption that a larger sample is always better is incorrect with more and more participants frequently adding nothing new of note (Sharp, 2009) while trying to quantify large samples can 'wring the meaning out of the data' (Quinn, 2010, p. 236). Instead, quality of research design is key as is clarity around the enquiry so that the right people are recruited (Wisker, 2001) and so guarding against sampling error (Privitera, 2017).

In selecting participants for the interviews a combination of sampling strategies was employed (McGrath and Coles, 2013). Purposive sampling, i.e., selecting participants

based on their ability to provide relevant information (Johnson and Christensen, 2012) is commonly used in qualitative research (Luttrell, 2010), and case studies in particular (Aubrey *et al*, 2000), because it can lead to detailed, contextualised description, insightful analysis and depth of understanding (Coe, 2012b). It also means that professionals with a range of experiences can be selected (e.g., social workers who have worked with children of different ages, and different types of schools) (Luttrell, 2010) and those with extreme views, or non-relevant experience (e.g., social workers who only work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children) can be omitted (Owen, 2017).

Purposive sampling worked effectively in some cases because of my prior experience in this field. There was a need, however, to identify other participants and in these cases snowball sampling was used, with existing participants identifying others from their own networks who were willing to take part (Hartas, 2010). This worked effectively in identifying social workers and teachers, because it is normal for professionals to know others with relevant views and interests (Owen, 2017). When implemented effectively this strategy provides rich, accurate, complete data as it is borne out of existing networks with trust and respect (Luttrell, 2010). It should be noted that snowball sampling is vulnerable to non-response bias (Privitera, 2017) in that it cannot explore the views of those who choose not to participate as it may be that they make this choice for a particular reason. The range of participants and data collection instruments were included to account for this. The specific roles of the participants, i.e., VSH, DT, social worker, were obviously chosen because of their relevance to pupil premium plus decision-making, but there was also a social justice element. I felt it was important to validate the importance of these roles, via inclusion in this study, and enable them to contribute to the developing narrative around pupil premium plus. This is an important element of recognitional justice (Gewirtz, 1998).

Rejected Options

These sampling strategies were considered but ultimately rejected:

- Stratified random sampling can enable the researcher to generalise findings to a wide group (Freebody, 2003; Coe, 2012b) providing the characteristics of the target population are accurately represented in the sample (Privitera, 2017). It can also

reduce bias by appropriately replicating the various groups that exist within the target population (Wisker, 2001). However, this benefit does not really apply to this research given that there are no set characteristics nor groups within VSHs, social workers or DTs that need to be captured in this way.

- A random sample can help to strengthen a study's validity, but McGrath and Coles (2013) identify that samples of this sort are rarely truly random, nor large enough to be representative.
- Convenience (or opportunity) sampling, where participants are selected based on their availability, is considered to be particularly unrepresentative (Saldana and Omasta, 2022) and the researcher is unlikely to know how those who are able to take part differ from those who cannot (Privitera, 2017).
- Self-selection sampling tends to be less valid than some other strategies because it, by definition, excludes those who do not want to volunteer or are unable to (Lavrakas, 2008).

The Challenge of Finding Participants

At the outset of the research the intention was to interview 26 professionals: 16 Designated LAC Designated Teachers (or Headteachers), eight social workers and two VSHs. This proved to be quite challenging and in practice it was only possible to secure 20 participants: ten DTs, eight social workers and two VSHs. Indeed, the task of identifying participants willing to take part and then actually completing the interview was more challenging than had originally been perceived. Archibald and Munce (2015) note that this is not unusual when interviewing professionals, explaining that it is easy to overestimate the availability of participants and the time that is needed for this process. The actual process of recruiting participants for qualitative interviews can be a frustrating one, particularly when gatekeeper assent is needed and when the researcher needs to make follow-up contact with potential participants who may or may not choose to take part (Davies, 2011). Where professionals see that there is a benefit to them consenting the identification of participants is much easier (Testa and Coleman, 2006) and while the inclusion of practitioners certainly helps the researcher and users of the research understand situations more deeply (Coulshed and Orme, 2012) some potential participants might not have seen the immediate benefit to them. In some cases in this

study a prior professional relationship with participants did help to make initial contacts and then ongoing discussions easier (Archibald and Munce, 2015) as did recommendations via snowball sampling. In others though these advantages were in place and it was still not possible to secure agreement to progress to an interview.

It is not always clear why individuals were not willing or able to take part in an interview as there will have been different reasons that may not have been shared. Sometimes it is the research process and some of its terminology that causes anxiety amongst potential participants (Archibald and Munce, 2015) and in this study some professionals did initially agree to take part but later refused having been sent the information and consent form. In addition, the inclusion of practitioners in research does sometimes challenge the power of the participant (Coulshed and Orme, 2012). That is certainly a strong possibility here given the need for teachers and social workers to discuss their approaches and practices, and potentially explore challenges that they had faced. For example, in one case a school agreed to take part and then, after some delay, withdrew because their LAC DT was relatively new in post and did not feel confident enough to participate.

It is also important to note that schools and social work teams are always busy places and so these professionals have limited availability (Marks *et al*, 2017). Any participation from these colleagues is likely to be based around good will and being able to find a slot in an already busy schedule. For example, in one case a social worker agreed to take part, gave consent and agreed a time but then was unable to attend because of an emergency at work with a young person which of course took priority. After this it was not possible to arrange a new date for the interview, which was regrettable, though understandable. Headteachers are likely to want staff to prioritise day to day teaching and assessment as well as reports and school events (Marks *et al*, 2017) while social work managers are focused on delivery of quality safeguarding practices rather than participation in research (Beddoe, 2011).

Document Analysis

When used as a research instrument, like interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, etc., document analysis is effective in gathering in depth data (Marshall and Rossman, 2011)

via careful and thorough identification of key issues, themes, concepts and labels that give insight into the decision-making of the organisation that created the document (Wisker, 2001). In this field of social research the documents themselves can be any record of an event or process (McCulloch, 2012), while Scott defines a documents as 'an artefact which has as its central feature an inscribed text' (1990, p. 5). It is important to note that in most cases these documents are classed as secondary data (Denscombe, 2010) in that the data was not produced for the researcher or the research, but for some other purpose.

That is also the case in this research with the document analysis focusing on school websites and the pupil premium strategies that are required to be published there by each local authority school and academy (DFE, 2020e). Reports are considered to be useful documents for educational researchers to include because they frequently examine defined problems and propose solutions (McCulloch, 2012). This should be the case in this research given the requirement from DFE (2020e) for schools to publish the following on their websites:

- their pupil premium allocation (though not broken down into the discrete groups);
- barriers to the progress of these children;
- how the funding has been spent in the previous year;
- the impact of this funding on eligible children and other children;
- how the school intends to spend the money in the coming year;
- how the school intends to measure the impact;
- when the strategy will be reviewed.

In order to draw out the meanings and concepts from the documents and to understand the values and beliefs that they portray (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) the researcher needs to undertake thorough evaluation. This addresses four key areas. The first is authenticity (Macdonald, 2008; Denscombe, 2010) which focuses on whether the document is the work of those who are credited. In this research this should not be in doubt given the personalised nature of each strategy and likelihood of schools wanting to take ownership of these sorts of materials. The second is representativeness (Macdonald, 2008; Denscombe, 2010) which asks whether the document is complete

and whether it is typical of its type. Completeness could potentially be explored though it is likely that Ofsted would use the school's pupil premium strategies before and during inspections and therefore significant omissions would be unlikely. Whether the report is typical is not relevant in this research given the differences between schools in terms of the number of LAC, and because there is no set format set down by DFE for this. The third area is meaning (Macdonald, 2008; Denscombe, 2010) and this is particularly important given that there may be two levels of meaning to be found: a surface meaning and a deeper meaning (Macdonald, 2008). It is important for the researcher to consider both what is included and anything which is noticeably absent, any assumptions that seem to be made, as well as the use of any language which may be viewed as subjective or persuasive (Rapley, 2007). This analysis is crucial to identifying how LAC are viewed within the school and how their needs are understood and supported. The fourth area for evaluation is credibility (Macdonald, 2008; Denscombe, 2010) with a focus on the accuracy and relevance of the interpretations made by the author (Macdonald, 2008; McCulloch, 2012). This should also ask whether relevant voices are heard in the document (e.g., senior leaders, teachers) and whether data is drawn from appropriate sources and presented clearly and accurately (Rapley, 2007). In summary, document analysis within small-scale qualitative research such as this is most likely to be in the form of internal criticism which focuses on purpose, precision and information quality (Bertrams and Weyenbergh, 2021). The alternative to this is external criticism which analyses the authenticity and genuineness of the document. Given that these policies are published on school websites the work can be assumed to be authentic and genuine. However, exploring, for example, the purposes of the school's strategy for allocating pupil premium plus, or the level of detail included in the school's analysis of outcomes, will be very relevant in relation to the research questions which focus on uses of pupil premium plus and how outcomes are tracked.

The Suitability of Document Analysis

Document analysis is as valid as any other research method, providing it meets the needs of the study in question (Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2013). It was selected as an effective research instrument for this research because of its suitability for studies taking a post structuralist approach (Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2013) and this has resonance

with LAC, a group for whom preconceptions around attainment, progress and other educational outcomes are often held. Furthermore, Curtis, Murphy and Shields (2013) continue, this method is also appropriate for the analysis of educational policy and practice while Candappa (2017) identifies document analysis as being a key source of data in case studies. This is because it can provide multiple insights into how an issue is perceived (Robinson, 2010) and in this research it showed how the needs of LAC were prioritised and how interventions were implemented accordingly. In short it helped to show the school's ethos when supporting vulnerable children (Scott, 2000). Moreover, by analysing reports of this kind, which are related to state policy, it enables the highlighting of any contradictions or difficulties between the policy itself and how it is being enacted (Codd, 1988, cited in McCulloch, 2012). This is very relevant for this research as links can be made between the priorities as set down in government policies regarding LAC and pupil premium plus, and how these are employed by schools in practice.

Document analysis also provides direct access to communities (or in-depth information about communities) (Candappa, 2017) and this enabled the research to generate data from a wider range of schools than would have been possible with other methods, without disturbing the settings (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Data generated from the document analysis is used most effectively when it is used alongside that from other methods, in this case interviews, to provide comparisons (McCulloch, 2012) and to look at the same themes from a different standpoint, thereby giving more 'nuanced understandings' (Candappa, 2017, p. 182). The opportunity to draw parallels and contrasts between schools' policies and the views of professionals was important in this research. For example, many pupil premium strategies made mention of pupil progress meetings as central to pupil premium decision-making. However, in interviews it was evident that for LAC there were other forums, such as Personal Education Plan meetings, that appeared to take priority in this process because of their focus on the individual pupil.

The Disadvantages of Document Analysis

Just as human participants in research have a specific, local, context through which their data needs to be viewed, so too do documents (Rapley, 2007). They can only be

understood through the context in which they were created (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). So the size and type of school, the number of LAC (and other pupil premium eligible children) and their levels of progress, need and attainment, even perhaps the proximity to the next Ofsted inspection may all have had an impact on the pupil premium strategy that was published. Of course, elements of this data would have been open to interpretation (Robinson, 2010) when seen through the researcher's own context, with for example, concepts like levels of progress and impact perceived differently. Therefore, and because the researcher is unable to probe or clarify as he or she can in an interview, cautious analysis is needed, which represents the long inferential span that can exist with this method (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Where statistics and other data were given in documents used in this research, the extent to which they could be interpreted differently needed to be considered, as was the extent to which the author(s) of the strategy stood to gain or lose based on those statistics (Denscombe, 2010).

One of the advantages of documents as a research instrument is, Ahmed (2010) explains, a lack of bias, in that interpretations or misinterpretations come from the researcher, not the document itself. There may be some value in this view though it is not widely supported. Denscombe (2010), for example, indicates that validity of the content of documents should not be taken as read. Indeed, in this research it was not assumed that the pupil premium strategies necessarily represented the school's practice in comprehensive, straightforward manner (McCulloch, 2012) because what is reported may not always be the same as what actually happens in practice (Rapley, 2007). Macdonald (2008) indicates that it is unwise to assume that the authors of documents do not intend to deceive and while the concept of deception was neither expected nor sought in this research, the extent to which the strategy may be used to justify a school's actions was considered (Elton, 2002). For example, some strategies made reference to training for teachers and teaching assistants around areas like English as an additional language, phonics, dyslexia and more able children. Of course, these sorts of things may be useful in supporting LAC, but it is quite likely that they would be applied more generally across the whole of the school population. Similarly, given that these strategies must be published on school websites (DFE, 2020e) the ease of access to all

parties may lead schools to produce documents which emphasise particular aspects of practice and minimise others to present themselves in a more favorable light (Fothergill, 1974, cited in McCulloch, 2012).

One final consideration around documents and the data that they hold relates to data that is not included. It has already been established that in some cases researchers need to be aware of what may have been omitted from the strategies (Rapley, 2007). For example, local authority schools must publish what the barriers to learning are for pupil premium eligible pupils, and how the pupil premium has been used to address these barriers (DFE, 2020e). There is no requirement to identify specific amounts spent on certain interventions and schools may choose to omit this information if something appears to have not been cost effective. However, it should also be acknowledged that in some cases data may have been restricted for good reason (Denscombe, 2010). While researchers may look to negotiate to access this additional information, it needs to be acknowledged that in some cases analysis of documents could cause harm to related individuals (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). As such, in this research it was ensured that even though a school must publish their pupil premium policy openly on its website, school names, staff and pupil names were not identified, nor were any individual's specific needs revealed.

Interviews

Interviews are frequently used as research instruments in case studies (Freebody, 2003). This is because effectively managed interviews are interactional events where participants, often with elements in common, share and construct knowledge of cultures, processes and settings (Baker, 1997). Interviews also complement other research methods effectively (here, document analysis) (Wisker, 2001; Gray, 2018). In the case of this research all the participants were selected because of their involvement with LAC, and interest in how these children and young people are supported. It is important to note that the interviews looked to do more than just identify what was happening with pupil premium plus, and focus on explanations of events (Freebody, 2003) to show levels of involvement, understanding and engagement from professionals. These specific, purposeful interactions were intended to highlight

participants' experiences regarding the use of pupil premium plus, related feelings and areas that held particular significance for them (Mears, 2012).

The role of the interviewer is important to emphasise here because the participants will generally discuss and prioritise the elements and themes that they perceive to be most relevant (Freebody, 2003). These views of course have value, but the skilful interviewer will ask questions and use prompts in such a way that all facets are explored, including those that the participant may not view as vital (Gray, 2018), such as, in this case, the pooling of funding with other schools. In this research, priority was given to eliciting a meaningful conversation, which would be valuable to both parties, while developing and maintaining a positive relationship (Bryan and Loewenthal, 2007). Clarity and interest were also maintained by avoiding questions which were leading, too long, multi-faceted, hypothetical, ambiguous, too sensitive or contained too much jargon (Wisker, 2001; Gray, 2018).

The interview type (which will be discussed presently) and the individual questions are central to the interview as these 'shape the ground…on which participants can and should speak' (Freebody, 2003, p.137) with the focus in this research on data generation between two informed professionals, rather than simple, passive data gathering (Baker, 1997). In this way participants' responses were viewed to be accounts of events and versions of truth, influenced by perspective and individual experiences, rather than completely objective reports (Baker, 1997; Todd and Loewenthal, 2007). As such each interview is viewed as unique because of the 'infinite otherness' (Bryan and Loewenthal, 2007, p. 26) of each participant and each conversation. Therefore in this data generation it was important to remember the subjectivity that each person brings to the interview and the thoughts and feelings that are projected from one to the other because these influence questions, answers and interpretations (Gray, 2018). This positionality is related to previous, usually professional, experiences and influences the way that participants see themselves and the values that they hold, and therefore how the interviews progress (Griffiths, 1998; Bryan and Loewenthal, 2007). In this research it was important to consider and try to understand each participant's professional context (Wisker, 2001) including their role and the way that they worked with other professionals, and specific areas of education or social care that they might prioritise,

because these values and experiences are just as important as what the participant actually says (Tedder, 2012). To reiterate, the interviewer must acknowledge that he or she cannot nullify his or her own view (Mears, 2012) and while attempting to take a neutral position may have benefits (Peshkin, 1988) in this research the prior experiences and knowledge of the interviewer enabled more precise probing (Tedder, 2012). For example, as a former assistant virtual head, I was able to engage in discussions with social workers about the importance of a young person's legal status. Similarly with designated teachers, I could empathise with the challenge of trying to mitigate pre-care experiences and support expected academic progress. In these examples and others the specific knowledge that I had provided assurance to the participant regarding the expertise of the interviewer and promoted greater depth of discussion.

Interview Specifics

It is generally accepted that interviews fall within a continuum from structured to unstructured (Wisker, 2001). Structured interviews generally involve closed questions and the interviewer cannot deviate from the set question order or wording, which results in minimal interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Gray, 2018). This method was rejected in this research because structured interviews frequently are ineffective in capturing participants' feelings (Wisker, 2001) which is at odds with the interpretivist paradigm. This is because the closed questioning, while it may collect facts, names and numerical data, limits the deeper thinking and creative, collective exploration (Wisker, 2001). This research has already identified that significant hard data exists showing the low attainment of LAC and therefore the emphasis is on people's stories and feelings about this issue and professional practices.

The other end of the spectrum is the unstructured interview, in which only general themes are decided beforehand and the specific content of the interview is allowed to develop naturally, like a conversation (Hobson and Townsend, 2010). While this has significant flexibility and a balance of power between interviewer and interviewee, it is more frequently employed in biographical or oral history interviewing (Mertons, 2015). It is also important to note that the lack of control over the way the interview progresses can lead to the discussion drifting off topic and while this can enable participants to explore their own experiences (Arksey and Knight, 1999), if unchecked it can produce

data that is either irrelevant or incomparable (Wisker, 2001). Lastly, being inductive in nature it does not fit as well the thematic analysis used in this research, which will be discussed later in this chapter (Fontana and Frey, 2000). As such this method was also rejected.

Between structured and unstructured interviews, and selected for this research are semi-structured (or part-structured) interviews, which include pre-set themes or questions which are asked of all participants, though with more adaptability than in structured interviews (Hobson and Townsend, 2015). Given the wide range of issues and challenges that relate to the achievement of LAC, and the use of pupil premium plus, it was important that some deviation in discussion was allowed (Gray, 2018) so that the themes that were most important to the participants could be pursued (Freebody, 2003; Taylor and Loewenthal 2007). For example, one of the virtual schools involved had recently been inspected by Ofsted and therefore the discussion with the VSH around accountability and tracking was informed by and influenced by this experience. It also meant that the VSH in question had very relevant and recent knowledge that could positively add to the data that was being collected. The degree of structure does enable the researcher to maintain control of the data that is produced and logically follow leads related to the research questions (Bryan and Loewenthal, 2007). In the case of this research, this involved the use of prompts to expand on initial responses and the use of improvisation, such as rewording or re-ordering questions, to maintain the flow of the conversation (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Swain, 2017). The use of open questions gave scope to the participants to explore a range of ideas and feelings in their responses and while some information provided may have been irrelevant (e.g., discussing the free school meals pupil premium), the diversity in information was generally kept within the boundaries of the research questions by the prompts and follow-ups (Wisker, 2001; Mears, 2012). Overall, the interview specifics employed here cohered with research's social justice ethos by ensuring that all the participants had an equitable opportunity to participate fully and discuss what was important to them (Gewirtz, 2006). The interview schedules for DTs, social workers and VSHs can be found in Appendix A.

There are differing views around how many interviews should be included in a research project of this type (Gray, 2018). Rowley (2012) indicates that for interviews of about

this length, 12 interviews are sufficient. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) concur with this providing the group is homogenous, but suggesting that more participants would be needed for a heterogenous sample. For this research, it was expected that the participants would have some experience and knowledge in common, but given that three different groups were included and because of the differences in experience and practice that frequently exist within fields like education and social care, it was decided to undertake 20 interviews. Brinkmann (2013) explains that researchers must not apply quantitative expectations of sample size to qualitative research and that it is too hard for qualitative researchers to 'get close to the lives of 50 or 100 people' (p. 59) via interview.

Interview Schedule Pilot

The piloting of data collection tools is an important part of the research process as it provides an element of quality assurance prior to the actual data collection (Kumar, 2019). An effective pilot enables the researcher to get closer to the research's context (Day Ashley, 2012b) by enabling a thorough examination of, in this case, the interview schedule to identify any problems with wording (Kumar, 2019) and to remove or rephrase any ambiguous, insensitive or confusing questions (Opie, 2004). In this research a full pilot study was not carried out, rather the interview schedule was shared and discussed with knowledgeable peers from the fields of education and social care. This was partly because it was a challenge to identify appropriately informed and experienced interviewees for the main study. Furthermore, as Opie (2004) explains, it is not ideal to carry out a pilot study with the research's participants as they can become sensitised to the topics and answer differently. However, the peers who reviewed the schedule provided valuable insight into their interpretations of the questions (Kumar, 2019) and shared their views as to whether participants would be likely to want to take part in the main data collection (Robinson-Pant, 2005). Indeed as Day Ashley recommends (2012b), colleagues who took part in this pilot played an active role and made relevant suggestions and engaged in meaningful discussion about the schedule. This resulted in some additions to the prompts used as follow up questions to the main questions, and the inclusion of the final question which asks for an overall view as to whether support provided for LAC could be maintained without pupil premium plus.

The Suitability of Interviews

Interviewees were selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience in the field of LAC and pupil premium plus and by making this clear, participants may feel complimented that their views are important (Wisker, 2001) and this begins to build a positive relationship which is central to effective, meaningful interactions (Gray, 2018). The content of the interviews themselves was targeted specifically around the research questions. The intention was to generate original and illuminating data (Gray, 2018), which in turn resulted in high face validity (Swain, 2017) in that there was no intent to deceive, and aims were clear and straightforward. This is important for the transferability and credibility of the data generated because it highlights approaches that other professionals might adopt in similar situations (Mears, 2012) and enables readers to understand and reflect on the experiences of the professionals and the children that they are working with (Todd and Loewenthal, 2007). This was very important for this research because its research questions around pupil premium plus: planning, uses and monitoring, are of relevance for all professionals working in this field providing the data has depth, relevance and credibility.

Semi-structured interviews, therefore, not only fit well with qualitative research (Privitera, 2017) with their emphasis on attitudes, emotions, experiences and behaviours (Wisker, 2001; Gray, 2018) but also effectively document the relationships and interactions between education and social issues (Freebody, 2003). This is because open questions and prompts enable issues to be explored fully and links to be made between concepts and because the flexibility of the approach makes it useful in dealing with sensitive issues (Wisker, 2001). Furthermore, the confidentiality afforded to participants in this research ensured that topics could be discussed at length if desired (Gray, 2018) and provide detailed descriptions of situations and experiences that some participants may find challenging (Denzin, 2001).

The subjectivity of the individual has already been mentioned but it is important to emphasise here that semi-structured interviews, through their adaptability, enable the researcher to capture unique, personal perspectives (Mears, 2012). Our own understandings and experiences are distinctive to us until they are shared with others and the flexibility afforded by the semi-structured interviews enabled that to happen

(Mears, 2012). However, participants will only engage fully if they feel that the interviewer also holds some requisite knowledge, experience and credibility (Freebody, 2003). Therefore, in this study I discussed and commented on my own professional experiences and drew on relevant policy and literature to substantiate a position of knowledge and relevance. By doing this, participants felt more confident to provide their own insights, examples, values and perspectives, thus enriching the data further (Wisker, 2001).

