Mainstream Secondary School Staff Perceptions and Experiences of Working with Alternative Provision

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an increase in mainstream schools using dual registration with alternative provision (AP) to deliver education. There is limited research into the motivations and working relationships between these settings. The research presented here is an exploratory investigation that uses six semi-structured interviews to elicit the perceptions and experiences of mainstream secondary school staff, regarding their work with AP settings. It aims to understand staff motivations for using AP, barriers and facilitators to working with AP, and the existing perceptions held by staff. Situated within a critical realist research philosophy, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was utilised to complete both inductive and deductive analyses. The inductive analysis produced themes relating to the three guiding research questions. The deductive analysis uses the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) to organise data visually under the categories of background factors, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. The data generates an understanding that school staff feel unable to support within the confines of their mainstream settings and hold a perception that AP possess components that they cannot provide. Barriers to working with AP were deemed to be the lack of regulation and guidance, the marketisation of the sector, and negative parent and pupil perceptions. Facilitators include positive parent and pupil perceptions, and regular, transparent communication. Overarching perceptions from staff developed themes such as: approach must be individualised; inconsistent experiences and lack of knowledge; and AP can be unequitable. AP was viewed largely as a hopeful alternative for students and the various factors impacting these beliefs and attitudes are displayed visually using the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011). It is highlighted that Educational Psychologists are in a unique position to foster the

development of inclusive practices when considering any potential use of AP.

Implications for policy, practice and future research are considered.

DEDICATION

To Ross, my family, and my friends, thank you for your patience, encouragement, and love throughout my journey.

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Alternative Provision
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPs	Educational Psychologists
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
LA	Local Authority
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RAA	Reasoned Action Approach
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

This research was conducted as partial fulfilment of my applied doctoral training in Educational and Child Psychology. Consequently, it was completed whilst on placement with a Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in the West Midlands. My interest in the area was rooted in my recent and previous professional experiences working with professionals, young people, and parents who have experience of the Alternative Provision (AP) system. This professional involvement has given me insight into the regulation, use, and accessibility of alternative forms of education, leading me to question if others have the same understanding or perspectives as myself.

Within the landscape of secondary education, AP exists as a resource for addressing the needs of students who face various challenges in traditional school settings. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of mainstream secondary school staff when working with AP. AP can be defined as non-mainstream educational settings that offer instruction to students who "...would not otherwise receive suitable education due to exclusion, illness or other reasons" (DfE, 2013, p. 3). Examples of such settings include "education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour" (DfE, 2013, p. 3). This includes pupil referral units (PRUs), AP-free schools and AP-academies. It can also encompass settings that support

medical or mental health needs otherwise not accessible in a mainstream setting (DfE, 2022a).

1.2   Types of Alternative Provision

It is important to note that the range of AP available varies depending on a number of factors such as location, local authority policy, availability of funds and pupil places (Gutherson et al., 2011). This will mean that the use of, and access to AP, is not the same for all young people. Table 1.1 below details the different classification of AP potentially available to pupils.

Table 1.1 AP Classifications

Alternative Provision Type	Description
Pupil referral unit (PRU)	Offers support and education to students who may have been excluded from mainstream schools or struggle with significant behavioural, social, emotional, or learning challenges. PRUs are designed to address the educational and emotional needs of such students who find it difficult to manage within the traditional school environment. The structure and services provided by PRUs can differ between regions within the UK, and terminology may vary accordingly. In some areas, PRUs will offer short-term placements with the aim of reintegration back into mainstream schools after a designated period. In other regions PRUs will predominantly remain the alternative setting for a pupil's foreseeable education. In most regions PRUs will offer both services, however, their ability to offer either placements can be controlled by variables such as capacity and funding.