The Challenges of Interviews

As with other research methods, validity and reliability need to be considered during the planning and implementation of data generation and in this work the credibility of the data was prioritised (Gray, 2018). Validity was sought by making sure that the research instruments matched the aims of the study and the use of semi-structured interviews with predetermined questions helped to ensure that a relevant focus was maintained (Gray, 2018). As has already been explained the interview schedule was also shared with non-participant professionals in the fields of social care and education to confirm that questions and themes were appropriate given the research questions. Validity was also promoted in this research through the development of rapport and trust between researcher and participants. This can be challenging, especially when there is not a pre-existing relationship (Mears, 2012) but providing clarity around how the interview is to be conducted, the themes to be explored and the method of recording (Gray, 2018) helps to build the rapport which encourages interviewees to express themselves fully (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This is important to guard against the sort of antagonism that can develop because of the power that each person holds and the possible perceived prying on the part of the interviewer, which can lead to awkwardness and misunderstandings (Wisker, 2001). This was not an issue in the interviews conducted in this research, in part because of my own understanding and knowledge, and also because of the exploratory, rather than expository aims of the study.

Reliability in qualitative research is less to do with replicability (as it is with quantitative research) and more about transparency so clear accounts of, and rationales for, decisions made are key (Mears, 2012). Gray (2018) adds to this, stating that the qualitative researcher should be aiming for consistency in how the tools used identify

and measure the central themes. As such, wherever possible questions were asked in the same way and clarifications were used to confirm meanings of questions and to check for precise meaning of answers where necessary (Gray, 2018). It was acknowledged that the interviewer's demeanour, expression and tone of voice can all influence the reliability of data (Privitera, 2017) and departure from the interview schedule and careless use of prompts were avoided (Oppenheim, 1992).

Despite all of these measures it needs to be acknowledged that interviews do not necessarily capture the views of the participants authentically and in entirety (Freebody, 2003). For example, given the sensitive nature of the topic in question, participants may not answer truthfully to make themselves, their colleagues and their organisation, look better (Swain, 2017). They may also be unwilling to discuss certain topics (Wisker, 2001) and this is most likely if they are unsure how the findings will be used and reported (Gray, 2018). Of course, in this research the information and consent form clearly stated how the findings would be used, and this was reiterated in person prior to the interviews commencing. In some cases, participants may have no knowledge or no opinion regarding the topic in question and therefore may have nothing relevant to add to the research, or feel they have to answer and do so using guesswork or inaccuracies (Swain, 2017). Questions may also be misunderstood (Todd and Loewenthal, 2007) and incorrect answers provided because of poor recall of information (Gray, 2018). Researchers need to acknowledge the potential for reflexivity, where participants provide the answer that they think the researcher is looking for (Gray, 2018) and sometimes just by being asked about a specific topic makes the interviewee think differently about it and so change their pre-existing view (Freebody, 2003). Therefore in this research, the selection of participants, which has already been discussed, was crucial to ensure that only those with relevant knowledge and experience were included, as was the number of participants so that sufficient data could be generated even if there were some gaps from some interviews. Practices within the interviews themselves were also important and care was given throughout not to give away any indications of opinions about the relevance or accuracy of answers that were given (Griffiths, 1998).

Despite implementing these measures, a degree of tentativeness was required in analysing the data and drawing out findings, which will be discussed presently. Interviews are frequently not effective in capturing nuances of expression, tone of voice and pauses (Mears, 2012). Furthermore, in many cases experiences in one situation cannot simply be applied to another because of the differences in context (Freebody, 2003) and we all make sense of what we hear and experience in contrasting ways (Todd and Loewenthal, 2007). This can apply to the interviewees and how they make sense of events in their everyday practice, but also to researchers who can only use their previous experiences to inform and assist with their understanding of interview interactions (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). For example, in this research, participants' comments around care orders, court proceedings, multiagency working and LAC reviews did not need to be defined as my understanding extended to these themes. Instead, clarifications and follow up comments enabled greater understanding in relation to the work's research questions.

Changes to the Research Methodology

Previously in this chapter the change from 26 interview participants to 20 was explained. There were two other differences between what was originally proposed in the project's ethical approval and what was actually undertaken in practice. These are as follows:

- Quantitative survey – at its inception the intention was to conduct a short quantitative survey of virtual school heads in England to find out how they allocated their pupil premium plus to schools. This may have provided useful context but as the research questions continued to be refined, this survey seemed to be at odds with the research's main areas of enquiries of what pupil premium plus is used for, the planning process involved, and how this funding use is evaluated. It was also clear from conducting interviews with DTs that different local authorities were using different approaches to allocating this funding and this does have implications for schools. The survey would have confirmed this but significant additional detail around the different approaches virtual schools use was not needed in this research.
- Focus groups with young people – originally it was intended to include LAC in this research via focus group, in order to ask them about their experiences with pupil premium plus. Some of the other participants did talk about gathering views from

children about support that they might want, or involving them in a way that is appropriate based on their age and understanding. However, it was also clear that in many cases children are receiving support from different funding streams, including the school's substantive budget, special education funding and higher needs funding. Support that is provided may also be part of a school's standard approach to working with vulnerable children, or a school's focus on a particular curriculum area, or in some cases support that is mandated in an Education Health and Care Plan. Therefore, it was decided that it was unrealistic to expect young children to know which supports or interventions were funded by pupil premium plus.

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data analysis should look to compare and contrast different interpretations of generated data, as well as exploring and developing anomalous, unforeseen or disconfirming findings (Freebody, 2003). There are a range of different approaches to such analysis but given its ability to fit with various theoretical frameworks and data collection methods (Robson, 2011) and to explore data in a way that exemplifies different theories (Gibbs, 2007) thematic analysis was implemented in this research. Thematic analysis' emphasis on meaningful interactions, which produce language that details experiences, behaviours, knowledge, perceptions and feelings (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012) made it an effective choice when working with knowledgeable participants in a caring profession (Newby, 2014). The intention here was to bring meaning to data, in this case interview transcripts and pupil premium strategy documents, which could otherwise be raw and inexpressive (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

In qualitative research the understanding sought is reliant on the researcher's interpretation which, in contrast to quantitative methodology, is central to the analysis (Coffey, 1999), and brings coherence via the identification of patterns and development of links between concepts (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Acknowledging this was important for this research given my background and experience working with LAC and related professionals. Denscombe (2010) noted how a researcher's ideas and attitudes can influence the interpretation element of thematic analysis and this study's emphasis

on participants' experiences, meanings and realities (Robson, 2011), all of which are subjective and open to interpretation, brought this into sharp focus. As a result, an emphasis on gaining meaning via plausibility (Robson, 2011), so ensuring that data was matched with codes coherently and acknowledging broader ideas and concepts being discussed, was prioritised (Newby, 2014).

Effective thematic analysis should highlight relationships between concepts, such as the specific needs of LAC and the way that pupil premium plus is allocated (Newby, 2014). Key contrasts in the data can also be made as can comparisons between concepts (Robson, 2011) and while these should be reliable, it should be noted that a lack of consideration for the context can reduce the richness of the findings (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). Therefore, taking account of the overall significance and meaningfulness of data was prioritised (Newby, 2014) to ensure that contextual nuances were not overlooked. This enabled the most efficient application of thematic analysis which not only explains and describes but begins to generate relevant, usable theories (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

The Application of Thematic Analysis in this Research

While this research does not intend to test hypotheses, and acknowledging that the issue of supporting LAC is too nuanced to create catch-all theories that will work in every situation, stakeholders can learn from specific situations if the relevance and transferability is clear. Thematic analysis is useful therefore, because of its ability to build models of understanding and find real world solutions (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012), by drawing out general statements and key underlying theories that can be applied locally (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). As previously stated, codes were used to represent key themes within the research. Crabtree and Miller (1992) identify a continuum of analysis ranging from codes that are completely fixed and pre-determined, to those intuitively drawn from the data. This research fitted somewhere in the middle of this continuum with codes decided beforehand based on existing knowledge, the research's research questions, and key theory. This enabled the identification of key concepts and how they related to one another, while comparing with what is already known in the field (Newby, 2014). However, an element of flexibility was required and so, if relevant, new themes were identified more inductively (or existing ones adapted)

as the data was analysed (Newby, 2014). This was appropriate because the research did not set out to confirm existing hypotheses and wanted to have an exploratory element given the lack of research that exists within this specific field (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). Taking such an approach resonates with the use of purposive sampling and with exploratory research questions (as opposed to a hypothesis) (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012) and provides the opportunity to generate hypotheses for future study (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

The flexibility to develop themes during data analysis is very important because themes that are solely pre-determined can restrict the extent to which the analytical process can respond to emerging issues (Ezzy, 2002). In this research, initial themes were selected that seemed to have relevance for the research questions and the participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) with the flexibility enabling new themes and patterns to emerge as the understanding of the topic deepened (Ezzy, 2002). This also helped to guard against any preconceived ideas enduring if they were not supported by the data (Robson, 2011). The pre-determined themes were: approaches to planning for pupil premium plus, the role of the PEP, the role of the virtual school, academic support, social and emotional support, curriculum enrichment and approaches to monitoring impact of pupil premium plus. Themes that emerged during the analysis included: external monitoring; challenges for professionals; and communication between PEP meetings. The actual analysis was undertaken using the NVivo computer programme.

The Suitability of Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is commonly used with qualitative research and it can be used effectively to summarise large amounts of qualitative data, and has the flexibility to be used with different sorts of qualitative data, in this case interview data and document analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). Its relevance for use with social sciences research and caring professions is emphasised by its effectiveness in evaluating programmes and interventions (in this case pupil premium plus use) and explain phenomena (such as the poor educational outcomes for LAC) (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). In addition, it is able to present comprehensive, sensitive accounts of participants' stories and help the researcher to understand complex life experiences (Newby, 2014).

Clearly the poor outcomes for LAC and the challenges of supporting them is a complex issue and therefore the method of data analysis needs to be similarly sophisticated and able to account for a range of different concepts (such as emotional needs, academic needs and tracking impact) and how they relate to, and affect, each other (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). This happens via the researcher's interpretation of participants' meanings, but crucially with an acknowledgement of what the data looks like in context, rather than by focussing on individual words (Newby, 2014; Gray, 2018). The inclusion of context, the exploration of how concepts relate to one another, as well as emphasising how participants view the issues in question (Robson, 2011; Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013) helps to 'support the emerging story to illuminate the questions being explored and decide how central they are to the story that is unfolding' (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 219). This focus on emerging questions is important as it fits well with the approach taken in this research: beginning with agreed themes but allowing for flexibility should new, relevant ones appear.

In short, effective thematic analysis enables the researcher to move from inferences and considerations of issues to making sense of participants' stories, drawing conclusions and extrapolating lessons (Patton, 2002). This must have relevance for stakeholders and in this research, care was taken to ensure that findings were easily communicable with a range of parties (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As a result, professionals and decision makers can look at these conclusions and identify areas of interest for them and what the implications are for policy and practice (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

The Challenges of Thematic Analysis

The principal criticism of thematic analysis is that it relies on the interpretation of the researcher which potentially reduces its reliability (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012) and that it is very difficult to separate the facts within the data from the interpretations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, not only are the findings inferred but the thematic codes and categories themselves are inferential and therefore can be ambiguous or may reflect the researcher's priorities more than the data can actually support (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). As such, in this study, my own background and perceptions were acknowledged and, as will be clear in the Findings chapter, where necessary the extent to which meaning was inferred was made evident

and care was taken to avoid being selective or unrepresentative with the data (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Fontana and Frey (2000) note that often researchers are not reflective enough, not stating when data was contradictory and not acknowledging challenges or issues, but this is unrealistic and thus the researcher's values and the effect that they have on interpretations and conclusions needs to be acknowledged (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). By doing so this provides an element of objectivity and accuracy which in turn increases the validity of qualitative research (Flick, 2007).

It has also been noted that thematic analysis cannot account for participants purposely glossing over an important concept, or leaving it out altogether, because they do not want to talk about it (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). This was not perceived to be a significant issue in this research although in some cases participants did acknowledge that they did not know as much about pupil premium as they would have liked. This is the sort of issue which interviewees may not want to discuss in detail because of the potential for some level of accountability on their part. It is also possible that coding can overlook some context specific data such as when professionals use different words or acronyms to mean the same thing, or by not adequately reflecting the significance of meaning that the participant had intended (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). This can result in the data being generated without some of the nuances implied by participants, nor the desired richness. To address this, interview summaries were written immediately after the conclusion of the interview but before transcription (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). These were intended to capture the overall 'feel' of the interview and identified key messages and themes which could then be compared to the analysed transcripts later to ensure that the analysis had not missed any of the overriding concepts, thereby supporting the work's validity (Flick, 2007). The plausibility of findings was also considered by comparing the emerging themes with the content of the literature review and with other data (e.g., from DFE) in the field. This was not intended to highlight data to be removed, rather to show any particular surprises in the data worthy of deeper questioning (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

This research takes place within the broad social sciences field and therefore has a responsibility to be inclusive of different interests, perspectives and values (BERA, 2018). Indeed, at the heart of this study is an understanding that different groups, in this case LAC, do face different challenges than their peers, as do the professionals that are working with and for them. Therefore, this research sets out to ensure that these individuals and their views are valued and respected (BERA, 2018). Indeed, studies that are about people and their affairs have a duty to protect their human subjects from harm and this is particularly so for research in real world, contemporary contexts (Yin, 2014). Of course this protection needs to extend to a range of potential harms including physical, mental, social and environment harm (Thomas, 2016) and while this is not necessarily straightforward, especially in case studies which have less formal structure than some other approaches (Yin, 2014), the likelihood of harm occurring can be lessened via some key principles. These include (NRC, 2003):

- participants being fully informed of the purposes of the research;
- consent being sought from, and given by, participants;
- anonymity and confidentiality being provided if originally offered;
- reputations of participants and their employers and / or associated organisations being protected.

The way that these principles were implemented in this research will now be outlined.

Informed Consent

Gaining informed consent is ensuring that participants completely understand what participating in the research actually means and what it is going to entail (Day Ashley, 2012b). This includes information about nature of the research, its goals, how long their participation is likely to take, what they will actually have to do and any potential harm that they may endure because of the study (Day Ashley, 2012b; Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey, 2016). In this research this was achieved via a detailed information and consent letter (see Appendix B). This had been approved by the University of East London's ethics committee and covered all the elements needed for participants to understand what was involved if they decided to take part. This was sent to participants

prior to them agreeing to be interviewed and prior to the interviews themselves. The main purposes and benefits of the research were reiterated and interviewees were able to ask questions. This enabled the fostering of a degree of candour and respect which can provide a positive environment for sharing (Mears, 2012). The priority throughout was for all participants to be treated with respect and no information was kept from them during the process (Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey, 2016). This included clarification that participants had the right to withdraw themselves and their data at any point up to the beginning of data analysis and clarification around data protection.

All participants' data, including any personal information that was gathered, and their own interview responses were kept in accordance with the 2018 Data Protection Act. Therefore, all data was kept securely, irrespective of whether this was in hard copy or electronically. Also, participants were made aware how data was going to be used and who was going to have access to it; in this case only my supervisors and I. Participants were also informed that their data would not be used for any purposes beyond the scope of this research and any linked activities such as journal articles and presentations.

Because the participants are all, by definition, working as part of a larger organisation, consent was also sought from relevant gatekeepers (Piper and Simons, 2011). In the cases of both local authorities the relevant gatekeeper was either the virtual school head or virtual school deputy head. Dowling and Brown (2009) identify the challenges of gaining legitimate gatekeeper consent and this was the case in this research given that many of the participants would be working in multiagency teams with different layers of management (e.g., social workers might report to team managers, service managers, assistant directors). Seeking gatekeeper consent at these multiple layers would have been logistically challenging and time-consuming but it was important to ensure that professionals felt content in participating. Ultimately it was decided that the VSH, as the representative of the corporate parent, and 'lead responsible officer' (DFE, 2018b, p.8) for educational experiences and outcomes, was best placed to provide this for all participants within that local authority. Of course, social workers were able to seek informal consent from managers, just as teachers could discuss and agree participation with head teachers in line with the policies and expectations set down in their settings.

This research has also drawn on document analysis of school pupil premium policies as a source of data. These policies must be published annually on school websites (DFE, 2019d, 2020e) and so they are openly accessible within the public domain. Therefore consent was not needed from the relevant schools to use these, though of course both school and staff names were anonymised in the thesis. The schools were selected from the same two local authorities from which the professional participants were drawn. These local authorities were not named in the research either.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

As previously discussed, respect for participants was a key concern and so it was important that their privacy was maintained by keeping identities confidential (Day Ashley, 2012b). It was hoped that this would give participants the confidence to be honest and answer questions at length (Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey, 2016) as they would be protected from any potential harm that could have been forthcoming had they been named or were identifiable in the thesis (Piper and Simons, 2011). It should be noted that there was some internal confidentiality (i.e., participants not knowing who the other participants were) inherent in the study but this did not apply to all the interviewees because some were identified via snowball sampling. Therefore, by definition, another of the participants would have known that they had taken part.

Participants remained anonymous for the purposes of this research although interviews were conducted either in person, by video conference or by phone, and so I did know the interviewees' identities. It was initially felt that a face-to-face approach was important for the quality of the interviews and the data gathered though some interviews had to take place virtually because of Covid-19. The intention was to enable frank, open discussion (Piper and Simons, 2011) and this was achieved by both in-person and virtual interviews. Furthermore, Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey (2016) note that anonymity can sometimes lead to participants taking less care to answer accurately and carefully because of a perceived lack of accountability. It was important to reduce the likelihood of this.

Risk

It is incumbent on the researcher to minimise the risks faced by participants taking part in any study and study underpinned by social justice must recognise participants' value

and maintain dignity and respect (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2005). In this research the priority was clearly to treat participants with due consideration and to maximise the benefits not only to the research and its interested parties but also to the participants themselves (Mears, 2012) who, it was hoped, would welcome the opportunity to reflect on and discuss pupil premium plus and its allocation. Indeed, the benefits must outweigh the risks for the study to be viable (BERA, 2018) and to be approved by the university's ethics committee.

Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey (2016) identify that there are broadly three stakeholders who may be at risk during social sciences research: the researcher, the participants and the institution, which in this case would be the University of East London. In this research there was very little risk to me given the profile of the participants and the data collection methods. There was a small chance of participants making disclosures during the interviews which might have caused emotional distress but given the systems already in place to support and supervise the participants from schools and social work teams this was unlikely and proved not to be an issue. The university itself was able to minimise the risk to itself via the ethical approval process and rigorous ethics committee (see Appendix C for ethical approval). In this case the research was largely implemented in accordance with what was originally planned and approved by the committee, thereby ensuring that no harm was done to the institution. There were some elements of data collection in the original ethics application that were not used. These decisions were made to fit with the evolving focus of the research and these have already been outlined.

As with the majority of studies there was some risk of harm to the participants in this research and in particular they may have been at risk of emotional distress or discomfort if they felt that they were being judged or that the interviewing was overly intrusive or aggressive. However, this was minimal because in the case of the professionals these were all active stakeholders with agency who were able to understand the risks and make an informed choice based on this (Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey, 2016). That is not to say that there was no further regard given to their well-being as care was taken throughout the interviews to watch for any sign of distress or anxiety and to ask questions accordingly by, for example, changing topic or rephrasing a question (Day

Ashley, 2012b). For example, in one interview a participant spoke at length about the challenges around accountability, justifying choices that had been made, and being able to evidence positive outcomes for young people. In fact, the discussion around this took place earlier in the interview schedule than had been planned; the interviewee tackled these themes indirectly, via a different question. The participant explained feelings and perceptions around this in detail and with passion and it was inferred that this was something that could potentially be a source of stress. Therefore, the originally scheduled question was later omitted because the topic had already been covered and there was no need to potentially cause any discomfort on the part of the participant.

It should also be a priority for the researcher to attempt to minimise any reputational damage to the organisations for which the participants work or are associated with (Brewer, 2007). So in this case that would be schools and social work teams. This may have caused some anxiety for participants, feeling that answers that they gave could lead to criticism of their institution if for example, participants indicated that practice might have been better. A balance was therefore needed because research may find that there are areas for practice improvement but may feel that to report such findings would be unethical (Thomas, 2016). As such, in this research, a focus of exploration, discussion and sharing of approaches was clearly emphasised with the participants, to clarify that the aim was not to expose poor practice or lack of knowledge.

Perspective

Researchers can only approach topics based on who they are, what they have experienced and what they see as being important in our world (Robinson-Pant, 2005) but despite this, it is incumbent on the researcher to communicate all participants' views, ideas and perspectives honestly, fairly and accurately (Mears, 2012). This needs to be a priority in case studies where there is the risk that preconceived positions can be substantiated because usually the researcher brings existing knowledge with him or her into the work (Yin, 2014). To mitigate this, this research included participants with a range of experiences and different roles (social worker, teacher, VSH) which made inclusion of contrasting viewpoints more likely (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, the inclusion of documents enabled a wider selection of approaches to using pupil premium to be explored.

My background has already been outlined during the Introduction chapter but this should be revisited here. It is clear that with a background of virtual school assistant head teacher I had knowledge both of the expectations of professionals around pupil premium plus, and specific approaches taken by schools, although not necessarily those taking part, using pupil premium plus. Indeed, DeLyser (2001) notes the challenges that exist for researchers when they hold role duality, as is the case here. For example, in-depth knowledge of the topic in question can lead to a loss of objectivity (Unluer, 2012) or incorrect assumptions that are not borne out by the data that has actually been gathered (DeLyser, 2001). Furthermore, once participants are aware of a researcher's knowledge and experience they themselves are more likely to omit information which they assume the researcher is already aware of (Smyth and Holian, 2008). To address this the researcher must be acutely aware of these specific effects and take appropriate steps to mitigate them. In this work, I was clear with all participants regarding my background but also explained that the research was exploratory in nature, with no hypotheses nor preconceptions about what was to be found. It was also noted prior to each interview that an aim of the research was about identifying different approaches to supporting LAC via the pupil premium plus and that the research would be highlighting effective practices linked to pupil premium plus and the outcomes for LAC. Of course, there are advantages to this role duality and in this case my knowledge of key terms, policies and historical developments were beneficial and reduced the need to provide clarifications, definitions and context (Unluer, 2012).

Gilbert (2008) explains that interviewer effects can have implications for the accuracy of findings and how they are reported, and this is more likely to be an issue in non-standardised interviews, as in this research which employed a semi-structured approach. The lack of structure, Gilbert (2008) notes, inhibits the ability of the researcher to conduct interviews in the same way each time. With this in mind it was important to minimise these effects and therefore in this research an interview schedule was used to ensure that all of the same topics were addressed and broadly speaking in the same order. It was felt, in contrast to Gilbert's (2008) position, this flexibility to use prompts and probes, and to pursue lines of enquiry, would actually improve the accuracy and significance of the findings because it improved the likelihood of drawing

out ideas and perspectives that were important to the participants (Freebody, 2003; Taylor and Loewenthal, 2007), even if they proved to be contrasting or unexpected.

No rewards or inducements (e.g., financial) were given to the participants as this may have given interviewees the impression that there was some element of cooperation or expectation that they would respond in a particular way (Dowling and Brown, 2009). It could be argued of course that the participants benefitted from taking part in this research from the opportunity to explore the issue of pupil premium plus and support for LAC and by definition, all participants would have some investiture in this topic. Indeed, it was a main aim of the research to promote a shared benefit for both researcher and participants so that both parties saw value in the research process (Loewenthal, 2007).

Conclusions

This chapter has summarised the overall research design and in summary this has had two main aims. The first has been to evidence a coherent design in which choices from paradigm, approach, sample and methods are aligned and work effectively right from overarching principles to the specific research tools used. The second aim has been to maintain the social justice element which was introduced in the Introduction chapter. Different parts of the methodology, such as the selection of the participants, the interview schedule and the ethical considerations were intended to maintain that social justice emphasis so that the right information is gathered from the right people in a fair and ethical way, with the intention of learning more about pupil premium plus, and how it can help support LAC. As previously noted, it was not possible to focus on all the associated groups of vulnerable children. In particular, those working with and for unaccompanied asylum seeking children may feel that that their exclusion from this research may be unjust (Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey, 2016). However, it is hoped that this research will raise the profile of this issue for all LAC and have an indirect benefit for UASC while at the same time emphasising that we cannot assume that all LAC are the same and have the same needs. The next chapter will document the findings gathered via interview and document analysis and start to organise those findings according to the research questions.

5 - Findings

Introduction

This section explores the findings from the data collected from interviews with primary school DTs, social workers and virtual school heads, and is supplemented by the document analysis of pupil premium strategies. The two local authorities will be explored separately in order to maintain the discreteness of the two case studies and to enable readers to more easily identify relevance to their own specific circumstances. This will be followed by a single Discussion chapter which draws out, analyses and develops themes raised in this chapter. The research questions will be revisited in the Conclusion chapter when overall findings are identified and recommendations made. It should be noted that in the participant quotes that follow, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Central to the Findings are the study's research questions:

- How does the pupil premium plus improve the educational outcomes of LAC in primary schools?
- What are the priorities and processes used in planning for the use of pupil premium plus?
- What are the interventions and supports that LAC receive via the pupil premium plus?
- How is the impact of pupil premium plus tracked and monitored?

These will be used in this chapter to give order and structure to the findings though, as will become evident, a number of related topics will be explored as well.

As previously outlined, the two local authorities are quite different in terms of context and profile. Local Authority 1 is large geographically, and has 1807 LAC as of 31/3/20, which equates to 53 per 10000 children. Local Authority 2, one of the London boroughs, has 402 LAC as of 31/3/20, equalling 63 per 10000 children (DFE, 2020d).

Local Authority 1

Planning for the Use of the LAC Pupil Premium Plus

The VSDH explained that in LA1, schools are automatically provided with £1200 per child, from the £2300 per child (correct at the point of the interview, prior to the amount increasing to £2345 per child in April 2020). This is divided into three £400 instalments. This does not apply to independent special schools who have to invoice separately for the funding. Schools wanting any additional funding can apply for it and applications are reviewed and either approved or declined by the virtual school's assistant head teachers. The virtual school also top slices some of the funding and uses it to employ education support officers. It should be noted that because different local authorities have different methods of allocating pupil premium plus, if schools have LAC from different local authorities there may be different methods for accessing the funding for different children.

Senior Leaders

A prominent feature in the document analysis of pupil premium strategies was the use of pupil progress meetings to plan for the use of the funding. These, led by senior leaders and Inclusion / SEND staff, made significant use of quantitative attainment and progress data to inform decision-making, as well as the consideration of pupils' individual needs. Some, though not all of the DTs also mentioned a similar planning process in interviews, again led by the SLT and supported by class teachers who know their children best. Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, which will be discussed shortly, are intended to look at the needs of the individual child, whereas decision-making from SLT can be helpful when looking at more general approaches and building a whole school ethos (Martindale, 2018). Despite being recommended by DFE (2018b) in their guidance around supporting LAC, only one of the DTs said that he used the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) toolkit (2020a). This DT outlined how they had provided training for staff in metacognition and effective feedback. Both of these interventions are shown to have significant impact on attainment and offer value for money. This is aligned with the EEF (2019) guidance that schools should be combining credible research with professional expertise. Another feature of these interventions is that they can benefit all children, not just those attracting pupil premium.

The Personal Education Plan Meeting

The VSDH explained that it was her aim for decisions around the use of pupil premium plus to be made in PEP meetings, which would include the social worker, the DT and the foster carers. This makes sense given that PEPs promote cooperation between education and social care professionals (Hayden, 2005) and that LAC need a supportive network of people around them (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018). This was echoed by the social workers and DTs who also saw this as the ideal forum to plan, and they also noted that the involvement of colleagues from the virtual school in these meetings was helpful. Professionals from CAMHS, the local SEN department and specialists like play therapists were sometimes mentioned as PEP attendees, which is positive and helps to promote information sharing between agencies which can sometimes be a challenge (Mannay *et al*, 2017). Similarly, social workers talked about the importance of having discussions with foster carers prior to PEP meetings to enable some pre-planning about possible interventions. DFE (2018b) also recommend including the child in the PEP, in a way best suiting his or her age and understanding. Children are often able to describe their own needs and should therefore be given information about what is available to them to meet that need (Coulshed and Orme, 2012), thereby exercising their agency (Berridge, 2017). Linda, a social worker, emphasised this point:

> I don't think I have had an experience where we are not in agreement…the child, they might be a little bit reluctant to have extra tuition and if they are not in agreement to engage with that then we won't put it in place…it is very collaborative. (Linda, a social worker in LA1)

PEPs were not explicitly mentioned in the pupil premium strategies though there was reference to the consideration of individual needs and the involvement of children, families and outside expertise, though not social workers nor the VSH.

Between PEP Meetings

While the preference of the VSDH was for decisions around pupil premium plus, and applications, to come from PEP meetings, she was clear that schools could apply in between PEPs if necessary, for example, if there was change in circumstances or a crisis. Sometimes, social workers explained, this may have been the result of other

meetings happening in the interim. For example, as recommended by DFE (2018b) Independent Reviewing Officers would sometimes ask about the pupil premium plus in statutory LAC reviews, and this could result in an action for the social worker to liaise with school with a view to applying for the funding. DTs' views about these sorts of conversations varied and it appeared that some schools would consider these sorts of applications but there needed to be a clear rationale for applying, and they would not just do so on request.

There was also a concern from one of the DTs about the responsiveness of the application system, particularly when a young person's situation changed in between PEPs and perhaps a new or different intervention was needed quickly. Christine (DT) explained that working with vulnerable children is 'a very fast changing picture' and she felt that having to go back and forth to the virtual school was frustrating and time-consuming. Craske's (2018) view on this is interesting as he suggests that schools should try to prioritise the important over the urgent, meaning that they should remain focussed on activities to improve the wider ethos of the school rather than responding to a series of different, short-lived challenges. The extent to how this fits with the needs of an individual child, possibly in crisis, is unclear. Nonetheless in this research disagreements between teachers and social workers appeared to be relatively rare but sometimes resulted from differing views about whether the young person needed any additional support at that time, rather than what that support should be.

The Role of the Virtual School in Planning

Social workers and DTs both spoke about the value of virtual school staff attending PEPs though it is clear, given the number of LAC in this local authority, it would not be possible for the virtual school to attend every one of these meetings. The VSDH echoed this, explaining that teachers and social workers both valued the support that they received from the virtual school in helping them to understand further the roles and priorities in social care or education, which is central to effective multi-agency working (Stoddart, 2012). Professionals seemed to particularly value the opportunity to have discussions with the virtual school either prior to, or during the PEP, regarding applications that they were not sure would be agreed, such as horse riding, and what the application would

need to include for it to be approved. For example, DFE (2018b) state clearly that pupil premium plus should be attached to SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-limited) targets in the PEP, and virtual school attendance was seen as a way to minimise delay based solely on the wording of the target. Of course, when a school has children from more than one local authority, it means that the DT has to work with different virtual schools. Sometimes there are differences between the virtual schools that can make planning support more challenging. For example, Sandra (DT) stated:

> So, I had a child from yet another authority a few years ago who was grammar school, didn't need educational support apart from extending her. And I had the virtual school saying, well, we can spend it on violin lessons, we can spend it on this, we can spend it on that. Whereas other authorities, some of them will spend it on one to one tuition, some of them won't. Some of them will put it on support in school, some of them won't. So, it's trying to find out what they actually will fund. (Sandra, a DT in LA1)

Better communication between services (Connelly and Furnival, 2012) would ultimately benefit LAC because, if nothing else, it would reduce confusion and delay. Some social workers also explained that they were not always, especially at first, completely confident that they understood everything about the pupil premium plus. It was evident that the virtual school had been very informative at that time in circulating advice, but one social worker explained that she and her colleagues were 'playing catch-up' initially. Another noted that there had been a misconception that it was tutoring 'across the board' and that sharing of examples of best practice to inform planning would have been helpful.

Using the LAC Pupil Premium Plus

Needs-led support

When making or contributing to decisions around the pupil premium plus spend, all the professionals in LA1 discussed the importance of meeting the diverse needs of the LAC. Teachers, social workers and the VSDH were all keen to use the funding flexibly, which is reflected in Rivers' (2018) advice for VSHs around the most effective support for young people in care. Keeping the child central to the discussions was clearly important, as Linda, a social worker argued:

> I feel that I work in a very child-focused way so I will go into a meeting and if I feel the child needs something particular for them then I will push that. But I don't usually have any problems with that, so I do feel that everyone else is probably just as child focused as I am and it's not something that I have had issues with when requesting something for them before. (Linda, a social worker in LA2)

Another of the social workers mentioned more than the once that it was very important to not spend the pupil premium plus just for the sake of it, nor choose a particular intervention without good reason. She also praised the creative approaches adopted by some primary schools to using the pupil premium plus and effectively meet LAC's needs.

Some of the different interventions mentioned will be outlined presently, but it is important to note that some of these creative uses come from an emphasis on hearing the pupil's voice. Coulshed and Orme (2012) outline the empowering nature of participation for vulnerable young people. As examples the VSDH explained how they had provided funding for a girl of five to have lessons in her native Russian language, and dance lessons to help another young person learn more about his cultural heritage. In both cases the LAC are being listened to, and supported to understand more about their upbringing, which is valuable (Berridge, 2017). Of course, the needs of many LAC are significant and this will mean that sometimes they will face crises which may need specific interventions. The VSDH was clear about the importance of being able to use the pupil premium plus to support young people when they are in crisis, such as being unable to access full-time education.

It should be noted that the pupil premium strategies did not make explicit mention of a needs-led approach, as they tended to outline specific interventions, costs and impacts. These will be explored next.

Academic Support

Individual tuition with the aim of raising academic attainment was a feature of all of the interviews and of a number of the pupil premium strategies. Berridge (2017) highlights tuition as being one of a number of measures that can be effective for LAC, though it was not always clear the extent to which the child's regular teacher was involved in planning, something which Stoddart (2012) raises as central to the impact.

Interviews with participants did indicate that particular year groups, in the case of the primary age phase, years five and six, were prioritised for tuition. This was because of the need to prepare children, especially those vulnerable or lower achieving, for SATs or the Eleven Plus tests and they fit with the DFE's (2018b) aim for pupil premium plus to close the attainment gap. Indeed, government's intention here does seem to privilege academic achievement, which may of course be right for some young people, but may not meet the pastoral needs of others (Mannay *et al*, 2017).

The focus on academic attainment is also reflected by the curriculum subjects in which tuition or other interventions were provided. Document analysis of the pupil premium strategies showed that mathematics and English (including phonics and reading interventions) were mentioned far more than any other subject, and while this was not a key feature of the interviews with DTs, both the VSDH and social workers noted academic subjects were most commonly supported. One social worker explained that this was reasonable because some of her LAC were behind in these subjects because of their past experiences, while another said that she felt it was because the academic results affected the school and that they had a status to maintain as a high achieving school. Barrett (2018) accepts that this is difficult for schools when making these decisions, given that they obviously want their impact to be wider than just academic, but they are only judged on their academic results. The extent to which the curriculum is narrowed by these approaches is unclear, but it is a consideration given that some LAC may have already missed periods of schooling (Connelly, 2013).

Some of the DTs said that they used the pupil premium plus to employ staff specifically to work with pupil premium children, either in class or in withdrawn intervention groups. While the EEF (2020a) indicate that teaching assistants have limited impact on pupil outcomes, Palmer (2017) explains that these can be very effective providing they are targeted, well-planned and monitored. In a similar vein Stella (VSDH) explained that her virtual school used some of the pupil premium plus to employ staff to support LAC and school staff:

> So they are providing individual support to the children as necessary and as capacity allows, but the school has pupil premium plus funding itself to get tutors in so we wouldn't expect our support teachers to be doing long term tutoring but

> we do use them if necessary, for example when a child has just come into care, just changed schools…They do a lot of work on transition as well so years 6 or 7 transition. They will be doing goodbyes and making sure the child feels confident about their next step. (Stella, virtual school deputy head in LA1)

The work around moving from primary to secondary school is interesting and relevant as LAC may need extra support around transition (Brewin and Statham, 2011). The VSDH's approach aligns with Webster's view (2017) that using a small number of designated staff to support transition is effective as they are able to liaise with families and agencies, and address any emotional, educational and social challenges.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health Support

The social, emotional and mental health needs faced by some LAC, as well as some of the causes, have been explored earlier in this thesis. It is therefore to be expected that support of this nature is supported by government, though not as explicitly as academic support is. DFE (2020g) notes that pupil premium can be used to support children's confidence and resilience, while the education of LAC guidance (DFE, 2018b) suggests the use of therapeutic work where it might avert exclusions, and the promotion of positive relationships and improved self-esteem. It was clear from the interviews that primary schools are well aware of the SEMH challenges faced by their pupils and a wide range of specialist interventions were mentioned. These included play therapy, positive attachment programmes, nurture rooms and counselling. Schools also described using the pupil premium plus to purchase resources associated with children's mental health and well-being, such as weighted blankets, Lego for Lego therapy, and soft day beds. The central theme was again the personalised approach, based on need. The document analysis of pupil premium strategies reflected this as well with counselling, nurture groups and mentoring all featuring prominently, as well as staff training in mental health first aid.

There was also alignment between the strategies and the interviews in the specialist external services that primary schools employed using the pupil premium plus. In both cases educational psychologist support or assessments were included, as were speech and language therapy. This sort of expert help ensures a better understanding of the

child's problems and more appropriate interventions (Berridge, 2017; Cross, 2018). Christine, a DT, was clear that this would support attainment in time:

> You've got to get the wellbeing right so that they can attain. And so we will always start with the wellbeing of that child and making sure that child is happy and safe and has a place that they can talk about things and work out their problems because actually… they're not ready to learn otherwise. So you can put in all the extra tutoring you want and all the extra interventions you want. But it's not going to work for most of those children. (Christine, a DT in LA1)

Oliver, also a DT made a similar argument:

> Well, like anything, you have to be in your right frame of mind to be able to learn. So I think first and foremost, you need that sort of emotional stability and security or place or feeling where you can vent, disclose or talk about, just gaining confidence first and foremost and then you can. (Oliver, a DT in LA1)

As with academic support, primary schools used the pupil premium plus to employ staff with more of a behavioural, pastoral or socialisation role, although it should be noted that it is possible for the same staff member to support academically and socially at different times of the day. Examples included behavioural support at unstructured times, learning mentors and family liaison officers, who, as Richards (2017) recommends, are able to work with parents and carers as well as make links with other agencies and professionals. However, Christine, a DT, argued that sometimes accessing the funding was more challenging:

> So it's easy when you're putting in those interventions for those [academic subjects] because it's measurable and you can see the impact…But when it's their, you know, wellbeing or it's additional things it's more difficult to get the funding for that. It's achievable, but you do have to fight for it. (Christine, a DT in LA1)

In another example a social worker explained that even though the funding had been agreed for a lunchtime support worker, the school had been unable to find anyone to fill the role.

Enrichment

Chapter 3 of this thesis noted that extra-curricular activities have significant social, emotional and academic benefits for LAC (Barber *et al*, 2005; Brewin and Statham, 2011; Gilligan, 2013; Tickle, 2016) and that this can include sport, art, music, culture and animals. This is reflected in practice in this research with DTs and the VSDH explaining that pupil premium plus was used to support LAC's engagement in extra-curricular activities, including through the provision of equipment. This was also a feature of the pupil premium strategies, with breakfast club another example. The EEF toolkit (2020a) indicates that these sorts of interventions, while of low-moderate cost have a limited impact on attainment. However, the toolkit itself acknowledges that it is referring to academic attainment and therefore the direct, short-term correlation is hard to draw.

Another similar use that was discussed in interviews and features in the strategies is school trips. Social workers and the VSDH acknowledged that trips really needed to have a clear purpose to justify the use of pupil premium plus funding, and should not be funded if they are just a luxury. However, the participants did add that for some LAC a genuine, worthwhile purpose could be the social gains that they might make on such a trip and for these, attendance should be prioritised, a position supported by Berridge (2012a).

One of the social workers talked passionately about wanting to give her LAC every opportunity to identify interests and talents that could be pursued in the future and so engagement with different activities and specialist equipment was one of the means to achieving this. Given the low educational outcomes explained earlier (DFE, 2020a) it makes sense for this to be pursued. One of the ways to do this is via an enriching curriculum (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008) and a similar outlook was shared by Oliver, a DT, albeit discussing vulnerable children more generally:

> My philosophy is to make sure we give children as many experiences as possible so that when they leave school: 'I remember doing that, I am going to do that or actually I could do this and I could do that'…I think that it would be more worthwhile spending the money [on different experiences] than sort of ramming home about maths, English and science because you can have a fantastic life not being brilliant at any of those things and I think the fact that you're always pushing

that means that you know artists, musicians, software designers, whatever, are kind of being restricted and it would be better to say actually these are all the jobs out there you could do when you're older, which one takes your fancy or what things you're interested in. Well this is what you need to do to do that, here are some experiences to really inspire them because when they're faced with all kinds of crap happening at home, that might be the only thing that keeps them going. (Oliver, a DT in LA1)

Monitoring the impact of the LAC Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Progress Meetings

According to the interviews with DTs, a common means of monitoring the outcomes for LAC were pupil progress meetings, and these were also named explicitly in the pupil premium strategies. These meetings apply to all children, not just LAC and appeared to be a forum for looking at numerical attainment data to identify how children are progressing, reviewing existing work and deciding where additional support might be needed. This is unsurprising given the increased attainment accountability that schools are facing (Bradbury, 2014) and the overwhelming data scrutiny from external bodies like Ofsted (Craske, 2018). A key challenge when trying to attribute a child's progress to a specific intervention is that there are frequently different variables in play at any one time. As one of the DTs explained, and supported by Morris and Dobson (2020), there tends to be concurrent supports for these children and so linking an increase in attainment to one single intervention is difficult.

The pupil premium strategies also made mention of lesson observations and learning walks as a means to monitor what is happening in classrooms. These were only noted in passing in the interviews, but one DT did explain that these sorts of activities helped to inform continuing professional development decisions, and as we have already seen, these could be funded via pupil premium plus.

PEP Meetings

The majority of DTs and social workers explained that the PEP meeting was the key forum to discuss in more detail the attainment and well-being of LAC. Targets from the previous PEP would be reviewed and new ones set. Where targets were linked to the

pupil premium plus funding, this would form part of the discussion to see whether the spend had been effective and if it needed to continue or change to something else, as Linda (SW) explains:

> If there has been tuition, we would discuss it because we would have a record of the child's progression over the year so if we find there has been significant improvement in that particular area…we would look at maybe other areas, so for example if the progression was in maths then maybe we would look at does English now need this [support]. We might transfer it over to English. (Linda, a social worker in LA1)

In agreement, one of the DTs explained that having clear links between targets and funded interventions made monitoring easier. Each LAC should have three PEPs each year and this does give clear points in the calendar when data needs to be ready to inform discussion and this may guard against a situation described by Craske (2018) where schools spend so long collecting data that they do not have enough time to use it.

Monitoring well-being and social emotional and mental health

The challenges that LAC face around well-being and health have already been discussed at length in chapter 3 and therefore it is to be expected that this may be discussed in both pupil progress meetings and PEPs, as would pupil premium plus-funded interventions intended to address these issues. Indeed, it was clear that both social workers and teachers were keen to see a positive impact of these sorts of interventions (e.g., counselling, play therapy) even though sometimes progress in these areas had to be described more qualitatively than quantitatively. Barrett (2018) explains that trying to justify spending pupil premium on non-academic interventions can cause anxiety in teachers because of the challenge of evidencing impact. However, one of the social workers explained that she actually liked to hear the narrative, and another said that alongside tuition reports she wanted to hear about the child's engagement, concentration and relationships.

Some of the DTs outlined their mechanisms for tracking the improvement of children's well-being with one using pupil questionnaires and a Leuven scale, and another holding

weekly well-being meetings where vulnerable children are discussed. This is challenging for primary schools though as it is difficult to measure and there is no agreement in how to define well-being (McLellan and Steward, 2015). The DTs were aware of this issue and some emphasised the difficulty in trying to prove that a certain intervention has led to an improvement in social, emotional and mental health. One DT, Sandra, noted that there are not always quick outcomes:

> When we had the therapist potentially you could say, well actually they seem much more settled but I'm not sure. Just thinking back to one of the boys that we did it for, I'm not sure we could necessarily see that impact straight away. What you hope is that longer term it is going to have had an impact on his emotional wellbeing. (Sandra, a DT in LA1)

The pupil premium strategies also showed that a greater emphasis on monitoring progress in English and maths. Attendance also featured strongly, probably because this is something that schools are judged on by Ofsted (2019c) and it is easy to measure and compare.

Monitoring and communication in between PEPs

Poor accountability and monitoring can adversely affect educational outcomes for LAC (Mannay *et al*, 2017) but this was not evident here. There appeared to be a general consensus amongst the social workers that they would need to be proactive and contact primary schools in between PEPs if they wanted updates about how interventions were going, or how much progress had been made. Of course, social workers do see the children and their foster carers more frequently than the three times a year PEPs, but as one of the social workers pointed out, it is less likely that children and foster carers will be able to explain how many points or levels of progress has been made in a certain subject. One of the social workers acknowledged that sometimes schools have a specific monitoring cycle which means that there may be a delay before progress data is available.

Some of the schools did state that they initiated contact with social workers and foster carers in between PEPs, though not specifically to discuss pupil premium plus. Rather this would be general information and collaboration, which is important for quality care for LAC (NICE, 2013a). In these contacts pupil premium plus would sometimes feature,

though one of the DTs explained that foster carers in particular were less concerned about where the funding was coming from, and more to do with whether children were receiving support and what it was.

The relationship between the primary school and social worker is important in monitoring and communication; one of the DTs noted that this is made more challenging if there are regular changes of worker. When the relationship is strong, Rhiannon, one of the social workers explained, schools are more likely to initiate contact with social workers to share educational information:

> And it does depend on your relationship with some schools. Some schools are too busy and don't have time for that, some schools changed over their staff and again that impacts on it but generally I would be the one to be the proactive one. It's not often that you'll get something. You'll get safeguarding concerns from schools. You'll get them within seconds of them happening. But you won't get that, no. (Rhiannon, a social worker in LA1)

This seems to support Richards' (2018) view that there remains significant uncertainty in schools around reporting safeguarding concerns, and that this is compounded by a lack of feedback from social care about the appropriateness of these referrals.

External monitoring

The VSH's responsibilities regarding pupil premium plus include monitoring its use via each child's PEP (DFE, 2019f) and this was echoed by LA1's VSDH who said that this enabled the virtual school to see which schools are making progress with their LAC. Use of an electronic PEP enables the virtual school to collect data and targets from each PEP remotely, although one of the DTs did say that sometimes they were also asked to provide attainment levels separately. Stella, the VSDH was very clear that progress will look different for different children:

> It's not always about attainment, sometimes it's about the child remaining in school for eighty percent of the time and that's an achievement. So it will vary, so yes it's on a case-by-case basis almost but broad brushstrokes…the fact that our attainment levels where we've had specific projects in mind, they have improved; where we put support in various schools we've seen a reduction in fixed term

> exclusions for example; we haven't had any permanent exclusions this year, we haven't had any for four years now. (Stella, the virtual school deputy head for LA1)

This highlights that LA1's virtual school understands that success is not always about academic attainment. The virtual school's assistant head teachers also visit each school at least once an academic year which enables more detailed analysis of each young person's situation and the school's use of pupil premium plus. This appeared to be much more than just the collection of numerical data.

Another layer of oversight comes from the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs, see Glossary) and statutory LAC reviews. DFE (2018b) state that IROs should be scrutinising the PEP, which forms the education element of the child's care plan, in LAC reviews. Social workers explained that this happened, and that pupil premium plus was part of this discussion, either because they would raise it when talking about education, or because IROs would ask what the pupil premium plus is being spent on.