	PRUs are most often managed by the LAs they reside within. As a result of receiving pupils who have been directly excluded, secondary PRUs will often provide education for more age groups.
AP academy	AP academies are often similar in their structure and approach to education with an emphasis on providing pupils with a mainstream-like educational experience tailored, where possible, to the needs of the pupils attending that setting. These settings are typically governed by Academy Trusts and follow the leadership structure of academy schools. A number of PRUs have converted to AP academies over time (DfE, 2022a). Like a PRU, this setting may also provide short-term educational placements. These settings predominantly cater for pupils in their later years of secondary education.
AP free school	Like AP academies, AP free Schools receive government funding. The key difference is that AP Free Schools are set up and sponsored by independent organisations, such as charities, community groups, or education providers, rather than being run by an existing Academy Trust. Consequently, they may be afforded more autonomy and less moderation in their operation and curriculum compared to AP Academies or PRUs.
Unregistered AP	This covers a wide range of providers that may not meet the criteria that would require for them to register as an independent school or PRU, or they may be in a pre-registration phase for newer settings. These can include dedicated tutoring companies, online providers, vocational training or work-based learning, or therapeutic support. Unlike the examples above, unregistered settings fall outside any existing designation as a "school" (DfE, 2022b, p.3). Unregistered provision settings are not subject to Ofsted oversight (Ofsted, 2016).

As Table 1.1 outlines, variations exist between types of AP that include curriculum, funding, governance, and leadership. Beyond the classifications seen in Table 1.1, AP can also be designed with a particular pedagogy or student profile in mind, and it can be difficult to understand each route a pupil has taken in order to find themselves in AP. Table 1.2 outlines the various routes that may result in a pupil attending AP, who is likely to have commissioned and funded the place, and which school they would then be registered with as a result.

Table 1.2. Routes into AP based on information gathered from Malcom (2021) and Gazeley et al., (2010), p.25, Exclusion and alternatives to exclusion: a continuum of provision.

Route into Alternative Provision	Commissioner	Funder	Type of Registration
Following a permanent exclusion	LA	LA	Single registration with AP
Short-term intervention to support reintegration back into mainstream	School	School/ LA	Dual registration
Long-term alternative provision as an alternative to exclusion	School	School/LA	Dual registration
Off-site attendance for a portion of the week to access other courses such as vocational training	School	School	Dual registration
For reasons of health	LA/School	LA/School	Dual or Single registration
Where the LA needs to make provision in accordance with Section 19 'other reasons'	LA	LA	Dual or Single registration
Agreed named provision in EHCP	LA	LA	Single registration with AP
Interim provision whilst awaiting placement in a school	LA	LA	Single registration with AP

There are various reasons why a pupil may have taken each of these routes which in some areas, has led to a menu of alternative educational settings; some of which accept a mixture of needs and some tailored to the specific needs of their pupils. Different needs that are suggested to be catered for through AP include: special educational needs, social needs, medical needs, emotional wellbeing and mental health. This could mean that one AP is designed to support pupils having difficulties   reintegrating back into mainstream due to increased involvement in anti-social activities, and the same or an alternative setting may cater for pupils who find busy settings challenging due to a social communication difference such as Autism.

1.2.1 Commissioning and Regulation of Alternative Provision

As seen in Table 1.2, AP is usually funded through LAs or directly from host schools. Over time, there has been a gradual shift in some LAs regarding the funding and commissioning of AP where responsibilities have devolved into the hands of mainstream schools. There remain significant differences between the accessibility, use and regulation of these settings (Bryant et al., 2018; DfE, 2023b; Gutherson et al., 2011). The White Paper, Educational, Excellence, Everywhere (2016), set an agenda to meet the needs of neglected groups of children which in part included reforming the AP system to ensure mainstream schools remain accountable for the education of pupils in AP and the commissioning of high-quality provision (DfE, 2016, p.88). Bryant et al. (2018) were commissioned by the DfE to research how LA AP systems operated and what made them most effective. A key finding emphasised the benefits of partnership working, and mainstream schools remaining responsible for their pupils who required AP. A system which is now known to be a 'responsibility-based model'. Bryant et al. (2018) considers this to involve:

"…approaches that seek to foster responsibility on the part of mainstream schools, AP providers and local support services for all pupils in a locality, including those in AP, and cultivate a shared understanding and collective custodianship of the local system's resources for supporting pupils requiring inclusion support and AP." (p.5).

In their research, two specific responsibility-based models emerged: collective decision-making models and devolved funding models. Models for collective decision-making are where local agreements operate a process that allows all professional stakeholders to make decisions together, regarding the use of shared system resources for AP. Devolved funding models require school leaders to use devolved funding, along with their own delegated resources, to put in place support. This is one possible change to the commissioning avenues that may be driving increased use of AP by mainstream settings.

Despite this research discussing funding streams, presently only brief statutory guidance exists for the use of AP relating to placements commissioned by schools (DfE, 2013, p.11). See Appendix A for a summary of the current advice and guidance applicable to schools commissioning AP.

1.3 Research Context

In March 2023, the DfE presented an analysis of the consultation responses to the Green Paper, SEND review: right support, right place, right time (DfE, 2023a), which consequently led to the development of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023b). This Improvement Plan sets out an agenda to develop strategic frameworks designed to enhance and support educational provisions for students

with special needs, or those who require alternative forms of education. It proposes plans to adapt programmes, staffing, support, assessment, and monitoring of AP, through national standards and increased regulation (DfE, 2023b). Exactly how that will be implemented is yet to be discussed however the proposed changes to AP have been summarised in Appendix B.

The consultation data that informed this plan gathered a mixture of opinions and perceptions from a variety of people including parents, senior school leaders, AP representatives, charities, and LA professionals. The authors report that there was "general support among consultation respondents for the need for a national SEND and alternative provision system" (DfE, 2023a, p.6). A small number of questions related specifically to AP that are important to highlight for the purpose of this research.

Opinions varied widely across all questions with a marginal number in agreement that the new vision will bring positive change for young people in AP. 36% of respondents (n= 927) either strongly agreed or agreed that the ideas set out in the Green Paper would result in positive change, 32% (n=824) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 32% (n=808) neither agreed nor disagreed (DfE, 2023a, p.54). These responses appear to show some enthusiasm for these changes with answers weighing marginally in favour, however, the report also highlights an even greater degree of uncertainty or scepticism amongst many groups consulted. This suggests that even proposed improvements to the AP system are filled with nuance, that will be difficult to combat through national standards and that a localised approach may also be necessary.

Consultees were given an opportunity to offer qualitative responses to the question "What needs to be in place in order to distribute existing funding more effectively to alternative provision schools, to ensure they have the financial stability required to deliver our vision for more early intervention and re-integration?" (DfE, 2023a, p.54). The researchers noted that equality and consistency of funding were important to those asked, to provide stability, build better practice over time, and possibly prevent cost inflation by private providers (DfE, 2023a, p.55). This is in contrast to current funding models that predominantly run on funding per pupil either from the host school or LA.

When consultees were asked if they felt a bespoke AP performance framework would improve outcomes for young people, 2,319 people responded, 44% (n=1,028) strongly agreed or agreed, and 56% were either neutral, disagreed or disagreed strongly. When looking at responses from teaching staff specifically (n=634), 59% strongly agreed or agreed, and 40% were either neutral, disagreed or disagreed strongly. This would suggest that the overall consultation response is relatively reflective of teachers' opinions. However, 'Headteacher/teacher/other teaching staff', along with 'parents/ carers' (n=957), were the highest responding groups, with the next highest being 'Other/interested individual' (n=297) (DfE, 2023a, p.556). This may suggest that the consultation is more reflective of teachers' and parents' perspectives because greater numbers of them responded, and that there is perhaps less of a consensus in thought regarding the proposed AP improvements across communities.

Additionally, respondents were asked if they feel the proposed statutory framework for pupil movements will improve oversight and transparency of placement into and out of AP. 58% of respondents (n=1,335) agreed that it would.

Again however, when looking at the variation between respondents, LA and AP representatives were more likely to agree (over 90%) compared to only 40% of parents. Teachers were more likely to agree, however 28% remained reserved about the changes. The qualitative explanation provided by a parent or carer in the report stated, "*I don't believe, in my experience, that LA's have the resources or internal communication between departments, in order to implement this*." (DfE, 2023a, p. 58). The variation seen throughout these responses indicates that there are differences in the opinions of those engaging with AP across all aspects of the community, from those who work in AP, those who work with AP and those whose children access AP. It also shows us that even within one professional group (i.e., teachers) opinions regarding improving AP differ and perhaps a scepticism exists about how increased regulation can be implemented.