Of course, perhaps the most significant scrutiny that schools face is from Ofsted, and having to evidence the range of pupil premium-funded activities can apply significant pressure (Barret, 2018). However, the general consensus from the DTs in this research was that Ofsted did not ask in detail about the LAC pupil premium plus. They explained that pupil premium generally had been discussed with the head teacher and that Ofsted had looked at the school's pupil premium strategy online, but had not pursued a detailed discussion about LAC. This was unexpected because the new Ofsted school inspection handbook (2019) explicitly discusses the use and impact of pupil premium and the experiences of LAC. Similarly, the House of Commons briefing paper (Foster and Long, 2020) says that Ofsted will ask headteachers about how they manage the LAC pupil premium plus and for evidence of it supporting LAC achievement. One of the DTs suggested that Ofsted were mainly interested in 'significant groups' and while LAC do certainly count as significant (Mackay, 2019) the DT suggested that Ofsted would review data around certain groups pre-inspection and come to the school with specific foci in mind based on that.

Ofsted also inspect virtual schools and the VSDH, in contrast with the schools, explained that Ofsted did want to know how they were able to show the impact of

the pupil premium plus spend. She explained that they provided data to show academic progress and used a Boxall profile (a tool to measure social, emotional and mental health) regarding well-being. They were also able to highlight trends which, in this case showed that English outcomes were very positive but maths outcomes were lower and so needed to be targeted going forward. It is clear that there are many factors affecting LAC attainment and therefore providing a narrative was very important for the VSDH who gave the example of children coming into care in year ten resulting in the virtual school having a limited period of time to support them prior to exams in year eleven.

Local Authority 2

The VSH explained that in LA2, schools are allocated approximately half of the pupil premium plus directly in three termly payments. The virtual school retains the other half and schools can apply for additional funding should they need it, for interventions identified via the PEP, which is the main monitoring tool. The VSH gave examples of additional tuition and staff attachment training as things that schools might apply for. She explained also that the reason for this half and half split was to ensure that the funding was used efficiently and not just being pooled with other sources of money and not benefitting the LAC. Some of the funding that is retained is used to employ PEP champions who attend PEPs, support DTs and RAG rate PEPs.

Planning for the Use of the LAC Pupil Premium Plus

The Personal Education Plan Meeting

As recommended by DFE (2018b) the PEP meeting was the key forum for planning and discussions around the pupil premium plus, with all interviewees making mention of it. This is, they explained, where positive collaboration could take place between the DT, social worker and foster carers (Hayden, 2005). Some participants also talked about including the child, based on their age and understanding and this can be helpful in developing positive, enriching relationships (Maclean, Finch and Tedam, 2018) providing he or she really is given a voice and tokenism is avoided (Coulshed and Orme, 2012):

> I've had really good relationships with most of the schools that we've worked with and I find that that's really important to get that balance with the communications

> to enable us to get what we need for the young people, but I also think it's really important for them to have a say as well. They're important, what they feel that they need, as opposed to it just being the adults around them. (Jane, a social worker in LA2)

Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner (2018) suggest that a lack of a support network including professional expertise can be an issue for LAC but here teachers talked about the role of CAMHS and educational psychologists; they would either attend PEPs or if that was not possible share views ahead of the meeting. Teachers and social workers also commented that the network, or some members of it, meeting prior to the PEP was useful. Social workers and foster carers would discuss what they thought were the child's main needs while one of the DTs explained that he would have similar informal conversations with the foster carers. Conversations in between PEPs were also mentioned by one of the DTs who explained that sometimes changes or additions were needed and that he would contact the social worker by phone to discuss, before applying for extra pupil premium plus. Social workers and DTs noted that sometimes, based on capacity the virtual school would be involved in PEPs. One of the social workers explained that this was very useful as these PEP Champions would help with the wording of targets and advise on what would be an effective use of the funding.

The agreement of targets appeared to be an important element in the PEP / pupil premium plus process. DTs and the VSH explained that the targets agreed in the PEP needed to be linked to the pupil premium plus, and that then the PEP had to be quality assured by the virtual school. Assuming that the PEP was deemed to be either good or outstanding the funding would be released to the school and the VSH was clear that if the PEP was not good enough then the school would not receive their funding. Accountability measures can sometimes narrow the provision that is available to schools and children (Barrett, 2018) but this does not seem to be the case here and Ian, one of the DTs explained why he did not think it was issue:

> At the time of going to press…schools are financially struggling on, they are actually struggling and that money could be filled into different pots, so I think it

> is building a degree of accountability for the looked after child, so I think that's useful, that's beneficial. (Ian, a DT in LA2)

The decision-making process will be discussed in more detail later but it was worth noting here views around leading the meeting. DFE (2018b) state that the PEP is the joint responsibility of the DT, the VSH and the social worker. However, some social workers were clear that they expected the DT to lead the meeting, given that it is principally an education meeting and that the DT is the education expert. One of the social workers explained that she felt the better schools, those that were more confident in their support for LAC and use of pupil premium plus, would more happily lead the meeting than some other schools. This does to some extent resonate with Martindale (2018) who explained that many schools are uncertain how pupil premium plus can be used effectively.

It should be noted that the pupil premium strategies did not mention PEP meetings. These strategies do of course cover the different types of pupil premium, not just the LAC pupil premium plus but this was surprising nonetheless. Mainly the strategies reflected an emphasis on the SLT and inclusion team making decisions, though with some communication with families and children. Other colleagues such as subject leaders and the assessment coordinator were also involved. The use of research, such as the EEF toolkit, to inform planning was mentioned in the strategy documents, unlike in the interviews. Some of these points will be revisited presently.

Negotiation and Decision-Making

Despite there being agreement across all participants that the PEP was the place for collaborative working there was not a consensus amongst the interviewees as to the level of negotiation and consultation. Several DTs and social workers explained that disagreements were rare and that discussions balanced the priorities of the different professionals, while focussing on the needs of the child. For example, Ian (DT) explained:

> We sit around the table and it's a very transparent process, we have a lot of stakeholders involved in that child… with different perspectives and I think it's very important that those are shared and very transparent for the benefit of the pupil and if we've got number of professionals around a child all pulling in different

> directions, at the end that's, for a looked after child, who's probably not in a good place emotionally in the first place it just makes it all the more confusing. So yeah, I think having all the people around the table at the PEP being transparent, being open, being honest, that can only benefit the child. (Ian, a DT in LA2)

However, some social workers felt that there should be greater consultation with them and that sometimes it was a challenge to get what they felt the child needed, rather than what the school wanted. It is not unusual for different agencies to have different priorities (Beckett and Horner, 2016) nor for there to be difficulties in education and welfare services working together (Townsend, Berger and Reupert, 2020). While this did not appear to be a widespread issue in this research, social workers did note times when they needed to highlight the child's need from their perspective, as Francine, a social worker explained:

> Obviously as school is education, they're very focused on their education. We have to really argue that look if we don't address the emotional side or social, the behavioural side, then the child will have poor outcomes from the education side. But sometimes it's not true, you know, them not being capable. They may be very capable, but they need the right resources that often schools don't seem to highlight that to us. It's generally us that highlight that to them. (Francine, a social worker in LA2)

Another social worker, Stacy, held a similar view and argued that social workers would perhaps see things differently, despite school taking the lead:

> I say, "Listen. This is what needs to be done" because I'm seeing something. But really it's the school who makes all the decisions and they consult amongst themselves as to what we're going to do with this premium and how long and how much and who's going to sign the budget and stuff. It's really—it doesn't really bring us in. (Stacy, a social worker in LA2)

Indeed, one social worker explained that sometimes discussions needed to continue outside of the PEP meeting in order to reach a consensus, while another social worker noted that she would have felt more confident to make suggestions around uses for the

pupil premium plus if she had a better understanding of the policy itself. When it comes to making a final decision, in the event of a disagreement about the use of the pupil premium plus, most social workers and DTs acknowledged that, as the experts in education, it would be the DT who would make the decision. Brown *et al* (2019) explain that the best foster carers act in exactly the same way as committed parents would do and Harold (DT) saw them in this way:

> Well, I mean I've never had to get down to a final decision where I've had a conflict, so if I said the final decision rests with me, would probably be a little bit high and mighty…I'm not even sure I can tell you who the final decision would ultimately rest with. I would imagine it would be the carer's decision but I've never really contemplated it because we've never had an issue like that. So, you know, in the same way it would be a parent because the parent's voice is the one…they're the ultimate advocate for their child. So, they [foster carers] should be taken into consideration at the highest level. (Harold, a DT in LA2)

Other Planning Forums

Social workers and DTs both indicated the PEPs were the main forums for discussing pupil premium plus and how it should be used. One of the DTs also explained that the school held regular safeguarding meetings, which included senior school staff and used information provided by class teachers. He said that pupil premium was also discussed there. The safeguarding focus is relevant, and emphasises the health and wellbeing challenges that LAC frequently face (Gushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007; CFCA, 2014). The same DT added that in many cases decisions about what pupil premium was to be spent on, were made by the senior leadership team. This is reflected by the pupil premium strategies which showed clearly that SLT are usually the decision-makers. Some of the strategies indicated pupil progress meetings were an important forum regarding pupil premium, while others made mention of a pupil premium lead or pupil premium panel, neither of which featured in the interviews. One of the social workers explained that while education did frequently feature in other meetings, it would be unusual for significant planning around pupil premium plus to occur anywhere other than PEPs.

Role of the Virtual School in Planning

Social workers and DTs generally spoke positively about the role of the virtual school in supporting the pupil premium plus planning process. As recommended by DFE (2018b) this local authority's virtual school were involved in drawing up plans to support individual LAC. One DT outlined how he had worked with the virtual school's advisory teacher to plan interventions for a particular young person, and associated pupil premium plus applications. This speeded up the process of accessing the necessary funds. Another DT explained that the virtual school were quick to set up the ePEP for children new in to care, so that there was no delay in accessing support, as NICE (2013b) recommend. The virtual school also supported DTs with discussions about applications for funding in addition to the termly instalments. By being open to these conversations before applications are made, this again speeds up the process and reduces the likelihood of schools needing to reapply. Another example of the positive multiagency collaboration that is sometimes missing (Connelly and Furnival, 2012) came from a social worker who explained that if she had questions or concerns about the way that the pupil premium plus was being used she could contact the virtual school for support and advice.

Planning Challenges

Virtual school heads have flexibility to distribute the pupil premium plus in a way that they feel makes sense based on their specific circumstances (DFE, 2018b). Of course, it is quite usual for schools to have LAC from different local authorities and this may mean that there are different methods for accessing the pupil premium plus for different children. One of the DTs, Harold, explained that they received different amounts of money from different local authorities, and that the forms were different. He also felt that the paperwork around the pupil premium plus was excessive:

> So you're filling in your targets and then you put down that you required the pupil premium plus funding…so I'd put the amount that it required so they [the virtual school] now know the amount you require for this funding. And then I was completely unaware that there was another form elsewhere we had to use to activate that. (Harold, a DT in LA2)

Another DT, Ian, had similar feelings about the level of information required, this time on the ePEP:

> It is a lot the bureaucracy and paperwork and justification…You know we live, we very much live at a current time in an educational environment, in the climate of austerity and that includes time as well, you know it's teachers' time, social workers' and professionals' time, etc…The process could be streamlined and we could still get the same outcomes is what I feel…It's more about justifying a school's existence and making them accountable rather than actually benefiting the child. (Ian, a DT in LA2)

Maclean, Finch and Tedam (2018) argue that while information sharing is important, professionals should ensure that they are only sharing what is necessary and that this should be done in a timely fashion. As these two examples demonstrate, requests for additional information can take longer to provide and slow the process.

One of the social workers also explained that sometimes there is a delay in schools being able to actually get the resource once funding has been provided. Another issue that was raised by a social worker was schools simply saying that they did not have the funding. The social worker could not say why this was the case. It is possible for example, that the funding had already been spent, or that applications had been made but rejected, but Foster and Long (2020) state that sometimes pupil premium is used to plug gaps in school budgets, and therefore is not available for the specific children. Whether this is the case here, is unclear, but any delay to children receiving the resources or interventions they need must be avoided.

Using the LAC Pupil Premium Plus

Schools' Different Approaches

It was evident from the interviews with the DTs that primary schools adopted different approaches for using the pupil premium plus. The document analysis showed that this was supported by the pupil premium strategies which included a wide range of different uses and objectives, and these will be outlined presently. As previously explained, DFE (2018b) is clear that the funding should be used to close the attainment gap between

LAC and non-LAC pupils but there are different ways of doing this. One of the social workers, Stacy, explained that different approaches were to be expected:

> I supposed it's all about interpretation, isn't it? How you interpret, what is that, closing that gap? The attainment gap? What does that mean? I would imagine for each head or whoever's got the budget, they would probably interpret it differently if you haven't got any set guidance from virtual school or whoever is here saying this is what we mean, we're not limited just to Math, English and French. (Stacy, a SW in LA2)

Of course, both virtual schools and primary schools have flexibility to use the pupil premium plus as they feel is most appropriate, and Rivers (2018) argues that this flexibility is very important. This was clearly reflected in discussions around the balance between academic support and social and emotional support as different participants had different thoughts as to which of these seemed to be prioritised. Some of the participants felt that there was a balance between academic interventions and social / emotional interventions, while others indicated an emphasis one way or another. In actuality, more DTs felt that emotional support was prioritised in their schools, although the pupil premium strategies, which do cover all types of pupil premium, seemed to place a slightly greater emphasis on academic support.

There were other considerations and interpretations. One DT outlined how all pupil premium children received certain resources or benefits and then the school made other choices on an individualised basis. These core resources included half-price uniform, free school trips and half-price PE equipment. This is an interesting approach because the virtual school head explained that they would not usually fund things via application that she felt that foster carers should be able to provide with their allowance. She gave the example of school clubs. Indeed, DFE (2015b) recommends that virtual school heads should not use money to fund things like uniform and school transport if they retain funding and do not allocate it all to schools. However, the DT in this case explained that she felt that funding trips actually helped to reduce some of the pressures on foster carers. There was significant reference made to parental support as well as clubs and trips in the pupil premium strategies. This indicates that in some cases primary schools are seeing foster carers in the same way as parents. An example of this

was outlined by a DT who said that the LAC at his school were invited to attend breakfast club. This would usually be a means to ensure that vulnerable children started the day with a healthy breakfast and were in school on time to start the day. This would not normally be a concern for LAC living in foster care but, the DT explained, breakfast club for these children was beneficial in supporting social skills, and enabled them to arrive at school at a different time from adult relatives dropping off other children. Morris and Dobson (2020) explain the schools' spending decisions, particularly those not related to the curriculum should be supporting children's social skills and cultural capital, so this school's approach makes sense.

Decisions around the use of pupil premium to support different groups and the pooling of pupil premiums has further relevance here. The breakfast club example shows how LAC may benefit from support usually intended for other vulnerable groups but there are other different, but similar practices being applied. EEF (2019) indicate that non-pupil premium children can benefit from interventions funded by pupil premium and DFE (2020g) give some specific examples of vulnerable children for whom this might apply. These include young carers and those with a social worker. What was clear from some of the DTs in this research was that they wanted to provide support that was right for the child and that if pupil premium plus was funding or part-funding interventions or resources, they would not exclude non-LAC pupils who would benefit. Martindale (2018) argues that strategies that are effective with LAC are often effective with other vulnerable children, so this approach is efficient and appropriate.

Needs-Led Support

All the participants spoke about the importance of support being individually tailored to the young person's needs, as advocated by Berridge (2017), Martindale (2018) and Townsend, Berger and Reupert (2020). One of the social workers talked about the need to be creative in planning and not just defaulting to funding books and tuition. The balance between academic and social / emotional support is a key decision to make, and this has particular relevance here when thinking about children's needs. It has already been identified that pupil premium plus should be used to close the attainment gap (DFE, 2018b) but it is clear that schools do not view this to mean that only academic interventions and resources can be funded. This is appropriate because the attainment

gap's causes are complex and deep-rooted and closing it is a challenging task. Sometimes it is most relevant to address behavioural difficulties and aspirational deficits before focusing on academic subjects and sometimes providing social and emotional support can lead to academic progress (Morris and Dobson, 2020). The professionals clearly understood this, with Francine (SW) explaining:

> So often we've seen with some of our children that have had traumas or whatnot and claiming counselling or therapy intervention will obviously impact their ability to meet their educational attainments, and kind of one impacts the other from our experience. (Francine, a social worker from LA2)

Ian, a DT, made a similar point:

> If the child is not in a good place with their emotional well-being, you've got no chance whatsoever of moving them along [academically]…if it's clear that we need to look more on addressing the social to move the academic, then we'll do that and I mean we have used pupil premium to buy musical instruments and to enable students to use some of those funds to join the dance group of boys…So if you are addressing the emotional well-being of the child and they feel in a good place then they're inclined to learn. (Ian a DT from LA2).

Speech and language interventions and therapy featured significantly in the pupil premium strategies and one of the social workers explained that it was something that had been funded by pupil premium plus because it was important for one of her young people. LAC are more vulnerable to speech, language and communication needs (Scannapieco, 2008, cited in Wellbourne and Lesson, 2013; Cross, 2018). This is something that has implications for both children's social and behavioural needs, and their academic attainment.

Using pupil premium plus to fund interventions for children with significant special educational needs can be challenging for primary schools though, because they are already funded by DFE to support children with SEND. The VSH raised this, explaining that school funding is under significant pressure at present and therefore she had to make sure that she wasn't providing pupil premium plus for support that had effectively

already been paid for once. Harold, one of the DTs echoed this, noting how for LAC he had to make sure that what they received from pupil premium plus was in addition to what they would expect to receive from the school's SEND funding:

> So we're not going to sit there and bill a local authority using pupil premium plus money for interventions they're already entitled to. So it's about making sure that we're taking that further. (Harold, a DT in LA2)

Academic Support

Given what has already been established about the focus on the attainment gap it is to be expected that the pupil premium strategies should include a range of interventions and approaches intended to support academic progress. Schools seemed to be allocating funding to provide support for children either by teachers or teaching assistants. These tend to focus on English and mathematics and most commonly years five and six, which have most relevance for the end of key stage two SATs. This was echoed by the VSH and social workers who discussed the use of small group support, in maths for example, and in the build up to key exams. The EEF (2019) advocate for a real emphasis on quality first teaching to improve outcomes for all children and also note that this can make a significant difference for vulnerable children. This featured less often in the pupil premium strategies but some of the DTs actually raised this as being more important for attainment than specific interventions. For example, Ian (DT) stated:

> It's not about objects, it's about curriculum, it is about quality of teaching, it's about the quality of the teachers that you've got in classroom, good recruitment, good CPD training, it's about creating the best environment for those pupils to go into. So regardless of whether a child has a laptop or doesn't have a laptop, if they're going into a class with a good teacher who knows about the child, where they've had a dialogue with the designated teacher or the person who is working closely with that child, that child will progress. (Ian, a DT in LA2)

The VSH explained that schools might use pupil premium plus to fund staff training and this could help to develop the level of teaching quality that the DT is referring to.

Individual tuition was an intervention that teachers, social workers and the VSH all said was implemented with LAC. Berridge (2017) explains that this can be positive if it is used appropriately with children who need it, rather than for all, and the EEF (2020a) suggest that while it can have an impact on attainment it is expensive and so may not represent value for money. Tuition was rarely mentioned explicitly in the strategies though some of the adult support already mentioned could have been in the form of individual or small group support.

Resources to support attainment also featured in the interviews and the document analysis of the pupil premium strategies. Most commonly discussed was digital technology like tablets and laptops, with both teachers and social workers using pupil premium plus to secure these resources. Berridge (2012a) suggests that it is important for children to have access to a computer at home, to help them with homework, while the EEF (2020a) indicate that digital technology provides a moderate impact on attainment for moderate cost. However, Corinne (VSH) was not keen to fund the provision of laptops:

> We don't generally [fund] things like laptops, the whole laptop issue which was a big thing a few years ago, give looked after children a laptop and apparently that's all they need…lots of people ask for them because they think that will help but actually if there isn't a specific special need of that child, they don't need a laptop. (Corinne, VSH in LA2)

Townsend, Berger and Reupert (2020) found that LAC wanted access to tutoring and to a computer, as well as books and other educational supplies. In agreement, books were mentioned by DTs and social workers as common uses, while the DTs also explained that they provided stationary. It was also clear that schools were happy to support children in pursuing specific interests such as music and dance via equipment or lessons and this coheres with Reupert's (2019) view that it is important in showing children that their voices are being heard.

Social and Emotional Support

Earlier chapters of this thesis have explored in detail the impact of pre-care experiences on children and noted that this can be significant (Berridge, 2007; Gushard-Pine, McCall

and Hamilton, 2007; CFCA, 2014). Gypen *et al* (2017) indicate that LAC are more likely than non-LAC to suffer from mental health problems. As a result, both DTs and social workers explained that they used pupil premium plus to fund therapeutic interventions, and to employ staff like counsellors. However, the VSH explained that she felt that really this was something that should be provided by Health services and a DT added that CAMHS did not provide a good enough service for these children. Barrett (2018) echoes this view, with one of his participants, a learning support officer, referring to CAMHS, as a 'ghost service' (p. 68).

The VSH outlined a number of other therapeutic interventions that she had provided via the pupil premium plus. These included nurture groups and staffing, and play therapy, which she explained was expensive but was worth it because it helped to keep children in school:

> We're funding their play therapy so those children are getting a huge amount of money, they are, and they need it because otherwise they'd be excluded…when we talk about the impact of pupil premium I think a lot of our impact could be seen as negative impact in the sense that they don't get excluded yes, you know they don't get thrown out of lessons because of the resources that I'll put their way early enough to keep them in school and on track so we do try and do quite a lot of stuff before it gets to crisis point if we can, which of course is quite expensive. (Corinne, LA2's VSH)

Behaviour related interventions were also outlined by DTs who used pupil premium plus to fund or part-fund staff in school with specific responsibility for promoting good behaviour, and small group SEMH support. Positive behaviours and social skills are important for LAC (Brewin and Statham, 2011) as is helping to them to understand appropriate conduct (Stoddart, 2012) so this behavioural focus is appropriate. These sorts of interventions featured in the pupil premium strategies, alongside counselling and nurture groups. What was less evident, perhaps because they might be harder to quantify, were self-esteem related activities and resources. LAC are likely to achieve better when their self-esteem is supported and the VSH gave the example of the traditional end of year residential as a trip that she would fund with pupil premium plus

because of its importance for developing confidence before starting secondary school. One of the DTs even mentioned providing trainers for a young person as a means to support her self-esteem.

LAC are at more risk of insecure attachments (Webber, 2017) because of the challenges that they face around stability (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Cocker and Allain, 2013). A common issue, Webber (2017) continues, is that whole school approaches are needed, rather than individual ones, and there is often insufficient training around this. Harold, one of the DTs explained how important he felt attachment is for LAC:

> If their placement breaks down, then we are going to see further attachment issues, mental health issues. So we're looking to maintain the placement to maintain, emotional balance and ultimately mental health. (Harold, a DT in LA2)

Connelly and Furnival (2013) argue that training needs to be interdisciplinary, so in this case training for educationalists around a health-related issue. This was something that the VSH was keen to provide, noting that she had provided funding to enable schools to benefit from whole school training around attachment. She had also used the pupil premium plus to fund or part-fund the Boxall profile, an assessment and diagnostic tool for children's social, emotional and behavioural challenges.

Virtual School Staff and Support

The VSH explained that because the virtual school's funding was limited, she needed to top slice some of the pupil premium plus to fund or part-fund some of the members of her team. This included colleagues responsible for attending PEPs, supporting children at risk of exclusion, becoming NEET, or child sexual exploitation, supporting transition, supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those with English as an additional language, supporting those new into care, and providing business support. She explained that schools in her local authority were positive about the support provided by these staff members. This range of support highlights the breadth of need that LAC have and evidences that they need to be seen as individuals (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013) with support that is appropriately varied (Hayden, 2005).

Monitoring the impact of the LAC Pupil Premium Plus

PEP Meetings

PEP meetings were a key forum for monitoring the impact of interventions funded by the pupil premium plus. There was a consensus regarding this from all the participants and this was to be expected as DFE (2018d) are clear that the PEP meeting should include tracking and monitoring attainment and setting targets accordingly. Social workers mentioned this as an important part of the meeting; looking at targets that had been set in the previous meeting, reviewing them and deciding whether they should change. In some cases, some social workers explained, the discussion needed to be more about whether an intervention had actually happened and this is one of the responsibilities of the network supporting the child, ensuring that there is no delay in progressing with interventions (DFE, 2015b). Foster and Long (2020) posit that some of the accountability systems around pupil premium need to improve and Francine, one of the social workers, took a similar position, suggesting that a clear numerical breakdown of what had been spent would be positive:

> I think accountability and being able to show what [pupil premium plus funding] has been used and what hasn't could only be a positive thing. It would really promote transparency. So, yes, it would be a very positive thing. (Francine, a social worker in LA2)

Although it should be noted that pupil premium plus does not represent a personal budget for LAC (DFE, 2015b; 2018d) and so it might not always be possible for schools to make an exact financial calculation per child. The pupil premium strategies did not explicitly mention PEP meetings although there was acknowledgement of the importance of action plans and targets for children, the use of pupil voice and parental feedback and attainment data. All of these would normally feature in a PEP meeting.

Quantitative Data

Craske (2018) has noted a significant data focus in schools presently and all of the pupil premium strategies included the use of numerical attainment data as a means of monitoring the impact of pupil premium. Schools seemed to use this data to compare with national attainment statistics, and the attainment of non-pupil premium children in the same school. This links to the aforesaid priority to close the attainment gap and

the strategies showed that senior and inclusion staff were involved in this monitoring, often in the pupil progress meetings that have been previously outlined as a forum for planning.

As explored previously, for LAC, attainment and academic progress need to be planned for and assessed alongside health and well-being. This can create a challenge for schools as, Barrett (2018) explains, they are often seeking an impact which is wider than just academic, but attainment is the accountability measure. Harold (DT) explained that in actuality academic success and well-being could be linked:

> We're always tracking their progress and achievement. But I feel there are definitive links there [to wellbeing], and I've seen it too often to discount that. So we will often see there are improvements in their academic progress and usually it's their responses about how they feel about their academic progress and academic involvement that they're enjoying lessons…there's that change. (Harold, a DT in LA2)

This primary school seemed to be going beyond simply offering 'attainment with a prong of wellbeing' (Craske, 2018, p. 551) and was looking to avoid the conflict between what the policy demanded, and what they felt was the right thing to do. One of the ways that the DT did this was by recording SEMH data quantitatively, such as behaviour incidents, and then tabulating these to share in PEP meetings and to discuss with the children informally.

Qualitative Data

In many cases LAC are subject to different interventions at any one time, as well as the regular school curriculum, and any extra-curricular activities that they may be engaging in. As a result, it is difficult to link a specific item or activity to an individual student's progress (EEF, 2020b). One of the DTs, Ian, emphasised this point:

> It's always a difficult one to make it discretely between an object and progress or learning. You know to say that because of this item that we bought, this child is now making fantastic progress… in the end the judgments have to be qualitative and I think you can only take a stab in the dark and decide if the object that you've purchased through the PEP made an impact on that child. If we are looking at it in

> a very quantitative method…I suppose the approach would be as an example, at this PEP we identified this child needs a laptop, buy this laptop, we expected by the next data drop which is basically assessing the pupil, which schools are held to account by, they make one level progress. At the next review if they made one level's progress and assumptions made, well it must be the laptop. Whether it is or not, I would not like to say. (Ian, a DT in LA2)

The DTs were aware that some of the things that they were targeting with their pupil premium plus would be hard to measure with certainty and so were happy to gather qualitative data as evidence. This included, one of the DTs explained, gathering feedback from the LAC about how happy they are feeling, how they see their behaviour or their attitude to their work and others. While the schools' pupil premium strategies did mainly focus on the quantitative measures there were some other examples better suited to qualitative data. These included learning walks and lesson observations, feedback from teachers on pupils' engagement and behaviour incidents.

In between PEPs

While PEPs may focus the tracking of LAC's progress at three points in the school year, the process of monitoring appeared to be continuous with the pupil premium strategies not indicating specific times. Some strategies noted the importance of the SATs at the end of years two and six with the implication that the emphasis on these groups may be increased. In interview, one of the DTs talked about using Target Tracker (a data collating and tracking computer programme) to analyse the progress of specific groups, of which LAC would be one and pupil premium children as a whole would be another. This analysis would feed into the PEP as would the more qualitative 'professional talk' that Harold (DT) would have with class teachers and teaching assistants involved with the LAC:

> It's more about us as professionals sort of looking at how well they're doing, how they're getting on with their friends. How they're getting on in class. Are they coping and then go from there really. Because it's the teachers and the TAs that know them best because they're with them all the time. (Harold, a DT in LA2)

The document analysis identified that this was also a feature of a small number of pupil

premium strategies, and it is important as it enables teachers and teaching assistants to contribute to the young person's care plan (Connelly, 2013). It also resonates with the view of another of the DTs who explained that even though there may be processes in place for the progress of each class to be monitored, the LAC should be looked at individually because of their needs and bespoke support. He did add that this was only possible at his school because he had relatively few LAC at present and that larger numbers would make this more challenging.

There was not a consensus amongst social workers regarding the contact they had with schools in between PEPs. Barnardo's (2006) identify poor communication between professionals as being a potential failing of the corporate parent, but some social workers noted effective and regular conversations with schools about how the young person was progressing. One social worker said that she might get updates via email while another explained that she would have to request tuition reports when a block of individual tuition had finished. It has already been established that multi-agency working is important (McClung and Gayle, 2010; Connelly and Furnival, 2012) and one of the social workers explained that PEPs were not the only forum and that for some LAC there were more regular meetings to which school and other stakeholders would be invited and pupil premium plus would be discussed. Rowland (2015) explains that for vulnerable children monitoring should be happening regularly and so this approach is appropriate.

There was also evidence of monitoring happening more informally involving the children and their foster carers. One of the DTs spoke about the importance of gathering photographs from school trips and using these to assess how successful it had been for the young person. Of course, social workers will visit their LAC regularly and some saw this as an opportunity to discuss informally with children and foster carers how interventions were going, whether they were any new needs or even whether support had or hadn't happened.

External Monitoring

The virtual school head explained that she used the ePEP to monitor the use of the pupil premium plus and this was echoed by the DTs who acknowledged that the VSH collected

and used the data in that way. The VSH needs to be able to demonstrate how she uses the pupil premium plus to raise the attainment of LAC (DFE, 2015b) and Ofsted (2020) should collect LAC attainment and progress data from the VSH. Therefore, having up to date numerical data is important for the VSH although she explained that at her last inspection the inspectors were mainly interested in how she was using the pupil premium plus and how she was measuring its impact. This local authority's ePEP links the child's targets to any funding needed to meet that target. Targets should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) (DFE, 2018b) and Corinne, the VSH, found that this was something that she needed to support some schools with:

> We do a lot of training on SMART targets and not too many of them, so when we first started that, there was one I looked at and the child had 17 targets and that's because, she wasn't a teacher, she was an admin person that was doing the looked after children stuff and she had done a round-robin to the child's teachers and every teacher had given her a target and she had put them all on. (Corinne, LA2's VSH)

The Ofsted handbook (2019b) states that inspectors will ask schools about their use of pupil premium and the progress of vulnerable groups. Of course, they can collect this data via the school's pupil premium strategy and from attainment data gathered by the DFE. This would seem to be likely in these cases because DTs were generally not interviewed specifically about pupil premium plus. One of the DTs surmised that because vulnerable groups at his school were achieving well and because it was a one-day inspection, speaking to him about pupil premium plus was not a priority. Another DT explained that Ofsted had spoken with the head teacher about pupil premium in general but not specific to LAC, while one DT had been asked about safeguarding generally as this was one of his roles. This may have included LAC, but LAC was not the main focus.

IROs have a role in scrutinising the PEP and the educational support in general for LAC (DFE, 2018b) and this is likely to happen in the statutory LAC reviews which are held twice a year. There was not a consensus as to the extent to which this happened. One of the social workers explained that pupil premium plus was only likely to come up in

that review if education was not going well for the young person. Another said that the discussion would be more likely to be around education in general and may not include pupil premium plus. One of the DTs recounted an example which would support this view as he explained that in one particular meeting the IRO had pressed both him and the social worker around the use of pupil premium plus for a LAC at his school. However, one social worker said that she had not been asked about pupil premium plus by an IRO.

Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted a range of important findings drawn from the interviews and document analysis of pupil premium strategies. It is clear, for example, that the PEP is central to the process of planning for the use of pupil premium plus and monitoring its impact. It is a forum that enables professionals involved with the young person to work effectively, even though some colleagues felt that the ePEP itself was overly bureaucratic and time-consuming. This multi-agency working also seems to be valued by the key professionals as colleagues appreciate the different roles and expertise that others have. LAC and planning for their support do seem to have significant status as it appears that school staff working with the pupil premium plus have senior roles which is important for justifying decisions and moving things on quickly.

All professionals acknowledged the balance that was needed between academic and social and emotional support for LAC, despite the DFE's focus on the attainment gap. There is clearly an understanding amongst education and social care staff that in many cases even though academic attainment is the ultimate goal, this may only be achieved by first prioritising softer skills and mental health. This emphasises the needs-led approach that was commonly discussed during interviews. It also links to the fact that in many cases LAC would benefit from engaging experiences and so some primary schools looked to provide enrichment activities. Of course, schools are judged by Ofsted on the attainment and progress of children and therefore a school must have confidence in any approach it adopts that does not immediately prioritise the academic. In both local authorities the virtual school use some of the pupil premium plus to employ staff and while this is something that the virtual schools speak positively about regarding their capacity it was not frequently mentioned by the schools. Their views around this were therefore less clear.

Different local authorities appear to have adopted different approaches for schools to access the pupil premium plus and these may be completely different or different just in terms of logistics. In either case this does seem to create challenges for schools. Overall though, relationships between the virtual schools and other professionals seemed to be positive with their advice and oversight role appearing to have been imbedded and accepted. The role of Ofsted in monitoring seems less clear around pupil premium though, with schools not reporting significant questioning during inspections around the use of the pupil premium plus.

There was frequently a lack of alignment between the pupil premium strategies and the interviews that were conducted. This is likely to be because the strategies focus on pupil premium generally and are not specific to LAC. Nonetheless, it was sometimes hard to see how support for LAC might fit around the school's general approaches for supporting the wider pupil premium population.

These themes will be developed further and analysed in the next chapter, the Discussion.

6 - Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will explore the most important themes that have emerged from the Findings and analyse their meanings, rationales and implications and informs the Conclusion chapter's recommendations. These themes will not be organised by research question as the Findings were. This is because in many cases there is overlap and a theme can have relevance for more than one research question.

The upcoming sections will draw on these theories to explore the extent to which the findings evidence an understanding of the needs of LAC (Humanism), the appropriateness of LAC policy (Social Pedagogy), and effective support for LAC (Critical Pedagogy). These theories will be used to explore the extent to which the findings evidence an understanding of the needs of LAC (Humanism), the appropriateness of LAC policy (Social Pedagogy), and effective support for LAC (Critical Pedagogy). As previously outlined, the three theories are underpinned by a social justice ethos and this is important because it maintains the focus on equitable distribution of resources, recognition of the value of all learners, and the importance of participation (Gewirtz, 2006).

Supporting LAC via individual interventions and general practices

The findings have shown that schools use the pupil premium plus to provide support for LAC via two broad forms. The first is via individual interventions, resources or activities targeted to meet the specific needs of a single young person. Commonly this could be individual tuition, computers or books. The second is a more general form of support that will benefit a greater number of children. Examples from the Findings chapter included staff training on attachment disorder and effective feedback. Both individual interventions and general practices were referred to in interviews and pupil premium strategies. While the interviews were able to provide more specific detail about the nature of the individual supports in particular, the pupil premium strategies did still include things like individual tuition, Lego therapy, bereavement counselling and nurture groups; these would not be offered to all pupils and so would clearly not be general school practices.

The relevant policies and guidance have already been discussed at length in previous chapters but it is relevant to highlight again some key points that may contribute to these differences. The DFE is clear in both its guidance for designated teachers (2018d) and support for LAC guidance (2018b) that the funding is not a personal budget. The VSH responsibilities guidance (2015b) also makes mention of pooling funding, although in this case it refers to supporting a group of LAC, and not non-LAC. This emphasises the option of support being group or general rather than individual. However, these documents (DFE, 2018b, 2018d) also highlight the main focus of closing the attainment gap and meeting targets set down in the PEP (DFE, 2019f). These targets are likely to be personalised, while closing the attainment gap between LAC and non-LAC implies providing something for that child individually, like tuition, to help them catch up. The EEF's teaching and learning toolkit (2020a) is recommended by the DFE to support pupil premium decisions. It is worth noting that the interventions offering the most value for money are those that benefit classes rather than the individual. These include support for teachers to provide effective feedback and mastery learning, and support to enable pupils' metacognition and self-efficacy. These feed into supporting quality first teaching but this concept, and the toolkit was mentioned by only a small number of interviewees. In comparison individual tuition has a moderate to high impact but at a significant cost, while digital technology has a moderate impact at a moderate cost (EEF, 2020a). Metacognition in particular has relevance here because it intends to help children learn more about how they learn. This can begin to give learners an element of control which reduces frustration (Freire, 1968) and therefore reduces the power imbalance between teacher and pupil (Kareepadath, 2018). There are clear elements of Critical Pedagogy in this approach, though it was not a common feature of the interviews in this research.

Freire's (1968) banking concept and its potential implications for LAC were introduced earlier in this chapter and it is too simplistic to attribute this to either individual interventions like tuition, or support for a whole class or group. Indeed, effective individual tuition can include the sort of co-created, reality based experiences that Freire (1968) advocates. Similarly, teachers who develop skills in effective feedback, support children's resilience and who understand how children learn are much more likely to avoid dull exposition (Freire, 1994) and encourage risk-taking (Freire and Faundez,

1989). However, the need to be able to evidence a direct link between the money spent, the intervention and an impact probably does encourage schools to make choices on a more individual basis. There is a risk in this though as it can reduce children's ability to have control over what is happening to them and can make their attainment the sole focus of the activity. These are things that Freire (1968) highlights as elements of the banking concept which should be avoided.

Of course, the pupil premium plus policy's emphasis on the attainment gap influences schools' decision-making and Cameron (2008) has previously raised concerns, from a Social Pedagogy stance, on the prizing of academic success over more of a holistic perspective of progress. This will be explored more fully in due course, but it is clear that LAC are a group for whom success should not be defined purely on attainment and the attainment gap.

There are other factors that influence decision-making around whole class or individual interventions. For example, schools with few pupil premium children may not feel that they have sufficient funding to pool for group activities or support. It may also be the case that some LAC have very clear, specific needs and that for them, for example, speech and language therapy or counselling on an individual basis may be what they need most at that time. It was evident from the interviews that social workers are strong advocates for their young people, and it may be that they and foster carers are very keen to see that individual child receive something that is specific and personal to him or her. The aim when professionals are considering the pupil premium plus must therefore be to be led by the needs of the child, with the policy providing guidelines and boundaries. This is central to Rogers' (1967) theory in which he argues that children need someone who really understands their needs and feelings and can therefore make decisions from an empathic position. It is also relevant to raise here that Rogers (1967) compares this position of understanding children favourably to one which evaluates and judges children. Of course, schools will approach these situations differently but given that that the thrust of the policy, and one could argue the whole education system, is about measuring attainment and comparing children and schools, the default position is one that may not be positive for vulnerable children.

In both local authorities the virtual school chose to top slice some of the pupil premium plus to pay for virtual school staff. There appeared to be differences in some of the roles that these staff filled but it was clear in both cases that there was a mixture of supporting children and working with staff. This appears to strike an appropriate balance because while direct work with LAC can be very effective, it is not sustainable for virtual schools to be able to continue this for all its children all of the time. For example, stepping in to help avert a crisis is important but so is building capacity in school staff so that they can support LAC through transition. So where the virtual schools work with staff this may well build skills, knowledge and capacity which are likely to be deployed in the school more generally to support many children. Learners will be happier and more successful if their teachers understand how they experience the world (Freire, 1993) and if their school is flexible enough to adapt to meet their needs rather than expecting the child to be the one to change (Freire, 1968). This is particularly so for vulnerable children like LAC and support from experts in the virtual schools should help schools to understand this.

Meeting the diverse and individual needs of LAC

The findings from the research show that schools are using the pupil premium plus flexibly to meet the diverse needs of LAC. Academic support, social / emotional support and curriculum enrichment are all evident from interviews and pupil premium strategies, as are the use of interventions, resources and trips. This may indicate a degree of interpretation in how schools and other professionals are using the pupil premium guidance. As previously described, there are different documents produced by the DFE around the use of pupil premium and while there are key themes running through these, there are also some differences. For example, the Conditions of the Pupil Premium Grant document (DFE, 2020b) lacks specificity, just stating that the funding should be used to meet needs as set down in the child's PEP. This is echoed in the Virtual School Head's Responsibilities guidance (DFE, 2015b) but this also adds that VSHs must be able to evidence how the funding has raised the achievement of the local authority's LAC. The Promoting the Education of LAC guidance (DFE, 2018b) contains the most detail and in addition to the raising of achievement, includes closing the attainment gap. The distinction between attainment and achievement is important. Achievement refers

to children making progress, whereas attainment is progress against a particular set of standards or benchmarks. Therefore, educational achievement could refer to a wide range of things that would include, but would not be limited to, academic subjects. In contrast, attainment for primary school children is very likely to refer to how well children do in the SATS in years two and six. These only assess children in English and maths (and science in year six only) and therefore the scope of attainment is narrow.

The Promoting Education of LAC (DFE, 2018b) document also makes mention of acting in the child's best interest, using evidence-based approaches and providing a wide range of educational support. This appears to accept that LAC may need interventions in areas beyond just academic and this is further strengthened by a table of examples provided by Darren Martindale, Wolverhampton's VSH. This includes support around aspirations, relationship-building, emotional intelligence and self-esteem (DFE, 2018b). However, the extent to which the policy is open and flexible enough to meet the needs of LAC is debatable, especially when analysed through a Social Pedagogy lens. At the heart of Social Pedagogy is social justice (Stephens, 2013; Cameron, 2018) and while the findings identified examples of children receiving support in areas that mattered to them (e.g., dance, music, sport) whether these young people are being empowered to identify and address inequality in society is unclear. There are also many examples in the findings of children benefiting from counselling or some other form of emotional needs or mental health support. This should not be downplayed because for many LAC this is very important. However, the intended goal of this sort of intervention could be perceived to be to enable academic progress at some point in the future. Social pedagogues would argue that vulnerable children need to be able develop meaningful relationships with others and develop the skills to navigate the complex world they exist in (Eichsteller and Holthoff 2012; Cameron, 2013). There is a question to be asked as to who is really being benefitted by the pupil premium plus; if ultimately the funding serves governmental aims more than it does children's needs then it is not putting aside self-interest in favour of the vulnerable as Stephens (2013) advocates.

It would be unfair though to suggest that the pupil premium plus is not being used, at times, in a way which is aligned to social pedagogical tenets. Interviews and pupil premium strategies do show professionals supporting the development of the whole

child, and not just focusing on academic subjects, and some of the examples evidence a consideration for children's rights. These are points advocated by Petrie (2006) while the inclusion of some expressive arts and the flattening of some adult-child hierarchies, e.g., via shared decision-making, fit with Cameron's (2018) perspective on Social Pedagogy. Indeed, allowing personalisation beyond purely academic support is what vulnerable children need. It should be noted though, that this is only likely to be effective from a humanist perspective if children's potential in these areas is recognised and the adults have sensitive understanding of how the child feels and what he or she needs (Rogers, 1967). A further consideration is that the benefits of a personalised approach to support are lessened if the means by which children are assessed is standardised. Rogers (1967) argues against the use of exams and standardised tests, instead proposing that the most effective means of assessing is via the young person's life and that therefore the support they receive should support them to be successful in that.

It is not possible here to discuss each of the many uses for pupil premium plus that were included in the Findings chapter but there is value in exploring some in more detail, and in relation to Critical Pedagogy. Individual tuition was a common use and while this can certainly be a rewarding experience for learners there is a risk that this can become the sort of gap filling exercise that Freire (1968) warns against. Kareepadath (2018) explores this further arguing that children can come to see the adults teaching them as the owners of the knowledge, and themselves as being powerless to gain it on their own. It should be emphasised that tuition is not by definition like this, but it can become so if the purpose of it is purely to help children catch up in very specific, pre-determined areas.

There was also discussion around the provision of digital technology such as tablets and laptops. Of course, there is no issue with this as an intervention providing this is what the young person wants, and there is an element of choice for them in the type of technology they receive and the accompanying apps and resources. Indeed, assuming this is the case, what this can provide is an element of control in what they learn and how, the absence of which can be a real frustration (Freire, 1968). This can also enable the development of transferable skills which might have an economic benefit in the

future (Mahmoudi, Khoshnood and Babaei, 2014). On the contrary, if children are simply given a device on the basis of being LAC, with no choice in what they receive or how they might use it, this can be disempowering.

Another source of debate in the Findings chapter was around school trips and whether these should be funded via the pupil premium plus. In actual fact there was less of a question as to whether LAC should be supported to go on school trips and more about whether these should be paid for by the pupil premium plus. This was because of a number of reasons. The first was around whether these constituted something that would close the attainment gap. The second was related to the foster carer allowance and whether or not this should be used to pay for trips rather than the pupil premium plus. The third reason was about helping children to understand that they could not have everything as this was a good preparation for growing up and independent living. All these points have merit and are worthy of consideration but at the same time should not negatively impact on a young person if he or she would find that trip beneficial. Exploring this from a Critical Pedagogy perspective, it is important to remember that trips can provide a quite different learning experience from that in the classroom, which is often very goal oriented (Kareepadath, 2018). Trips provide an alternative context, giving children understanding about different social situations and issues, and empowering them with knowledge about the world outside of their classroom. These benefits are central to the principles of Critical Pedagogy (Mahmoudi, Khoshnood and Babaei, 2014; Kareepadath, 2018).

One area in which there may be misalignment between the pupil premium plus policy and the individual needs of LAC is around short-term target setting. The funding runs year to year and any funding not used by the virtual school is recovered by the DFE. The Promoting Education of LAC guidance (DFE, 2018b) also recommends setting short term goals and assessing children against them. This certainly makes sense alongside funding which has a yearly cycle and it would be wrong to say that this would not work for many children. However, there are also many LAC, such as those who have suffered significant loss or trauma, who will need longer term support. Indeed, a principle of Social Pedagogy, contrasting with the pupil premium plus policy, is that time-limited quick fixes may not be successful with vulnerable children (Cameron, 2018).

It has already been noted that social pedagogues hold social justice central to their aims and practices and it would be unfair to suggest that pupil premium plus does not have social justice imbedded within as it looks to help children catch up if they have fallen behind through circumstances beyond their control. It has also been evident from the interviews that professionals are working hard to meet children's needs in a variety of ways. It is debatable though, whether a policy that is linked to a young person's legal status, and not the child's needs can be considered to be fully supportive of a social justice agenda. Stephens (2013) argues that the social pedagogue teacher must advocate on behalf of the 'poor' (p. 143). It is important to recognise that LAC and other vulnerable children may be poor in many different ways, not just financially and that this poorness is not just related to being looked after. One of the social workers who took part in this research talked passionately about the way that children who are LAC and then return home lose their right to receive the pupil premium plus. She felt that this was problematic and Cameron (2018) points out that the response to supporting vulnerable children cannot fall just to the educators and that the systems and processes that they work in must work for the children as well. It is arguable that a policy which is just to do with legal status cannot fully do this. The danger in this sort of policy is that the child may cease to be seen as a complete person, rather his or her LAC status becomes all important. It is also hard to suggest that the pupil premium plus is fully responding to challenging social issues, as Social Pedagogy posits it should (Cameron and Moss, 2011) if funding stops when a child returns home. The implication there is that the problem is just related to being in care, rather than being to do with the child's individual needs that are derived from a whole range of experiences, crises and traumas. This is particularly important to realise as in some cases children may be returning to situations, locations and people that led to them being taken into care originally.