1.4   Research Rationale

This research seeks to inform the literature around the use of AP from the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff. The field of AP has gained significant interest in recent years as a result of the governments long-term plans for improvement (DfE, 2022a). Despite its increase in use, AP remains an elusive and unequitable system serving some of the most vulnerable pupils within the education system who can experience vastly different educational and social needs (Malcolm, 2021; Tomlinson & Johnston, 2024). In recent years there has also been a movement towards dual registration and increased responsibility for schools in commissioning AP (Bryant et al., 2018; DfE, 2016). Very few investigations have considered the perspectives held by teachers about AP, and I am unaware of any that have looked solely at the views of secondary school educators who bear

responsibilities for supervising and authorising AP. It has been proposed that the experiences of staff working with young people likely to be placed in AP may be a driving force in the commissioning of AP. The choices made by teaching professionals consequently has implications on the appropriateness of the setting chosen, its regulation, and ultimately pupil achievement. This idea is reinforced by Malcom (2021) who reviewed the current literature surrounding AP and relationships and suggested that the quality of collaboration between AP and commissioners should be a focus moving forward, in order to improve the AP system. Finally, the recent SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023b) also brings a timely need to increase the evidence base regarding the use of AP, to ensure it aligns with the best educational interests of pupils in AP. Subsequently, Understanding the experiences and motivations of the staff contracting with AP is key to helping us further understand the inclusion of AP pupils.

1.5   Research Objectives

This research has three main objectives: to understand motivations, experiences and perceptions of participants in relation to the AP system. The following research questions have been devised.

RQ1: What are the reasons for using alternative provision from the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff?

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream secondary school staff working with AP?

RQ3: What perceptions exist regarding AP from the perspectives of mainstream secondary school staff?

1.6 Research Scope

This research focuses on mainstream secondary school staff perceptions and experiences of commissioning and working with AP. The location in which this research is conducted has adopted a responsibility-based approach (Bryant et al., 2018) to the use of AP and maintains a diverse offer of AP settings across the city. In relation to the participants and findings of this project, when referencing pupils in AP this research is referring to pupils who remain registered with their mainstream school, and the APs discussed will predominantly mean those designed to support pupils with social and or emotional needs, as these were the most common form of AP used by the participants. Any exceptions to this will be explicitly stated.

1.7 Expected Research Contribution

This research provides an account of the attitudes and perceptions that currently exist amongst mainstream secondary school staff regarding the use and commissioning of AP. The findings contribute to the limited body of literature that exists (Johnston & Bradford, 2022; Malcolm, 2021) and document the qualitative experiences of the school staff trying to navigate the AP system before the proposed government SEND and AP Improvement Plan reforms (DfE, 2023b). Within the profession of Educational and Child Psychology, the research seeks to inform educational psychologists of the difficulties faced by schools in acting inclusively towards pupils they have identified as struggling to engage with the mainstream pedagogy. It is also hoped that findings may help to inform any future policy reforms at both a local and national level, by offering a richer picture of any possible challenges or benefits to commissioning and overseeing the use of AP from a mainstream school perspective.

1.8   Thesis Structure

Table 1.3 provides a summary of this volume, listing each chapter and a brief summary of its contents.

Table 1.3 Thesis Structure

Chapter Title	Summary
Chapter 1: Introduction	Contextual information regarding AP necessary for this research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review	Review of relevant literature pertaining to the use of AP by mainstream schools and inclusive attitudes presented in relation to the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA).
Chapter 3: Methodology	Methodological choices and research design used in this research.
Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion	Presentation of the inductive and deductive analyses as they relate to relevant literature. In line with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, I have refrained from using the positivist term 'findings' as the themes are considered to be generated (Braun and Clarke, 2022).
Chapter 5: Conclusion	Potential implications for policy makers and the professional practice of educators and EPs. Strengths and limitations of the research in addition to suggested future research

	considerations. The chapter ends with concluding statements.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Although AP programmes offer a substantial resource within the education sector in England, policymakers and academics have paid little attention to their unique characteristics or how they can help young people who are struggling in traditional education (Pennachia & Thomson, 2016). Due to the recent SEND and AP Improvement Plan proposed by the government (DfE, 2023b), there is a timely need to increase the evidence base regarding the use of AP, to ensure it aligns with the best educational interests of some of the most vulnerable pupils. This literature review considers the use and commissioning of AP by mainstream schools within the context of inclusion and inclusive attitudes. The existing literature detailing how AP is currently used and its potential efficacy is considered and the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011, p.22) is used as a framework to understand attitudes towards AP. To conclude I will discuss how AP can sit within the discourse of inclusion and how partnership working between mainstream settings and alternative providers plays a crucial role in fulfilling that.

2.2 Alternative Provision

In the last decade there have been many developments in the definition, use and regulation of AP in England, and in 2019 the Conservative party Manifesto pledged to "expand alternative provision schools", as part of its drive to "create more great schools" (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2019, p.13). Figure 2.1 shows the evolution of associated government research and documentation relating to the use of AP over time.

Figure 2.1 AP Documentation Timeline
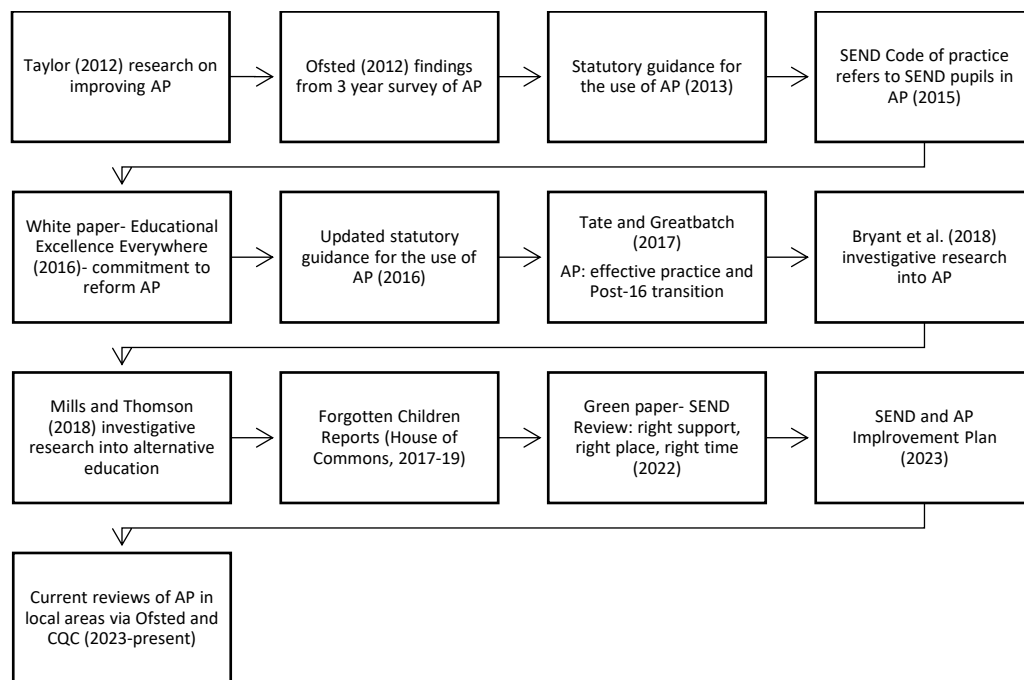
2.2.1 Pupil Demographics in Alternative Provision

Data from the Department for Education (DfE, 2023c) indicates that some groups of children are more likely to be placed in AP than others. Around 40,904 pupils were accessing AP between 2022 and 2023 (DfE, 2023c). Of these, 25,100 pupils accessed state-funded AP arranged by their schools and 11,900 of those pupils had a dual subsidiary registration in state-funded AP schools (i.e., dual registration). In 2022-2023, 20% of pupils attending AP had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and a further 42.5% received SEN support. Boys are overrepresented compared to the general population (63.5%), and 53.6% of all pupils were eligible for free school meals. Eligibility for free school meals is often a marker associated with poverty, and the figure displayed here is substantially higher compared to all school pupils which is 23.8%. Additional research also highlights that

pupils who have experienced local authority care, young carers, and pupils from specific cultural backgrounds (Travellers of Irish heritage, Gypsy/Roma, White working class, and Black Caribbean) are over-represented in AP (Gutherson et al., 2011; Malcolm, 2015). These statistics indicate the importance of decision making when using AP as these children often represent some of the most vulnerable pupils in the educational system.