The Impact of Accountability and Surveillance

The accountability measures that exist around the pupil premium have been outlined at length previously in this thesis and as such they will not be described in detail again here. However, it is important to note that these measures are just a small number of the total that both schools and social work teams must meet in order to justify their practices and the outcomes for the children and young people they work with. For example, the DFE

collects attainment and progress data from primary schools in reading, writing and mathematics (DFE, 2019g). Ofsted (2019b), when they inspect schools, will gather evidence about the children in receipt of free school meals, children in need, pupil attendance, support for SEND and many other items. Inspections of local authorities' children's services are similarly multi-faceted. So, a key point is that schools and social workers already work in a highly surveyed and performative environment and therefore they will expect the same sort of accountability in relation to LAC. It is arguable that because of the significant amount of pupil premium plus funding they may expect even more scrutiny. Whether LAC are subject to different social care and education priorities that may compete with each other is worth discussion and this will be explored later in this chapter. What is clear though is that professionals working with LAC are subject to significant oversight from both social care and education and that decisions have to be justified and rationales provided, especially when things have not gone well. This oversight initially is internal via managers, but also external via the virtual schools and Ofsted. It is also worth noting that one of these accountability measures, the pupil premium strategy, has been used in this research as a source of data.

Colleagues working in education and social care are so used to providing data, evidence and rationales that the need to do this in different situations and for different groups is just expected. Indeed, it is also clear that there is a trail of accountability that flows down from government: the virtual school head must provide for the DFE evidence of impact of his or her use of pupil premium plus; the virtual school therefore requires schools to provide evidence of that impact for each child. The question that is relevant here though is does this accountability and surveillance actually improve outcomes for LAC? Of course, there is no control group with which to make a comparison, but it is interesting to apply principles of Critical Pedagogy to support this discussion. A system which requires evidence of academic attainment equivalent to a certain monetary value risks prioritising Freire's (1968) banking concept of education in which memorising and repetition of information needed to provide that evidence becomes the norm. It is also worth considering whether this surveillance leads to a degree of performativity amongst professionals which might influence decision-making. It was clear from the interviews that a range of uses for the pupil premium plus were implemented and there was often

collective decision-making. Furthermore, the pupil premium strategies clearly identified pupil progress meetings as a key forum for planning and monitoring of the pupil premium. Nonetheless, with the need to meet targets and evidence progress it is worth considering to what extent education for these children can be truly co-intentional as Freire (1968) recommends, with cooperation between adults and pupils on tasks, goals and structures. A central tenet to Critical Pedagogy is around learners having control and without it the result may be disengagement or frustration. It is certainly arguable that LAC are amongst the most at risk of these things in that their prior experiences of education may have been challenging, disrupted and unsuccessful. Freire (1968) also argues that education should be transformative for the oppressed learners that he focuses on. For children who may have had a chaotic or traumatic start in life schooling certainly can be that catalyst for change but again this may be made more difficult by the need to report on a relatively small number of attainment measures. The danger here is that this system of accountability is expecting children to adapt to it, rather than it seeing each child's own individual circumstances and changing accordingly.

Linked to accountability and surveillance is the question as to whether the systems in place are too bureaucratic. Certainly this was something that was raised by some of the DTs, particularly in relation to the ePEP and paperwork associated with the pupil premium plus. This is time-consuming and teachers and social workers would argue that additional bureaucracy reduces the time that they can spend working with the children or dealing with other tasks. There can also be a frustration with having to justify decisions that professionals are very confident are the right ones for that child. However, the concern for teachers went beyond the effect that it had on them. For example, several professionals made the point that in many cases it was very difficult to prove that a specific intervention had resulted in a specific outcome. They also noted that some benefits are hard to quantify. This emphasises that a system which attempts to link a monetary value to an attainment change is flawed when applying this to a group with as diverse a set of needs as LAC. Indeed, nuance and situated judgement are needed here and a system which attempts to simplify a very complex situation to ticking boxes is unlikely to work well (Cameron, 2008). Stephens (2013) argues that the social pedagogue puts aside his or her own self-interest when working with vulnerable

children. While it would be unfair to say that the professionals in this research were not working with the children's needs central to decision-making, the need for evidence and the high level of accountability is likely to make these choices more challenging.

It was clear from the interviews with DTs that Ofsted had not seemed to prioritise close scrutiny of pupil premium plus during inspections. Of course, inspectors may have looked at pupil premium strategies and LAC attainment data prior to the inspections and it is likely that this would have influenced their decision-making about what they would explore in detail. DTs also felt that the lack of questioning was because initial analyses of the data would have shown positive outcomes for LAC and so they would be likely to focus on other areas. This makes sense but it would be inaccurate to assume that this would imply that inspectors were either not interested in pupil premium plus, nor that they see LAC as a group that can succeed with less surveillance. It is more likely that in the cases in question, the inspectors, with limited time in school, identified one or more of the many different pupil groups or subjects as warranting more thorough examination, including interviews with relevant staff.

What Does Success Look Like?

The pupil premium plus related policies and guidance have been explored at length previously in this thesis and it is clear that the attainment of LAC and the closing of the attainment gap is a priority. Clearly, positive outcomes in these areas would be seen as successes for the young people, professionals and the government. However, it is also clear that success for LAC is about far more than academic attainment. Indeed, reports by successive governments in 2003 (Social Exclusion Unit) and 2012 (All Party Parliamentary Group) highlighted similar concerns around issues like school and placement stability, physical and mental health, exclusions and time out of school, and a lack of tailored support. Of course, some of these things, when they are working well, can contribute to academic progress and attainment, but they are also successes in themselves. DFE (2020a) is also aware of the disparity between LAC and non-LAC in areas like fixed term exclusions and incidence of SEND. These are areas in which successes could be prioritised and celebrated.

Therefore, a key question which needs to be raised is whether or not this particular view of success is helpful for LAC and whether it is helping to meet their needs. Taking a humanist perspective, Thorne (1992) explains that learners need to know that those working with them understand and respect their individual experiences and perspectives. This is very important because an absence of this understanding could lead to assumptions being made about what might count as success for LAC. In reality this may mean overlooking something like mental or physical health in favour of academic attainment. Linge's (1976) view is also relevant here, as he argues that one must see the whole child when supporting and assessing, rather than just his or her intellect. It could be argued that in their policy decisions the DFE is not seeing LAC as individuals but are led by the headline low achievement data and then seeing LAC as a group who all need to succeed in the same way. Rogers (1977) noted that for many children there exists a constant fear of failure, which is based on the way they are assessed and on the expectations put upon them. In some cases he suggests that children face ridicule and criticism when they make errors. This is particularly relevant for LAC because, as previously discussed, they are perhaps more likely to have gaps in their knowledge because of time spent out of school, and they are particularly at risk of bullying and stigmatisation because of their LAC status. Barrett-Lennard (1998), is in agreement with Rogers' view and highlights that the rigidity in education creates a real threat to the learner's view of his or herself. Reducing this rigidity in what is seen as success for LAC would be helpful in reducing this threat.

It is important to consider that the aim of the pupil premium plus does not stand alone and because LAC receive multiagency support, they are also subject to multiagency priorities. School accountability has been discussed at length earlier in this chapter, but social workers will also be judged via a wide range of outcomes for LAC. For example, when Independent Reviewing Officers review the young person's care plan in the biannual LAC reviews they will ask the social worker, and other professionals, to report on a range of issues. These include the effectiveness of the care plan as a whole, plans for permanence, stability of the care placement, arrangements for contact with family, engagement in leisure activities, health and wellbeing, as well as educational needs and outcomes (DCSF, 2010). Of course, some of these items would not be best met via the

pupil premium plus and some would not meet the criteria in any case. However, some of these could be achieved by interventions delivered in school. Indeed, schools would be likely to see the benefit of improved health, a more stable placement, and engagement with positive extra-curricular activities like sport or music. In other cases these social care needs may be at odds with what schools may choose to prioritise and the findings of this research did indicate that on occasion there was not consensus between schools and social workers.

Similarly, VSHs, as well as needing to evidence the impact of the pupil premium plus, need to ensure that PEPs are in place and of high quality, that school attendance is monitored and is as high as possible, that LAC are accessing the most appropriate education, and that health and SEND is monitored and supported. Again, there may be different views from DTs and VSHs as to what should be prioritised for an individual LAC or a cohort of LAC in the same school. Of course, it is unlikely that, for example, any professional would argue that improvement in a child's mental health, or better engagement with leisure activities, would not count as success. The question is whether it would be the sort of success that is required by Ofsted or seen as value for money by DFE.

The reason that these differing views of success are relevant is because of the way that the DFE policy positions attainment of LAC. As such it is useful to analyse this from a Social Pedagogy perspective. Indeed, social pedagogues appear to see success far more broadly than just academic attainment and progress (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012). There are some common themes though with Stephens (2013) highlighting that education should develop and elevate the character of learners, while Layard and Dunn (2009) posit children's happiness, well-being and positive relationships as key outcomes. Of course, these benefits can develop alongside academic success, or even because of academic success but for some LAC it is these personal competencies that will enable them to do better in curriculum subjects later on. Cameron (2018) with a clear understanding of LAC, emphasises the importance of children being able to deal with complex emotions, of being able to work creatively, and of working together and being together with others. These things are hard to measure but for LAC they may represent success of one sort initially, and pave the way for success of a different sort later on.

It has already been noted that DFE (2018b) recommend short term interventions and that any pupil premium plus not used by the virtual school must be returned to the DFE at the end of the financial year (DFE, 2015b). The potential challenges around this from a Social Pedagogy perspective have already been raised so will not discussed again at length. However, within the context of an exploration of the context of success it is important to return to this issue. In many cases LAC will be able to achieve successes term by term via small steps and targeted interventions and there was evidence in the findings of this research of schools using tuition or small group support to achieve this. One of the virtual heads talked about the importance of being able to use the pupil premium plus for crisis management and gave the example of averting an exclusion. This, by definition, is short term and an effective and reasonable use. However, some children may take much longer to achieve positive outcomes in areas like mental health, resilience and stability. Whether the short-term focus discourages the use of pupil premium plus for these sorts of causes is unclear. However, it would be understandable that professionals might want to be able point to 'quick wins' for the purposes of Ofsted or the virtual schools, rather than try to explain that the intended benefits are not evident yet but may be at some point in the future. Freire (1968) argues that education is about transformation for the learners and it is possible that sometimes the short-term focus reduces the ability of the pupil premium plus to be transformative.

It is worth returning briefly to the theme of surveillance and accountability as it is this that requires schools to be able to evidence the impact of the pupil premium plus spend. It was clear from the interviews and document analysis that there was a range of interventions being used and that not all of these would be easily quantifiable. The key question to ask here though is whether or not an intervention counts as being successful if there is no concrete evidence to support this assertion. It is easy to assume that the issue is specific to social, emotional and behavioural outcomes but it should be noted that some DTs had developed ways of measuring these. The other factor is that in some cases success is something *not* happening, such as an exclusion. This is also difficult to represent numerically because it would be facile for a school to keep a track of the number of children *not* excluded, while the number of exclusions averted would be subjective. Of course, DTs and social workers should be making decisions based on what

is best for each child and what success would be for him or her. Providing the evidence of this is a separate challenge and in some cases this is likely to mean some kind of narrative rather than numerical data. It may be that this sort of evaluation actually does more to show a consideration of the whole child and his or her successes and challenges. This would help to avoid the arbitrary judgements and promote the empathetic understanding that Rogers (1967) recommends.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to conduct a critical analysis of the findings from the previous chapter and start to explore and develop the emerging themes. The threefold theoretical framework has been very important here; the overlap between education and social care, and between needs, policy and approaches, is such that different theories needed to be used to support the analysis at different points. It has not been the intention to use these theories to pass judgement on either the relevant policies, or the approaches taken by different professionals. Rather the theories have provided a lens through which to view, justify, explain and challenge these elements.

This critical analysis process has been very important in situating this research as providing new and relevant understanding. It has already been identified that many pupil premium decisions in schools are made based on prior experience rather than research. And it has also been apparent that generally the research that has been carried out has not drawn widely on these theoretical perspectives chosen for this study. Therefore, this research does something new by looking at the data collected from interviews and pupil premium strategies via theories that speak directly to the needs of LAC. I acknowledge that I did not set out to make this claim but instead my priority was to choose theories, as previously described, that resonated with LAC. However, the result of this enables a different light to be shed on the needs of LAC, how they are supported, and the aims and actions of those working with and for them. This analysis will inform the Conclusion chapter and it is hoped will also prompt some thought around the pupil premium plus process from professionals in different roles.

What has also been clear through this Discussion is that the emerging themes have touched on the different research questions concurrently. This is because this research

has highlighted the importance of the whole pupil premium plus process. For example, there is a section in this chapter about accountability and surveillance. It would be easy to assume that this sits within the fourth research question:

How is the impact of pupil premium plus tracked and monitored?

However, as this chapter has discussed, the surveillance culture in education influences what the pupil premium plus is spent on because of the need for it to provide clear evidence of impact. Furthermore, because the members of the network supporting LAC have different impact measures and perhaps different priorities, accountability and surveillance is also central to the planning process. The other sections have similarly encompassed the different research questions.

The research questions will be revisited in the next chapter, the Conclusion, and it is there that what has been learnt via this research will be summarised and presented against the research questions more directly. This will be alongside recommendations for practice and a plan for dissemination.

7 - Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will begin with my own thoughts around my PhD experience and my reflections on the challenges that I have faced and what I have learned through five years of study. The next section will explore the limitations of this study. Some of these limitations are linked to the scope of the research, and the adopted methodology. Others are more to do with the challenges that have been encountered in its undertaking and both will be discussed here. Then a summary of findings will be presented and these will directly address the research questions. This will lead into a Recommendations for Practice section. This research will be of interest to head teachers, designated teachers and other school staff; social workers and social care managers; virtual school heads and other local authority managers working in children's services; and colleagues from the Department for Education. Some of the recommendations will have implications for policy makers, while others will have more relevance for practitioners. There is also a need to outline how these findings and recommendations can be shared beyond the readers of this thesis and this will be shared in this chapter also. The final section will note potential next steps. As the Findings and Discussion have noted there are questions emerging from this research to do with policy and practice. Some of these are worthy of further research, as are some areas of interest that were beyond the scope of this research. These will be included here as well.

Reflections

I began my PhD studies at the beginning of 2016 and I must admit that this has been a more challenging process than I had envisaged. This is not to do with the length of the thesis, in fact I have found this to be very positive as I have been able to explore things at length and include some ideas and elements that I would not have been able to with a shorter word count. It is also not to do with the topic despite the concerning LAC outcome data which endures. In actual fact I have found it heartening to speak with many professionals who clearly care very much about these young people and do what they can to make things better for them. It is important to emphasise this because caring professions such as teaching and social work are sometimes blamed for outcomes and issues that are societal and multi-faceted. I have found this research challenging for

two reasons. Firstly, I have chosen to study while working full time. Of course, this has had time and workload implications for me, and what this has meant is that I have not always had the thinking time that I would have liked. I understand that reflecting on reading and research can be a drawn out process and I wonder if having more time to focus just on my studies would have enabled me to draw insights more quickly, or to make links between themes more readily. My second challenge has been around what I think of as the mystery of doctoral study. I have sometimes felt that I have been playing a game while only understanding some of the rules, or reading a book which has some pages in a different language. I should emphasise that throughout my studies my supervisors have told me not to worry about this and that things would become clearer as my understanding of my topic and my methods developed. I know now that they were right, but I have not always enjoyed the uncertainty and self-doubt that has come from having to work to doctoral standard. It is also important to state that I do not regret taking on this challenge. It is easy to say this now as I approach the end of the journey but even when I consider the most challenging times, I do so positively, aware that stubborn resilience is one of my qualities, and proud that I was able to overcome those challenges.

I have discussed social justice a number of times in this thesis and it has informed the rationale for the research, as well as the methods employed and the analytical framework. The tenets of rights, recognition, respect and participation have been central to this work and its aims, and it has certainly helped to have them as touchpoints in different parts of thesis so that they are kept to the fore. I also feel that the data collected shows that this social justice ethos underpinned much of the work that is happening with LAC in schools and that often the pupil premium plus is being used to pursue just goals, which is reassuring.

Of course, the aim of this research was to explore the pupil premium plus and more broadly consider how LAC can be supported effectively. Even as an experienced teacher and virtual school assistant head teacher, I know that my understanding of these topics has developed and this has come from the opportunity and the impetus to engage with them over a period of time and in different ways. However, given that most professionals working with and for LAC, will not have the time to study these themes in

the way I have, it does make me think back to when I was a class teacher doing the best I could for some of these children but making decisions based on what I felt was the right thing, rather than on expert knowledge. There will be many teachers in a similar position now and this does raise the importance of dissemination. It is so important that colleagues making decisions around support for LAC are well-informed and I hope that this research, along with other good work that is happening in this field will start to have an influence at a policy level and at a practice level.

I will conclude this short section by reflecting on whether I have achieved what I set out, which was to analyse how the pupil premium plus is being used to support LAC. I am confident that I have done this: the summary of findings and recommendations will highlight this shortly. There is clearly much good practice already happening but I am hopeful that professionals engaging with the research will take much from it to inform the way they work. That is not to say that the book has now closed on research in this field, far from it in fact. As ever, this research has raised a number of questions of its own and it is also too simplistic to expect a small number of answers to complex and challenging topics like LAC outcomes. So in some ways the end of this research has highlighted a number of themes of equal importance and shown the direction that my next research steps should take.

Research Limitations and Challenges

This research did not intend to produce results that would be generalisable nationwide nonetheless it must be acknowledged that the sample size is a limitation. The interviews and document analysis did yield a significant amount of data but expanding the study to additional local authorities would have been beneficial. It may also have been the case that including additional roles within the pool of participants might have brought different understandings. For example, foster carers may be involved in the planning process around pupil premium plus and while the interviewees in this research did acknowledge the role of foster carers it might have been useful to gather their views as well. Similarly, governors have an oversight role and could be involved in scrutinising the impact of different funding on pupil outcomes. Therefore, including these colleagues could also have brought a different perspective, although it should be noted

that there is no expectation for governors to be involved in decision-making around pupil premium plus.

Initially there was an intention to include children in the data collection but this plan was not taken forward. The reason for this was that, on reflection, it was felt that children, particularly those in primary schools, would be unlikely to know how interventions or resources were funded. They may have known about certain support that they received but the possibility of speculating as to how it was funded needed to be avoided. There is certainly the scope for including LAC in research about their challenges, how they are supported and their perspectives on it, but it may be that this is most appropriate in research which is not strictly focused on the pupil premium plus.

This research has a primary school focus. This was selected because of the need for boundaries around what was being studied, and what was manageable within a single thesis. Of course, all the DTs that participated were from primary schools and the pupil premium strategies were written by primary schools. However, it must be acknowledged that the other professionals that took part have roles that extend beyond the primary age phase. Virtual school heads have oversight of all LAC in a local authority and social workers will often have children of different ages on their caseloads. I am aware that social workers in particular referred at times to children that were older or younger than the five-twelve age range of this work's title. This is understandable because even though the title of the study is included in the information and consent form, colleagues will naturally draw on specific examples to illustrate points that they are making, and may not have always considered the primary school focus. I found this quite challenging and was initially unsure how to deal with this data. Of course, I could have sought clarifications during each interview as to whether the social worker was referring to primary schools but I felt that this would have interrupted the flow of the interview and may have hampered the building of positive relationships. Ultimately I decided that I would discount any comments that were clearly about work with secondary schools, special schools or early years settings. Where it was unclear as to what sort of setting the social worker was referring to, I included the data if it indicated the social worker's general way of working as I felt it was safe to infer that his or her principles, e.g., around communication with schools, or advocating for children, would

apply to his or her standard practice and would not be dependent on the age of the child.

The principal challenge faced during this research was that of identifying professional participants. This is not uncommon in research projects where professionals are very busy and where the research could potentially highlight poor practice. The other key challenges relate to the length of time needed to complete this research and the changes that happen in that time. For example, the pupil premium policy underwent some changes during the research period, such as an increase in the amount of funding per pupil. In this time the role of the virtual school head also expanded to include advice and guidance around adopted children and previously looked after children. These sorts of changes meant that there was the need for regular revisions of this thesis to ensure that it reflected the most up to date policy. The key decision here was around when to stop updating and in this case the thesis reflects changes up to the end of 2020. Similarly, there were some changes to headline data relating to LAC. Most notably, over the course of this research there was a drop in permanent exclusions of LAC. In 2013 LAC were about twice as likely to receive a permanent exclusion as non-LAC but by 2018 the LAC exclusions had dropped and non-LAC exclusions had increased and so LAC were actually less likely to be permanently excluded (DFE, 2020a). This did not change the aims or scope of the research but did again require regular checking of data and revisions.

Summary of Findings

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- How does the pupil premium plus improve the educational outcomes of LAC in primary schools?
- What are the priorities and processes used in planning for the use of pupil premium plus?
- What are the interventions and supports that LAC receive via the pupil premium plus?
- How is the impact of pupil premium plus tracked and monitored?

This summary of findings will address questions two, three and four in turn, and conclude with the first, main question.

Planning for the Use of Pupil Premium Plus

There is little doubt that the pupil premium plus has significant status within schools because it appears that decision-making is led by senior members of staff. This is important because it shows to the other professionals and the children that this planning process is prioritised and valued. This decision-making principally takes place during PEP meetings and this is a forum which, from my research, appears to work well. Foster carers and social workers attend meetings and contribute, and DTs value their input. Children's views are also gathered in ways that reflect their age and understanding. Virtual school colleagues are unable to attend every PEP because of capacity but where they can attend their presence is welcomed and DTs and social workers generally seem to appreciate their input on pupil premium plus applications. There may sometimes be different priorities from the professionals involved and while this may take some reconciling, the PEP meetings appear, for the most part, to be positive.

There was a feeling of frustration amongst some colleagues in relation to applying for pupil premium plus. These were to do with a perception of the process being overly bureaucratic and time-consuming. There is also a question as to whether the process was responsive enough in times of crisis. PEPs should now be happening three times a year and there was a consensus that discussing pupil premium plus applications in PEPs made sense. However, it is not always easy to predict what challenges might be upcoming and therefore the potential delay between applying for funding in an emergency and receiving it is viewed as a disadvantage. DTs also find it difficult working with different local authorities when their processes are dissimilar. If schools have children from two or more local authorities they may find that the PEP paperwork, or ePEP system, is different, and this may also apply to their processes for accessing pupil premium plus.

Setting targets and linking them to pupil premium plus was adopted by schools effectively. Target-setting has always been a part of the PEP and so linking these targets to particular applications is intuitive. However, putting specific monetary values on

interventions is not always easy when they may be shared between different pupils or paid for by a combination of funding streams. Of course, target-setting can be quite subjective in terms of the number, the level of challenge and the timescales involved. Support from the virtual schools around target-setting can be positive.

With regard to planning for use of the pupil premium plus, there appeared to be only limited use of the Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit (2020a), or other research, by the participating schools. It was unclear why this was, but it was likely that schools were using their own experience to inform their planning. While there is value in making decisions on a local basis using information about what has worked well in the past, this may result in some missed opportunities for best practice and value for money. It may also have been that schools did not feel that the toolkit applied well enough given that it is a general pupil premium resource, and neither specific to LAC, nor supplemented by guidance around how it might be used with LAC.

Interventions and Supports Using Pupil Premium Plus

The diverse and complex needs of LAC have been emphasised throughout this thesis and this is reflected by the different ways that pupil premium plus has been used by the professionals in this research. The intended impact of these uses includes academic; social, emotional and mental health; and enrichment. While this is representative of the varied needs of LAC, it could be argued that this is at odds with the thrust of the pupil premium plus policies which aim to close the attainment gap between LAC and their non-looked after peers. Of course, there is a debate regarding this position and many of the participants argued that their interventions, even if they were not obviously academic, would help to support attainment by improving children's resilience, self-esteem, learning behaviours, relationships and capacity to learn. This certainly is a relevant position to take and it would be unwise to assume that academic attainment must be, by definition, the main priority for LAC.