Due to a lack of regulation in this sector, the government currently publishes data for less than half of the pupils in AP (Centre for Social Justice, 2022). Even less is known about the extent to which schools commission AP with unregistered providers as the government does not keep records on the total number of unregistered providers or the number of pupils accessing them. Unregistered provision settings are not subject to Ofsted oversight and inspection and the quality assurance and regulation of these types of settings is variable across different local authorities (DfE, 2016). The government's SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023b) represents a potential change in the way schools and society come to use and understand AP, particularly concerning SEND. As part of this plan, the government have pledged to include AP in the discussion regarding SEND systems. In doing so they are proposing to build AP capacity and develop a performance framework to help regulate and monitor the use of AP for future pupils (DfE, 2023b).

2.2.2 Use of Alternative Provision

AP has historically been arranged as a time-limited, non-permanent resource designed for pupils to return to their mainstream settings after a period of respite or intervention. Heinrich (2005) and Pennachia, and Thomson (2016) refer to this as the 'repair and return' rationale. However increasingly, pupils are remaining in AP

settings for the length of their compulsory schooling whilst staying on roll with their mainstream settings (DfE, 2023b), known as dual registration. In 2018, a largescale rapid evidence assessment was commissioned by the DfE to explore the evidence base for current practice in AP. This found that participants saw value in mainstream schools remaining involved and invested in the progress of young people (Mills & Thomson, 2018). This increases the need for greater knowledge of the partnership between schools and AP. Not only are pupils staying for longer periods of time in AP, but these settings are also accepting a broader range of pupils including those with recognised needs such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Considering many LAs have special schools specifically devised to meet the needs of specific categories of SEND, this raises questions as to why these pupils find themselves in AP and not in a 'needs specific' provision. It may be the case that these pupils do not have an EHCP required to access a special school, there is a lack of suitable specialist settings, the English educational offer may be too narrow, or perhaps there is a complex interplay of attitudes concerning certain types of SEND that causes teachers to feel AP is the best option. For this reason, it is important to prioritise more research that incorporates these types of drivers, to enable us to shed light on these motivations further.

Although the current statistics available give us some insight into the characteristics of pupils attending AP, they do not explain why AP is used or what the outcomes are for these pupils. The available data suggests that the number of pupils attending AP in England has increased by around 13% between the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 (DfE, 2023c). Very little is known of the reasons why schools commission AP, as insufficient data is currently collected. Data from National

Statistics (DfE, 2023c) suggests that the most common reason recorded for schools arranging AP was "off-site placement for behavioural support" at 55.8%. Other reasons included physical or mental health conditions, suspension, unresolved exclusions, or 'other'. From a review of the literature Table 2.1 represents a summary of the possible reasons schools and local authorities make use of AP.

Table 2.1. Proposed Reasons for the Use of Alternative Provision in England (Collated from Bryant et al., 2018; DfE, 2023b; DfE, 2023c; Gutherson et al., 2011; House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; Owen et al., 2021)

Proposed Reasons for the Use of Alternative Provision in England	
Diverse SEND	Those in education report a lack of specialist educational settings or special schools, yet an increase in identified SEND (particularly mental health needs). AP can cater to students with diverse learning needs, who may require individualised attention and teaching methods that traditional mainstream schools feel they are not able to provide, such as smaller class sizes or a higher ratio of adult-to-child support.
Behavioural and emotional challenges	Some students may face behavioural or emotional challenges that are not identified to be a SEND yet can disrupt the learning environment in mainstream schools. These may present due to significant unique personal challenges or unidentified SEND. Mainstream staff may feel AP can offer a more specialised environment to address these challenges that they cannot. At times this has been attributed to a rigidity in some mainstream behavioural policies.

Personalised learning and flexible approaches	AP reports to offer more personalised and tailored learning experiences, allowing students to progress at their own pace and focus on their specific areas of interest and strength. It is felt by some that mainstream schools can only make these adaptations to a point before requiring a substantially different pedagogy. These may include the addition of vocational or community-based learning programmes. The reasons for needing this may also tie into the reasons stated above.
Preventing exclusion	In some cases, AP can be a way to prevent students from being permanently excluded from the education system. It can offer an opportunity for students to continue their education while avoiding cost to the school and pupil (monetary and other) or negative social consequences of exclusion.
Education policy and funding	Changes in education policy and funding are likely to have influenced the availability and uptake of AP such as the crackdown on actions like off-rolling and incentivised exclusion (For example, an unexpected byproduct of Progress 8).
National curriculum constraints	Some students experience a narrow core national curriculum as a result of intervention to reduce educational disengagement in mainstream settings. For this reason, some schools feel benefit from AP that offers a specialised curriculum, such as sports, environmental or outdoor learning, that mainstream settings feel they are unable to adapt for their pupils.
A lack of early intervention, funding, or support	Schools face many barriers in terms of early support and intervention. These can be a result of no longer having accessible finances to employ pastoral or specialist support

	as well as some attitudinal unwillingness to acknowledge certain problems or identify need.

In an effort to close this information gap, the DfE has asked schools to voluntarily submit data via the School Census on any AP they commission, both registered and unregistered. Data were initially gathered in January 2022, but no analysis has been released at the time of this research.

2.2.3 The Efficacy of Alternative Provision

In March 2018, the Conservative Government announced a vision to reform AP. This included building a strong evidence base about how local AP operates and how to improve outcomes for pupils who attend such settings (Bryant et al., 2018). Since then, research has suggested that more needs to be done to create a fair and equitable AP system, including the collection of more basic data by both the government and schools themselves (Malcolm, 2021). The government published the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023b) with plans to begin with an AP-specific focus that includes conducting reviews of APs across England (DfE, 2023b).

Current assessment of effectiveness in education is often based on perceived objective measures of success, with the standards set by mainstream schooling. This predominantly means the narrow view of progress towards nationally recognised GCSE or equivalent qualifications. It has been noted that historically, very few AP pupils achieve the qualifications that will support them into employment and are a population considerably more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment, or training) (DfE, 2016; Taylor, 2012). In 2019, the Centre for Social

Justice produced an analysis of the quality of AP and outcomes for each LA. On a 3-year average, all LAs listed maintained a percentage lower than 12% of pupils in AP achieving grade 9-4 in maths and English (Centre for Social Justice, 2020) and in 13 of those LAs, not a single child in AP passed both their English and Maths GCSE in three years. This could be interpreted as AP having little positive impact on the educational attainment of its pupils, however, there is no baseline or progress data to make comparisons against. Schools who commission this resource may argue that without the opportunity to access AP the only other option is for those pupils to be excluded or NEET.

Reviews of the effectiveness of AP have been conducted when thinking about wellbeing and belongingness, however, little evidence of the long-term benefits for students has been established (Gutherson et al., 2011; Owen, 2021; Thomson & Russell, 2009). Evidence, where it can be found, most often discusses characteristics or descriptors of what may make AP successful and less often looks into the how or why. Gutherson et al. (2011) conducted an international literature review into the outcomes of those in AP. The paper underscores that alternative education can be effective in achieving positive outcomes for students, including increased engagement, improved academic performance, and reduced dropout rates. Despite the potential benefits, the review also highlights challenges associated with alternative education, such as ensuring programme quality, teacher training, and adequate funding. The authors tentatively note that although they have selected some clear themes from the research available, there was not a strong evidence base to support claims of effectiveness, as there was no indication in the research of how these characteristics or components contribute to effective AP.

In a literature review exploring the theme of student relationships, Malcolm (2021) reviewed 114 studies relating to AP. The research underscored the prevalence of positive relationships as a central theme, suggesting their importance in social learning, wellbeing support, and understanding young people's experiences in AP settings. However, the conventional 'repair and return' approach, positioning AP as a temporary fix before mainstream reintegration, clashed with other findings, indicating this may be a problematic discourse surrounding AP. Moreover, the paper discussed some challenges faced when staff held deficit views of young people, a lack of trained staff, unstable teams, and a lack of supportive structures for staff working in AP settings. Challenges like qualification equivalence, exacerbation of difficulties through exposure to other peers, and the risks associated with provision ceasing suddenly were also highlighted. Finally, the paper scrutinised outcome measures, emphasising limited evidence within the research beyond perceptions.