What is not debateable is that interventions or resources linked to attainment are easier to evidence in terms of impact. Supports such as individual tuition in a particular subject, small group work, and resources like books can be more easily attributed to an increase in attainment. Even this is not without its difficulties, which will be outlined in the next sub-section. Digital technology was a common use, though there was not a consensus

on the benefit of this, with one of the virtual heads raising concerns about its value. Often tablets or laptops are intended to enable LAC to engage more effectively with home learning and this may be the case for some LAC, but it is also true that simply providing such a resource does not mean that it will impact attainment. This is more to do with how it is used, what for, and what the adult or peer support around that resource looks like.

What was clear was that in both local authorities the virtual schools used some of the pupil premium plus funding to pay for staff that worked with schools, social workers and children. Using the funding in this way enabled the virtual schools to provide support and services that would not have been possible otherwise. Whether the schools would have rather received the funding directly to use just with their own cohort was unclear. It was evident that the virtual schools' reach was wide because of this top slicing though it could be argued that this is using the pupil premium plus to plug gaps in provision and that this would not be needed if the virtual schools were funded differently. This is not the only example of the pupil premium plus being used to provide services that arguably should be funded from another source. Schools gave examples of mental health support like counselling that should be provided by CAMHS, and it could be argued that school budgets should be able to fund salaries of staff that provide mentoring or small group support to vulnerable children. This creates an interesting dilemma for schools: if the budget is not sufficient to provide support that children need, but LAC can access it only via the pupil premium plus, what does this mean for vulnerable children in need of support, but not in receipt of pupil premium?

Tracking and Monitoring

Schools' methods for tracking and monitoring of the impact of the pupil premium plus are driven by the pupil premium plus policies and the accountability systems that are in place to provide evidence to DFE and Ofsted. Even measures set down by the virtual schools are linked to accountability because they also need to evidence their pupil premium plus impact when inspected, or when answering to local authority leaders. It must be acknowledged that in this research Ofsted inspectors did not seem to have focussed significantly on the pupil premium plus but the surveillance on schools and

social workers is still influential on the sorts of supports that are used and how their impact is evidenced.

It was also clear that schools seem to have systems in place for tracking the progress of all of their children. Having to implement additional monitoring systems for LAC, in PEPs, and in order to provide evidence specific to the pupil premium plus spend, may have been a source of frustration because of the perceived bureaucracy. However, the PEP was an appropriate forum for this monitoring to take place because it ensured that it was joined up with the planning of support, thus creating a regular review cycle. This seemed to work well as professionals clearly saw their role as being to provide what the children needed, and then to provide the evidence of this. There were challenges in this though as it was not always easy to link a specific intervention or resource to an improvement in outcomes when there were lots of different supports in place for that young person at the same time. It is also the case that often children needed support for their social and emotional needs more than their academic needs. These interventions can be difficult to associate with immediate impact on academic attainment, and the data that is forthcoming is often more qualitative than quantitative and so is harder to track over time. Some schools were looking to represent changes in behaviour quantitively as a means of providing the evidence of impact, but it also appeared that this was less of an issue for schools with higher Ofsted ratings and the confidence to be able to defend their approaches.

Improving the Educational Outcomes of Looked After Children

The professionals in this research showed care for and understanding of LAC, and their practices were clearly driven by a desire to support this group. The specifics of how this happened were led to some extent by the policies and the requirement around evidencing impact, but overall colleagues tried to work with these to meet the needs of the children. Certainly the planning processes were informed by different perspectives and the different resources, interventions and supports showed flexibility and awareness of the individuality of the pupils. The majority of the interviewees felt that they would not be able to support LAC as well without the pupil premium plus, and those who took the alternative position did so because they felt strongly that they would find the money from somewhere if they had to. So there is little doubt that the pupil

premium plus does help to improve the outcomes for LAC, but it does not do this alone. Schools use this funding alongside their normal budget and other streams, and they benefit from skilled, caring staff, and support from other professionals like social workers and virtual school staff. Whether the pupil premium plus is sufficient to mitigate the earlier experiences of LAC is more debatable and for some children it almost certainly is not. It is also the case that the policies around pupil premium plus, designed to provide consistency and clarity, may not help some children with the specific focus on the attainment gap not always being the most appropriate measure.

Reflecting on the Research Questions

I am satisfied with the research questions which were employed during this study. In looking to explore how pupil premium plus is used to support LAC I think that analysing planning, interventions and supports, and tracking and monitoring was appropriate because it captured the different elements of the process. I have not attempted to measure by how much LAC are likely to progress because of pupil premium plus, nor whether it 'works' based solely on schools having access to it. I did not have the capacity to achieve this within the scope of this research and, more importantly, it is unhelpful to try to simplify complex issues in such a way, especially when there are so many variables in action. This research has always been about how the pupil premium plus can be used to support LAC and the research questions have enabled this. Nonetheless, on reflection it would have been interesting to explore more explicitly the ways that wishes and feelings of foster carers, children and other stakeholders have been captured by schools. Some DTs talked about this, particularly as part of a wider discussion around PEPs, but it could possibly have enhanced sections around planning and tracking and monitoring. I also wonder whether it would have been positive to explore with the DTs how they might prefer the pupil premium plus to be allocated. DTs did discuss some of logistical and bureaucratic challenge, and I have made some recommendations around this which will be outlined in the next section. However, asking for views around this, based around a school's individual circumstances might have been a positive addition.

I began this research with significant professional experience in this area and therefore some of the findings were not unexpected. However, I did find it interesting that Ofsted did not appear to overly focus on the pupil premium plus during inspections. I have

already suggested reasons for this, which I need not reiterate, but given the cost of the pupil premium plus and the low outcomes of LAC, it was surprising. The other unexpected finding that I identified was around schools' willingness to use the pupil premium plus for interventions that were not principally academic. The reasons for this have already been discussed and it should be emphasised that in my view this is very positive: using the funding to support children with what is most important for them. Nonetheless, I might have expected a stricter and more immediate adherence to the DFE guidance around closing the attainment gap.

Recommendations for Practice

There are two elements to this Recommendations section. Because many of the findings are related to policy, it is appropriate for some recommendations to be aimed at the pupil premium plus policy and policy-makers in the Department for Education. These will be outlined first. Of course, this research has implications for colleagues working within the current policy framework and so there are recommendations also for professionals in the present situation.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

1. Remove the focus on academic attainment and closing the attainment gap from the policies around pupil premium plus. Enabling a broader spectrum of aims would help schools to more confidently fit their pupil premium plus spend to the needs of the child.
2. Allow for some longer term interventions that acknowledge that some children will need support, e.g., mental health support, for an extended period of time to start to show progress. This may involve the allocation of higher than normal levels of funding, possibly over more than one financial year and so this should be in consultation with the virtual school head.
3. Consult with virtual school heads around PEP recording systems with a view to agreeing on a single PEP document (or ePEP) to be used in all local authorities. This should include an agreed process for accessing pupil premium plus. Schools with children from different local authorities have to use different PEP systems and different methods for accessing pupil premium plus.

4. Consider adding previously looked after children who have returned home to the list of groups who are in receipt of pupil premium. Previously looked after children who are adopted or on a special guardianship order receive pupil premium plus but those who return home do not. This would enable schools to continue to support children and not have to remove support because of a change in legal status.

Recommendations for Professionals

The following has relevance for head teachers, designated teachers, teachers and teaching assistants working with LAC, social worker managers and social workers, independent reviewing officers, virtual school heads, virtual school staff, and foster carers.

1. Where social, emotional or mental health needs are the most pressing for a young person schools should look at ways of quantitively measuring progress in this area. This could be via tallying of behaviour incidents or short pupil questionnaires. This should supplement rather than replace qualitative data which provides more of a narrative and together evidence the impact of these measures. Local authorities do measure mental health of LAC annually via the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and this data could feed into schools' work in this area by providing a baseline.
2. When planning for social, emotional and mental health interventions, schools should look to make links in the rationale, to expected academic progress, even if this is not expected initially. This will help to justify choices made and show awareness that there is an expectation that there will be an improvement in attainment but that progress in other areas is needed first.
3. Virtual schools should look to offer (or continue to offer) training around pupil premium plus to all stakeholders including social workers and foster carers. This should include coverage of what different colleagues' roles are in that forum. It may be helpful for virtual schools to deliver multiagency training with teachers, social workers and foster carers together.
4. Professionals should look to support children via both individual interventions (like tuition) and whole class interventions (like metacognition or feedback). Blending these approaches would help children with specific areas or subjects of need, but

also support them via higher quality whole class teaching. This may involve pooling different pupil premium funds. Improving quality first teaching supports all children, is better value for money and can help to reduce the need for individual interventions in the future.

5. Social workers, teachers and other professionals should prioritise sharing of information so that all colleagues have a really clear understanding of the young person's needs, interests, challenges and strengths. Knowing the child really helps inform decision-making around interventions and helps to build trust between adult and child.
6. Virtual schools should ensure that there are systems in place to provide pupil premium plus quickly to support children in crisis, and avert exclusions. This would not be the preferred method of allocation but should be available on rare occasions.

International Significance

As previously acknowledged, the pupil premium is an English policy but that is not because the low achievement of LAC is a solely English issue. The Introduction chapter outlined some examples of approaches that different nations were taking to address LAC challenges and outcomes. Similarly, I would not want colleagues based outside England to view this thesis as something that has limited relevance to them because there are key learning points that should be acknowledged to do with how we support LAC and promote their well-being:

- The majority of participants in this research felt that they would not have been able to provide the same support for LAC without the pupil premium plus. There may be a debate around whether this funding is sufficient to make up for their experiences but the message is clear that these young people do need something. What that looks like may vary and there will be local differences based around specific situations and the different ways that countries see child protection, but the attainment gap will endure if policy makers and professionals do not put support in place to address it.
- Because of the challenge that exists in supporting LAC, and because of the social justice element to their situations, there needs to be appropriate status given to this issue. In England the pupil premium plus goes some way to do this, as does the

virtual school head role. That is not to say that I am suggesting that these measures should be taken in other countries; local decision making is important. However, there does need to be a way for the challenges that LAC face and their poor outcomes to be given due consideration and attention, as it surely warrants.

- An ongoing evaluative process is needed at a national and local level. We have seen the amount of pupil premium plus increase steadily since its inception from £400 per pupil per year to £2345 because we understand now that £400 is not sufficient to meet the needs of many of these children. This research has also demonstrated that schools and social workers engage in evaluation to review what has taken place and how effective it has been. The message for colleagues internationally must be that support needs regular review to ensure that it continues to be relevant and appropriate.
- A real feature of this research was how much the participants knew about and cared for their young people and no doubt in most cases this same professionalism and care exists for teachers and social workers internationally. However, this should not detract from how hard these colleagues have to work, and how challenging it can be working with children who have suffered trauma and loss. This level of challenge needs to be acknowledged, and their expertise valued so we do not see situations where caring professions are sometimes blamed for the negative situations and outcomes of these young people.
- This research has highlighted the importance of professionals working together to support and advocate for LAC. Colleagues in England benefit from the PEP which draws stakeholders together to make plans and set targets. It has also been evident that sometimes relationships between professionals have not always been positive with disagreements about what sort of support should be provided. Because there will sometimes be different priorities between different professional roles, and because colleagues are strong advocates, these disagreements will sometimes happen. The key question for colleagues beyond England is whether there is a forum for collaboration that puts the young person at the centre of discussion so that different views can be heard and a consensus reached.

- An original contribution made by this research is the application of Humanism (Rogers, 1967), Social Pedagogy (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Stephens, 2013; Cameron, 2018) and Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1968) in analysing the needs of LAC, LAC policies, and LAC support. This has meant that social justice principles aligned with Gewirtz (1998; 2006), such as trust, wellbeing, participation, empathy, empowerment and enrichment, have been at the forefront of the analysis of interviews and documents. Of course, this data is reflective of the practice of schools, social workers and virtual schools and I think that professionals and policy makers may benefit from using these theories to plan, and then reflect on their own work. That is not to say that people working with and for LAC should try to analyse all of their work in the same way that I have here, that would probably be too time-consuming. However, by way of example, when planning for interventions for LAC, I am convinced that it would be valuable for professionals to consider how LAC can participate in the decision-making, and whether the supports are likely to enrich the curriculum. Working in this way would be to include principles of critical pedagogy. Similarly, policy-makers who draw on social pedagogy principles like a focus on children's wellbeing, and empowerment of the disadvantaged would keep social justice to the forefront, and this would only be positive for vulnerable children. In addition, when assessing the needs of LAC, teachers and social workers might consider, as Humanism would advocate, the extent to which they are empathising with how the young person feels about their relationships and experiences their education. I could list other examples of course, but I hope that readers of this work, in whatever contexts they are working will look at their own situations and consider how the application of theories with social justice at heart might refocus aims and shift priorities.

Dissemination

The EEF Toolkit

This research has referred a number of times to the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit (2020a). This is recommended by the DFE as a source of advice around interventions that could be funded via pupil premium plus, alongside their relative impacts on academic attainment, value for money and strength of evidence. This was rarely cited

by the interviewees and featured to a limited extent in the document analysis of pupil premium strategies. It is unclear why this is; it is possible that schools preferred to draw on their own anecdotal experience when planning, but it is also true that this toolkit is not applied specifically to any pupil premium group. Instead it is just recommended in relation to pupil premium in general. It may be that this also has an impact on schools' decisions whether to use this resource. Therefore, the intention following the completion of this research is to approach the EEF with a view to developing supplementary LAC specific guidance to go alongside the toolkit. It is important to note that this would be not be a completely different set of interventions; this research has not had the scope to test lots of different resources for impact. Also, and perhaps more importantly, it is unhelpful to suggest that certain resources or activities are effective for LAC, but not for other vulnerable children. It would also be unfair to say the EEF's toolkit does not contain supports that would be useful for LAC. What may need to be specific for LAC is the process for planning interventions and determining the aims of any intervention. For example, the toolkit's impact measure is related to academic attainment and schools are likely therefore to select supports with the greatest impact and, perhaps, the best value for money. However, as this research has established sometimes attainment, while important, may not be what an individual child might need at that particular time. Or it might be that other gains need to be made first before academic attainment can be maximised. These nuances need to be considered in the planning of the pupil premium plus spend. To demonstrate this the toolkit shows 'mentoring' as having zero months' impact on attainment, but it would be foolish to assume that high quality mentoring from skilled individuals does not have other benefits for vulnerable children. It might be what a young person needs and so should not be discounted because of this low impact score.

The supplementary guidance that is proposed would include consideration of:

- Prioritised aims drawing on education, health and social care needs;
- Using the young person's starting point when he or she entered care as a baseline;
- The timescale of any intervention and when the intended impact is likely to be evident;

- How the impact is to be measured, especially if the intervention is not easy to measure academically;
- Long term planning showing how development in one area will enable development in others in the future.

Research Articles and Conference Presentations

This research has a specific focus and it is this which makes it appropriate for presentation at one of the pupil premium conferences that are held each year. There are two principal events, organised by SecEd and Inside Government respectively. There are sometimes smaller pupil premium related events as well. The presenters at these conferences are often colleagues from the DFE, education consultants, teachers and head teachers sharing case studies. Academics presenting research are less common. It would be wholly appropriate to present the findings from this research in any of these conferences, and doing so would add some variety to the types of presentations that are most common.

The length and content of this thesis would be difficult to condense to a standard journal article length. However, it is important that the findings and recommendations are shared in an academic forum. Therefore, it is intended to use different elements of this research to write articles which have specific foci. These are as follows:

- The role of social workers in planning for effective use of pupil premium plus for LAC;
- The ways that schools use the pupil premium plus to support LAC and the associated rationales;
- The methods employed to track and monitor the impact of pupil premium plus for LAC;
- The content of schools' pupil premium strategies.

Journals will be chosen for their relevance to education and social care, and because the pupil premium is a policy only in England, those with a UK focus will be more appropriate. I would certainly hope to publish at least one of the articles in the University of East London's Research in Teacher Education (RiTE) journal. Conference presentations will be chosen again for their relevance based on their themes.

My Role at the University of East London

Within the Early Childhood and Education and Initial Teacher Education departments at UEL, I am already recognised as well-informed regarding LAC education and pupil premium. I have delivered a number of guest lectures around LAC at undergraduate and postgraduate level and will continue to do so as long as these themes continue to feature in our modules and programmes. I will also be the module leader for a level 6 module running for the first time in year 2021/22 on the BA Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status. This has a broad focus on wider school life and intends to prepare trainee teachers for some of the different challenges and experiences they may face beyond the normal teaching and learning in the classroom. This includes coverage of LAC and related issues and so this research will inform my planning and delivery of that module. I hope therefore, that students who leave UEL as newly qualified teachers will begin their careers with greater knowledge of LAC than I did when I started teaching and with confidence to support LAC effectively.

There are other opportunities for dissemination within the School of Education and Communities that will be explored. All Initial Teacher Education students benefit from a professional curriculum which is separate to their normal academic modules and covers a wide range of subjects to help develop understanding of the school curriculum and organisation. Pupil premium and LAC are topics that would fit well within this set of lectures and workshops.

The School of Education and Communities also includes Social Work, Social and Community Work and Youth Work programmes. In all cases students would benefit from an understanding of LAC and their needs and the social work students in particular would need to know about pupil premium plus and their role in its planning. Engaging with these course leaders will be prioritised to ensure dissemination to students who will then take this knowledge with them into their careers. It may also encourage students to consider LAC or pupil premium as a focus for their own research.

Next Steps

This research has identified a number of interesting findings and made recommendations that could have positive implications for policy and practice.

However, the scope of the research has been necessarily focused. It has not been possible to explore every related element or group. Moreover, the research, in its analysis, has raised more questions. Therefore there are a number of potential next steps which could build on this study. These are outlined here.

School Types

This research focused on primary schools. This was to ensure that the research had a boundary and gave an element of consistency to the DT interviewees and the pupil premium strategies. However, different types of school face different challenges and so it is reasonable to assume that they will think differently about how they support vulnerable children and how they use additional funding. For example, secondary schools will usually have a higher number of LAC than primary schools and this additional funding may enable different resources to be purchased. It must also be acknowledged that just by having a much larger amount of pupil premium plus funding may bring with it greater accountability and the need to think differently about a school's internal processes for planning, allocating and monitoring its use. Similarly, the situation is likely to be different again in special schools where all the children will, by definition, have a more complex level of need and already have a significant level of support via their EHCP. Therefore it would be interesting to repeat the research with a focus on secondary schools, special schools and early years settings. For example, to what extent does the pupil premium plus in secondary schools support LAC to ensure that they do not become NEET after year 11? How do special schools ensure that what they use their pupil premium plus for, goes above and beyond what they should legally be receiving because it is stated in the EHCP? How much collaboration takes place between early years settings and primary schools, when planning for the use of the early years pupil premium?

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

It was established in the Introduction chapter that this research would not focus on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), although they are LAC. This is because their situations are likely to be different and schools may need to support them in different ways, such as with English language tuition, or to improve their understanding of British values and customs. It would therefore be valuable to explore in detail the

ways that schools support UASC. This would need to include pupil premium plus but it would be feasible to look at support for this group more broadly because this would need to come from different sources and not just via additional funding. This research would also be most effective if it spanned both primary and secondary schools because the sorts of support that these children would need would vary depending on their age, albeit with some similarities.

Virtual Schools and Pupil Premium Plus

This research has shown how two virtual schools use their pupil premium plus to employ staff who attend PEPs, provide advice and guidance, work directly with children and do quality assurance work. It is unclear to what extent these examples are representative of practice more broadly. This may be related to how virtual schools allocate the pupil premium plus. If all of the funding is passed directly to schools then the virtual school can only be funded by the local authority. It would therefore be interesting to explore how the virtual schools use their pupil premium plus. For those that do hold funding back to pay for staff it would be valuable to know what those staff do and whether they fulfil the sorts of tasks that schools might otherwise tackle via the use of the pupil premium. These sorts of choices also have implications for surveillance and accountability because it would be reasonable to assume that Ofsted would want to know about the roles of staff employed using pupil premium plus, and whether these colleagues have an impact on pupil outcomes, and represent value for money.

The Different Types of Pupil Premium

This research has focussed specifically on the pupil premium plus for LAC but it has been evident in the data collection that some schools have some support which is for all pupil premium children. There are different reasons for this and it does not imply that these schools assumed that all pupil premium eligible children have the same needs. Nonetheless it would be valuable to look in detail at how schools use the different pupil premium funds, as there are likely to be situations where pooling the funding makes sense, and others where support needs to be very bespoke. The point has been made a number of times in this research that confusing the needs of different pupil premium groups, or making assumptions about them, is unhelpful. However, it is also the case that there will be times when, for example, a looked after child has similar needs to a

child on a special guardianship order (SG0). At any time a school could be receiving the early years pupil premium, the free school meals pupil premium, the service premium, and pupil premium plus for LAC, children adopted from care and children on SGO. It would be interesting to explore in detail how schools use and manage these different pupil premiums and how they are able to evidence the impact of each.

Support for LAC and Pupil Voice

Earlier in this chapter the decision to not include children as participants was discussed. This was based around the focus on pupil premium plus and the need for precision about what it was spent on. However, there is definitely a need to explore how LAC are supported more broadly. It was clear from this research that schools used different funding and resources flexibly to meet the needs of LAC and other vulnerable children. Therefore, it would be positive to engage in research that looked at support for LAC, the extent to which children are involved in decision-making, and how these views are captured. This would also show pupil premium plus within the context of other sources of funding and whether the focus on the attainment gap extends beyond just pupil premium plus, or whether other aims are met via other resources. There is much focus now on hearing children's wishes and feelings (Children and Social Work Act, 2017) and it would be valuable to explore how much this extends to support in school. Research that analyses what LAC want in school, whether it is provided, and how, would be impactful. This could cover a wide age range and include children currently in education, and care leavers who would be able to reflect on their educational career more broadly.

Final Thoughts

This research has been about the pupil premium plus and looked after children and I hope that colleagues, whether they are policy-makers, professionals or academics, will have taken something from this study that will inform and improve their work with LAC. I have not tried to be too prescriptive around specific interventions or resources; I have made the point several times that LAC are individuals and a single catch-all approach will not work. However, what this has done I hope, is focus more specifically on the LAC pupil premium plus than in previous research and in particular call for more thought around the process of support. This begins with policy and so that is where my recommendations begin, but at all levels there is a need to focus on whether things can

be improved; whether planning can be more streamlined, or monitoring made more flexible to fit with non-academic progress. I hope also that readers see this as an encouragement to speak to and learn from one other. There is much good work going on and opportunities for sharing this must be taken. It is also important to note that while looked after children are a vulnerable group in our schools, they are not the only one and there is much to take away from this that is transferable, in terms of multiagency working, dealing with the surveillance culture and balancing individual need against value for money. These and other principles can be applied more broadly, while not losing sight of how children's needs will vary based on their own circumstances and experiences.

My final request for colleagues reading this is to take a pause for reflection. This is a doctoral thesis and so, by definition, there is a lot here. It is important then that you identify what all this means for you; there may be many actions or there may be just one or two depending on your role, your experience and your practice. If you have engaged with this thesis then it is likely to mean that you are working with or for looked after children and stopping and reflecting on your learning is all important in improving outcomes for LAC. We can, I am sure, all think of notable successes in our work with these young people, but the headline data continues to be a concern. I set out on this research with the aim of exploring how the pupil premium plus can be used effectively to support LAC; so please, use this work to help you help them.

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Appendix

A – Interview Schedules

DESIGNATED TEACHERS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

1. What sort of school do you work in? (Age phase, mainstream, special, etc.)
2. What is your role?
3. How does your local authority allocate pupil premium for looked after children?
4. How are decisions in your school made about how LAC pupil premium is spent? Who is involved?
5. To what extent is pupil premium discussed in Personal Education Plan meetings?
6. Are parents / carers / social workers advised about what the pupil premium is spent on? How?
7. Do you differentiate how you spend your pupil premium for the different pupil premium groups?
8. What sorts of things is pupil premium commonly spent on? Is there more focus on academic progress or social / emotional progress?
9. Do you pool funding for groups of pupils? What sorts of things do these fund?
10. Do you pool funding with other schools to pay for resources / projects that are shared?
11. How do you monitor / evaluate the impact of your pupil premium spend?
12. Does your Virtual School / Virtual Head monitor the way you use pupil premium? Do they ask for evidence of impact?
13. During your last Ofsted inspection were you asked about how you used your pupil premium? Were the inspectors interested in the discrete pupil premium groups? Did they ask how you evaluated the impact of the funding?
14. Are parents / carers / social workers informed about the impact of the spend? How?
15. Would you be able to provide the same level of support for your looked after children without pupil premium?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

SOCIAL WORKERS

1. How does your local authority allocate pupil premium for looked after children?
2. How do the schools where your children attend make decisions about how LAC pupil premium is spent? Who is involved?
3. To what extent is pupil premium discussed in Personal Education Plan meetings?
4. To what extent is pupil premium discussed in child in care reviews?
5. Are you advised about what the pupil premium is spent on? How?
6. Are you able to suggest uses for pupil premium, such as resources / interventions that may benefit your children?
7. Do you find that schools have different uses for pupil premium depending on the needs of the children?
8. Are you aware of any cross-school projects funded by pooled pupil premium? What have they involved?
9. Are you informed about the impact of the spend? How?

10. What sorts of things is pupil premium commonly spent on? Is there more focus on academic progress or social / emotional progress?
11. Is there, broadly speaking, a consistent approach to allocating pupil premium, across the schools that you work with?
12. Would you be able to provide the same level of support for your looked after children without pupil premium?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADS

1. How does your local authority allocate pupil premium for looked after children? What is the rationale behind this decision? Who is involved in this decision-making?
2. How do schools respond to the application process? (If appropriate)
3. Do you have criteria as to what pupil premium is spent on? Can you give examples of things that you would not support? (If appropriate)
4. What sorts of things is pupil premium commonly spent on? Is there more focus on academic progress or social / emotional progress?
5. To what extent is pupil premium discussed in Personal Education Plan meetings?
6. Do schools commonly pool funding for groups of pupils? What sorts of things do these fund?
7. Do schools commonly pool funding with other schools to pay for resources / projects that are shared?
8. Have you, as a virtual school / local authority, used any of the pupil premium to pay for staff? What are the roles of these staff? How do you track the impact of this?
9. Have you, as a virtual school / local authority, used any of the pupil premium to pay for authority-wide projects / initiatives? What sorts of things? How do you track the impact of these?
10. How do you monitor / evaluate the impact of pupil premium used by schools?
11. How do you monitor / evaluate the impact of the overall pupil premium spend?
12. During your last Ofsted inspection were you asked about how you used your pupil premium? Did they ask how you evaluated the impact of the funding?
13. Would you be able to provide the same level of support for your looked after children without pupil premium?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

B - Consent and Information Form

Doctorate of Philosophy Participant Information and Consent Form

[Adult Participants]

University of East London, Stratford Campus, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ

Research Integrity

The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research; observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks.

The University is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing and as such it is a mandatory requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

Principal Investigator: Benjamin Taylor
0208 223 4318 /

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Proposed Thesis Title:

Pupil Premium for Looked After Children: its allocation, use and impact on educational outcomes for children aged 5-12.

Project Description
The aim of this research is to explore, via a case study approach, the ways that schools and local authorities use pupil premium funding to support the educational outcomes of looked after children. This will include:

- looking at the involvement of various professionals in the allocation of the funding;
- the extent to which the funding is closing the attainment gap between looked after children and non-looked after children;
- the ways that schools track the use of the funding;
- the role of local authorities in allocating funding and monitoring and evaluating impact.

Data collection will be principally via semi-structured interviews with virtual school heads, teachers, social workers and young people (either looked after children or care leavers). These will be drawn from two local authorities: [Names Removed]. This will be supported by a short electronic survey of virtual school heads, and an analysis of pupil premium reporting on school websites.

It is hoped that this research will be of value to all professionals involved in working with and for looked after children. The research and thesis should contribute to existing knowledge in the field. Specifically it will be of value by:

- identifying effective methods of supporting looked after children;
- showing how additional funding can be used efficiently;
- identifying positive methods of tracking spending and evaluating impact;
- highlighting the ways in which professionals can work collaboratively and creatively to support vulnerable children.

Participation in this research is voluntary and all participants and their employers, will be anonymised, and will remain confidential. All information provided by participants, as well as any personal data, will be secured on a password protected computer and will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research either before or during interviews. At the conclusion of the interviews the researcher will recap the main points raised during the interview and at that point participants will be given the opportunity to identify any answers that they would like adapted or omitted. Information provided by participants may be used in the thesis, in articles and / or publications, and in conference presentations, forums, symposia and lectures. Information will not be shared / used for other purposes. However, should the researcher feel that any information given indicates that young or vulnerable people may be at risk of harm, then information can be passed on to social services and / or police.

Although it is not expected that any of the participants should experience distress or discomfort either during or after the data collection, there will be an opportunity for participants (or an advocate) to request a debrief with the researcher either via phone or email. This will enable discussion around any of the issues, questions, or feelings that may have arisen because of the data collection.

Each participant will be asked to take part in one semi-structured interview at a location convenient to the participant (most likely the UEL Stratford campus, social services offices or schools) and it is expected that each interview last between 30 and 45 minutes.

There will be no payment made in exchange for participation.

DBS Information

Date of disclosure: 5/12/19
Type of disclosure: Enhanced DBS
Organisation that requested disclosure: University of East London

Disclaimer
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis – after this point it may not be possible.

University Research Ethics Committee
If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD
(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

For general enquiries about the research please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details at the top of this sheet.

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to Participate in a Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants.

Pupil Premium for Looked After Children: its allocation, use and impact on educational outcomes for children aged 5-12.

Principal Investigator: Benjamin Taylor

Please tick as appropriate:

	YES	NO
I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate 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 interviews will be audio recorded and consent to this.		
I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential as far as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. *(Please see below)*		
I understand that maintaining strict confidentiality is subject to the following limitations: Participants' confidentiality will be maintained unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority.		
I understand that anonymised quotes may be used in publications.		
I understand that anonymised data may be shared in publications, presentations, symposia, etc. as well as the final thesis.		
I consent to data I provide being used in the future in related research activities.		

I give permission to be contacted for future research studies by your team.		
It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed.		
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the research without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I understand that my data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis and that after this point it may not be possible.		
I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.		

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Participant's Signature

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) BENJAMIN TAYLOR

Investigator's Signature

Date:

C – Ethical Approval

8th February 2017

Dear Benjamin,

Project Title:	**Pupil Premium for Looked After Children: its allocation, use and impact on educational outcomes for children aged 5-12**
Principal Investigator:	**Dr Jo Finch**
Researcher:	**Benjamin Taylor**
Reference Number:	**UREC 1617 24**

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC on **Wednesday 18 January 2017.**

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents:
http://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/schools/graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-to-Approved-Ethics-App-150115.doc

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
- Virtual heads and social workers at their places of work - Interviews will be held at schools local authority offices or social services hubs. - Interviews with looked after children are likely to be held in council offices.	Dr Jo Finch

Approved Documents
The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	*Version*	*Date*
UREC application form	2.0	1 February 2017
Participant Information and Consent Form - Adult	1.0	9 December 2016
Consent Form - Adult	1.0	9 December 2016
Participant Information - Adult gatekeepers (social workers)	1.0	9 December 2016
Consent Form - Adult gatekeepers (social workers)	1.0	9 December 2016
Participant Information sheet – Adult gatekeeper parents	1.0	1 February 2017
Consent form - Adult gatekeeper parents	1.0	1 February 2017
Young people participant – Consent form	1.0	1 February 2017
Young people participant – Assent form	1.0	1 February 2017
Online Survey	1.0	9 December 2016
Gatekeeper email from Virtual School Head for [redacted]	1.0	9 December 2016
Gatekeeper email from Virtual School Deputy Head [redacted]	1.0	9 December 2016
Doctorate of Philosophy Interview Schedules	1.0	1 February 2017

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice in Research is adhered to.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Silva
Administrative Officer for Research Governance
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk

Glossary of Professional Roles and Processes

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the key professional stakeholders and processes. It will outline who the professionals are that play key roles for looked after children and their responsibilities and priorities. In addition, there will be a focus on the roles of these stakeholders in relation to pupil premium plus funding.

The Virtual School Head and the Virtual School

From 2014, each local authority in England had to have a virtual school head (VSH). This is the lead responsible officer for ensuring that educational outcomes and experiences are improving for looked after children (DFE, 2018b). In short, this means that the VSH should know how these children and young people are progressing in school, and should help school and social care staff to find out about and address the needs of LAC (2015a).

The VSH role was initially created in 2007 as part of a pilot of eleven local authorities following the Labour government's Care Matters: Time for Change white paper (DES, 2007). The intention at the time was to do more to raise the profile of looked after children, challenge low expectations and aspirations, try to avert permanent exclusions and to initiate further integration of social care and education (Parker and Gorman, 2013). Overall, the pilot was considered to be a success (Berridge, 2012b) with local authorities identifying a higher profile for these children. In addition, the pilot's outcomes included improvements in teaching, mainly positive outcomes in attainment, and local authorities' responsibilities to LAC being highlighted more specifically.

The VSHs were experienced educationalists, usually coming from a headship or deputy headship. Some also had social care experience. As a result, they were able to exert influence over colleagues in school, particularly in relation to contentious issues like school admissions and exclusions (Berridge, 2012b). Positive evaluations from Ofsted (2012a) and an All-Party Parliamentary Group (2012) followed and in the Children and Families Act (2014) the VSH role became statutory for all local authorities.

Usually the VSH will lead a virtual school. Virtual schools are not physical schools, rather they act as a champion for LAC, promoting educational outcomes to help them achieve in line with their non-LAC peers (Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020). While the size of virtual

schools will vary in different local authorities, usually related to the number of children that the authority looks after, the role of the VSH is the same and outlined in detail by statutory guidance from DFE (2018b). The VSH must keep an accurate roll (i.e., a numbered list) of all children looked after by the local authority, including those placed in other local authorities and this must be monitored and updated as children come into and leave care frequently (DFE, 2018b). There is also an important communication responsibility; the VSH should update head teachers and designated LAC teachers (this role will be explained later) when a child's care status changes, and ensure that schools have up to date information about children's health. Similarly, the VSH needs to make arrangements for positive multiagency working to ensure that education is considered as part of care planning for these young people (DFE, 2018b). This is likely to include social workers, foster carers and other professionals within that young person's network.

There is also a quality assurance and oversight role for the VSH as he or she needs to ensure that all LAC have an up to date, high quality Personal Education Plan (PEP) (these will be discussed later) and that all LAC are attending an appropriate education. What this means in practice is that education should be full-time and whenever possible the school should be rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding and children should only be attending unsatisfactory schools in exceptional circumstances (DFE, 2018b). This priority is linked to, and supported by the DFE's decision to grant LAC the highest ranking in school admissions. This means that schools can exceed their maximum role number to admit LAC and if necessary local authorities can direct them to do so (DFE, 2018b). The VSH needs also to ensure that LAC when moving to a new placement, even in an emergency, have started at new, appropriate education within 20 working days. The VSH role is also about ensuring that the child's voice is heard and that they have the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings around matters in their education that are important to them, including the school that they attend (DFE, 2018b).

Ultimately the virtual head has responsibility for the management and allocation of the funding (DFE, 2015b) and must identify which children are eligible to receive the funding, and advise school and social care colleagues of this. The VSH must also ensure that the method for payment is simple and does not lead to any delay. The VSH, as the

lead professional for the local authority, is accountable for the spend and its impact so he or she must decide whether to give schools the whole £2345 per pupil, or a different amount, and have an overview as to the extent to which the funding is making an impact for the children by holding schools to account. The VSH must be able to demonstrate impact to senior colleagues within the local authority, to DFE and to Ofsted during inspection and this impact is likely to be demonstrated via positive educational outcomes and value for money (DFE, 2015b).

The Social Worker

Local authorities in England have a duty under the 1989 Children Act to promote the well-being of looked after children and their educational achievement under the 2004 Children Act. While there are a number of professionals who are involved in supporting LAC, this glossary outlining the main ones, the social worker perhaps has the central role. The social worker has oversight and responsibility (sometimes shared with others) for all aspects of the young person's welfare. The social worker role goes beyond just working with looked after children of course (Parker and Doel, 2013), and social workers engage in a range of social care actions including: supporting families who are struggling with relationships, helping those with addictions, supporting the elderly and the disabled, and protecting those at risk of harm from themselves or others (Brody, 2010).

When children become looked after though, the social worker must ensure that the local authority's corporate parenting responsibilities are enacted effectively (White, Carr and Lowe, 1990). These include ensuring that the child is not discriminated against for being looked after, nor for any additional reason (such as having a disability or their ethnicity) (DFEE / DOH, 2000; Thompson, 2012). The social worker must also help to provide continuity and stability, particularly in relation to foster placement and educational setting, and facilitate early intervention when required to address any additional needs (Cocker and Allain, 2013). There is a focus on the need for high expectations particularly around achievement and behaviour and there must be regular opportunities for the child's voice to be heard (DFE / DOH, 2000; Children and Young Persons Act, 2008; Children and Families Act, 2014; DFE, 2014a; Children and Social Work Act, 2017; DFE, 2018b).

In relation to education, the social worker still holds significant responsibility as he or she should have the most up to date, relevant information about the child (Quinney, 2006). This need to be shared effectively with other professionals, particularly the virtual head and designated teacher (this role is explored next) so that they can make well-informed decisions (DFE, 2018b). No significant choices that affect education should be made by the social worker without liaison with other key professionals and he or she must ensure that education is planned for carefully when a child is coming into care or is changing foster placements (DFE, 2018b). The social worker is also an important contributor to the personal education plan (Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020) (this will be discussed later in this section) and the discussions that take place in that forum around targets and interventions, including those that may be supported through the use of pupil premium plus. It is important to note here that one of the main aims of this research is to explore how and to what extent different stakeholders are involved in decision making around pupil premium plus and related interventions. There is an acknowledgement that a lack of social workers' educational knowledge, particularly around post-school options, can have a negative impact on educational outcomes for LAC (APPG, 2012). Similarly, some LAC do identify education as an area in which they would like greater support from their social workers, albeit acknowledging that child safety and appropriate placements are also very important (Oliver, 2010). As a result the APPG (2012) recommended that social workers engage in updated professional development to ensure that they are more informed about the education system and especially around options for children when they leave school. This is happening much more frequently now (Sebba and Berridge, 2019) though training for all stakeholders around pupil premium plus remains a recommendation from Read, Macer and Parfitt's (2020) research.

For the majority of looked after children the local authority holds parental responsibility and so the social worker can make decisions for them, with their health and wellbeing central to those choices. In that the way, the corporate parent is ensuring that it is 'a good parent' (DFEE / DOH, 2000, p. 20), acting in the best interests (Children and Social Work Act, 2017).

The Designated Teacher for Looked After Children

Every local authority school, as well as academies and free schools must appoint a designated teacher for looked after children (DT). This role was initially made statutory for local authority schools in 2001 following publication of joint guidance around the education of LAC by Department of Education and Employment and Department of Health (2000) and this was expanded to include all state schools following revised guidance from DFE (2014a). In short, the DT must have an overview of the school's LAC cohort and an understanding of the key policies and relevant resources that ensure good practice across the school. He or she must also be the contact person for other professionals and is responsible for making sure that looked after children's needs are met and that they have someone that they can talk to if and when they need support (DFEE / DOH, 2000).

In practice the role has many aspects and while the DT is not solely responsible for the achievement and well-being of all LAC (that responsibility is shared across all staff) the DT needs to ensure that appropriate support is in place and that expectations of achievement and behaviour are high (DFEE / DOH, 2000). Positive communication with other professionals is also a priority and in particular the DT should promote effective home-school relationships with foster carers (DFEE / DOH, 2000).

This initial guidance was supplemented (DCSF, 2009) with clearer foci around accountability with the DT needing to provide an annual report to the school's governing body and input around educational progress and targets to the child's statutory looked after reviews. There was also an acknowledgement with the guidance that planning for LAC needed to be informed by effective assessment by teachers, supplemented by additional resources like one-to-one tuition, and supported by effective support from foster carers. In line with developments within personal education plans (which will be discussed later in the chapter) the DT had also to provide opportunities for the child's wishes and feelings to be heard. Perhaps most important in terms of emphasising the importance of the role and the status of looked after children was the change in the law in the Children and Families Act (2008) which stated that the DT had to be a qualified teacher, or a member of staff in post for at least six months who was working towards becoming a qualified teacher. The 2009 statutory guidance was replaced in 2018 and

while the main elements of the DT role remained, the updated guidance now requires that the DT have oversight of previously looked after children if they have been adopted or are subject to a special guardianship order or a child arrangements order. There is also a greater focus on the mental health of LAC and on avoiding exclusions.

A consistent message across most of the statutory guidance and recommendations (DFEE / DOH, 2000, Children and Families Act, 2008; DCSF, 2009; APPG, 2012; DFE, 2018d) is that the DT must be a member of staff with sufficient experience and authority to provide advice and training to others and to influence decision-making about support for these children. The introduction of pupil premium plus has further sharpened this focus as the DT is responsible for ensuring that plans made through the PEP, including those requiring additional resources that pupil premium plus may fund, are taken forward effectively (DFE, 2018b, 2018d). The PEP itself is the joint responsibility of the local authority who looks after the young person (DFE, 2018b) and in practice, this usually means that the meeting itself is led or chaired by the DT, as the education expert.

The Foster Carer

A foster carer (or foster parent) is any person that is looking after a child (or children) who has been placed with that person under section 21 of the Children Act (1989), or has been voluntarily accommodated with permission of birth parents under section 20 of the Children Act (1989). As has already been outlined the local authority has responsibilities in these situations around the child's welfare, their wishes and feelings, access to support and guidance, accommodation and education. Much of the responsibility for these things is shared with the child's foster carer (Fahlberg, 1994).

Foster carers are employed by the local authority, or by private fostering agencies, to look after these young people, and they are paid an allowance to do so. They should be providing day-to-day for the children that they are looking after, but this needs to be more than just accommodation and should include emotional support, placement stability and a loving home environment (Become, 2020a). Because of the early trauma that many of these children have experienced they may present with social and emotional difficulties which make placements hard to find and maintain (Research in Practice, 2014). Children who are disabled, large sibling groups, unaccompanied

asylum-seeking children and teenagers are among those who are most difficult to find placements for. In some cases local authorities will use residential care for young people who have mental health issues, challenging behaviour or are in need to therapeutic care (Berridge, 2016). Children who may abscond or are at risk of exploitation may be looked after in secure care homes. In both cases usually these children have previously been in foster care placements that have broken down (Become, 2020a).

Foster carers are an important part of the network supporting the education of looked after children (SCIE, 2004). They should emphasise the importance of high expectations in achievement and behaviour, show keen interest in educational outcomes and help the child with things like reading (Pithouse and Rees, 2015). Also, in consultation with their social workers, they should be accessing regular training and professional development that will help them to meet the needs of their foster children (Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2013). Along with social workers, designated teachers and the VSH, the foster carer has an important role, and shared responsibility, in developing the personal education plan (which will be discussed shortly) (DFE, 2018b). The carers should also be involved in discussions around the child's choice of school at the normal transition times (Brewin and Statham, 2011). Of course, foster carers develop significant knowledge about their foster children and this information should be shared with other professionals as appropriate (DFE, 2018b). Where foster care is at its most effective, Brown *et al* (2019) argue, foster carers provide genuine care: emotional support, empathy, affection and perseverance. This goes beyond purely safeguarding and risk management.

Foster carers should not be confused with adoptive parents or people who care for children under special guardianship orders as these are different roles. In both of these cases the adults hold parental responsibility and there is less involvement from the local authority (special guardians do benefit from a greater level of support than adoptive parents).

The Independent Reviewing Officer

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was established via the 2002 Adoption and Children Act in response to concerns that looked after children's care

plans were either not appropriate or not acted upon quickly enough (BASW, 2013). Every LAC must have an IRO who chairs the young person's six monthly Looked After Child Statutory Review, which reviews the child's care plan (Become, 2019). The IRO should also ensure that the young person's wishes and feelings are being taken into account and challenge the local authority if there is too much delay or poor practice on the behalf of other professionals (DCSF, 2010). The independence of the role is key, and even though IROs are employed by the local authority they are independent from the social work teams that hold LAC caseloads, which should enable the support and challenge that is required (BASW, 2013). However, Fayle (2019) argues that there is inconsistency in the robustness of challenge from IROs, due at least in part to local authority processes and management structure.

It would be unusual for the IRO to attend a PEP meeting (see below) although the PEP does form the education element of the LAC's care plan and so this should be scrutinised during the Statutory LAC Review (DFE, 2018b). It would be normal for this analysis to include discussion around pupil premium plus and its allocation and monitoring as this should be part of each PEP (2014b).

Personal Education Plans

Personal Educations Plans (PEPs) have been statutory for looked after children since October 2001 following publication of joint guidance around education of LAC by Department of Education and Employment and Department of Health (2000). PEPs were intended to address a perceived insufficient coverage of education within care planning and statutory looked after child reviews.

The specific issues and challenges for LAC will be addressed later on but in short, DFEE / DOH identified that lower expectations of LAC achievement and behaviour, bullying and social exclusion and too much drift and delay in finding appropriate education and actioning interventions were adversely affecting educational outcomes (2000). These themes have been echoed in subsequent research (SEU, 2003; Berridge, 2007; McClung and Gayle, 2010; HCESC, 2016). There was also a perception that education had a lower priority in care planning than some other factors. As a result, PEPs, which would be initiated by social workers within 20 days of coming into care, and then reviewed at least

every six months, were made compulsory. The intention was for these to be a shared responsibility between social workers, designated teachers and foster carers, and to be part of the child's care plan (DFEE / DOH, 2000). PEP content would address educational stability, help to identify areas of special educational need, set clear targets for both short and long term, take note of the child's wishes and feelings and form an evolving record of achievement (DFEE / DOH, 2000).

While the principle of the personal education plan has remained since its inception, subsequent statutory guidance (DFE, 2014a, 2018b) made slight changes to the way it works in practice. These include a tightening of some of the timescales, such as reducing the maximum time for a PEP to be initiated after becoming looked after from 20 working days to ten, and a requirement for PEPs to be reviewed once a term (so three times a year) rather than once every six months. There was also an expansion of the PEP's age range to include a pre-school PEP and a post-16 PEP and adding the virtual head to the list of professionals with shared responsibility for the PEP. The breadth of support has also been expanded with a focus on careers advice for older children and an acknowledgement that looked after children may need additional support when transitioning from one school to another. Most importantly for this research is that the PEP must also include clear planning for the ways that professionals will plan to allocate additional resources, such as pupil premium plus, to meet the child's identified needs and aspirations and help them to achieve the targets set within the PEP (DFE, 2018b).

PEPs have had a positive impact on the cooperation between education and social care professionals with both parties welcoming the opportunity to focus on the individual child (Hayden, 2005; Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020). In contrast, there is a challenge in ensuring that firstly PEPs are completed fully and on time (Harker *et al*, 2004) and that they do not simply duplicate content of other existing plans like IEPs (Fletcher-Campbell *et al*, 2003). There was also a feeling amongst some social workers that they were inflexible and did not cater well enough for those children with the most significant need (Hayden, 2005). More recently, VSHs have developed their own PEPs to meet needs in their local authority and while this has provided some flexibility, it has also resulted in some inconsistency which some DTs have not found to be positive (Read, Macer and Parfitt, 2020).