Ultimately, Malcolm's (2021) research acknowledges the importance of improving the regulation of AP. He suggests that reengagement and continued education should be considered as potential AP outcomes, as well as the importance of contextualising success and advocating for diverse measures, to accurately assess the quality and impact of AP beyond academic achievements. Whilst the government's AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023b) can be viewed as a step towards regulation (DfE,2023b), Thompson and Russell (2009) caution that increasing regulation of AP may impact the unique and inclusive nature of it by encroaching on the freedom of choice these providers have. Consequently, it is important that any new frameworks accurately contextualise what effective AP looks like and how this can be delivered with inclusive values.

2.3 Inclusive Education

Researchers, such as Gazeley (2010), have argued that AP moves away from inclusive education and has the power to perpetuate social disadvantage. Inclusion has been a focus for the English educational system since the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). This emphasised the importance of offering education to all students in an inclusive setting (UNESCO, 1994). Over the past two decades, consecutive national educational policies and legal frameworks have aimed to facilitate the integration of all children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) requirements, into mainstream education (Mills & Thomson, 2018). However, despite the Salamanca statement, and supporting research of its benefits (Gupta et al., 2014; UNESCO, 1994), the concept of inclusion has encountered some difficulty in exerting influence on policies in the United Kingdom and various other locations (Woodcock et al., 2022).

The definition of inclusion has been highly disputed (Nilholm, 2021). In a review of the 30 most cited journal articles relating to inclusion in North American and European literature, Nilholm & Göransson (2017) found substantial variation in the conceptualisation and definition of what inclusion was, both between articles and within articles themselves. The authors raise concerns that this may lead to misinformation in both research and practice as competing philosophies and logic are driving the implementation of potential interventions. They also propose that the discourse regarding placement and inclusion may have turned attention away from the pure assessment of how children in need of additional support are best accommodated. Critically, some scholars argue that a definition is less important and that a meaningful understanding of the core values of inclusion would serve pupils

better (Ainscow et al*.,* 2006). Hodkinson (2005) extends this further and argues that inclusion must be firmly located within the sphere of the individual and not the collective.

In the context of this research, it is argued that inclusion must do more to remove the 'identified SEND' versus 'no SEND' dichotomy, as this does not serve pupils who have unrecognised, borderline, or are perceived to have no SEND, yet are struggling to receive education in their communities like those in AP. In this research, inclusion is defined as facilitating engagement in an appropriately individualised and challenging education, alongside a supportive and broad social network to promote a child's ability to participate in their community. Consequently, inclusion will be conceptualised as Hodkinson (2005) has previously described as "… a catalyst that requires schools and society to identify and overcome the barriers that inhibit children's choices and ability to achieve their full potential" (Hodkinson, 2005, p.19). Using this definition allows AP to exist within the conversation of inclusion and supports us to understand how professionals come to develop attitudes that perceive the use of AP as acting inclusively.

2.4   School Staff and Inclusive Attitudes

2.4.1   Attitude Formation and the Reasoned Action Approach

For us to understand the relationship between AP and inclusion, I will first discuss theory around how inclusive attitudes develop in education. A person's perceptions are said to influence intentions and attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) and much of the literature looking into the inclusive behaviours of teachers has centred around attitudes (Erten and Köseoğlu, 2022). Broadly, Fishbein & Ajzen (2011), define an attitude as a person's affect or disposition to respond favourably or

unfavourably with respect to a psychological object. Attitudes have also been conceptualised as relatively stable constructs impacted by cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Maio et al., 2018). This conceptualisation helps us to understand that an existing attitude often predicts a behaviour, however, it does not offer us insight into how an attitude may have formed.

To display how attitudes impact behaviour, Fishbein & Ajzen (2011) propose the RAA. This is suggested to be an extension of previous theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) and their earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). This approach considers background factors, beliefs, and perceptions, on an individual's intention and subsequent behaviour. Studying what factors may contribute to the formation of an attitude can help us to understand how this attitude may have formed as well as the behavioural intention. However, Fishbein & Ajzen (2011) do note that their visual representation lacks the appropriate detail with regard to feedback loops and relationships between the constructs. Figure 2.2 below is an adapted version of The RAA with arrows to represent the recursive nature of attitudes and behaviour formation.

Figure 2.2 An adapted representation of Fishbein and Ajzen's Schematic

presentation of The Reasoned Action Approach (taken from Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011,

p.22)
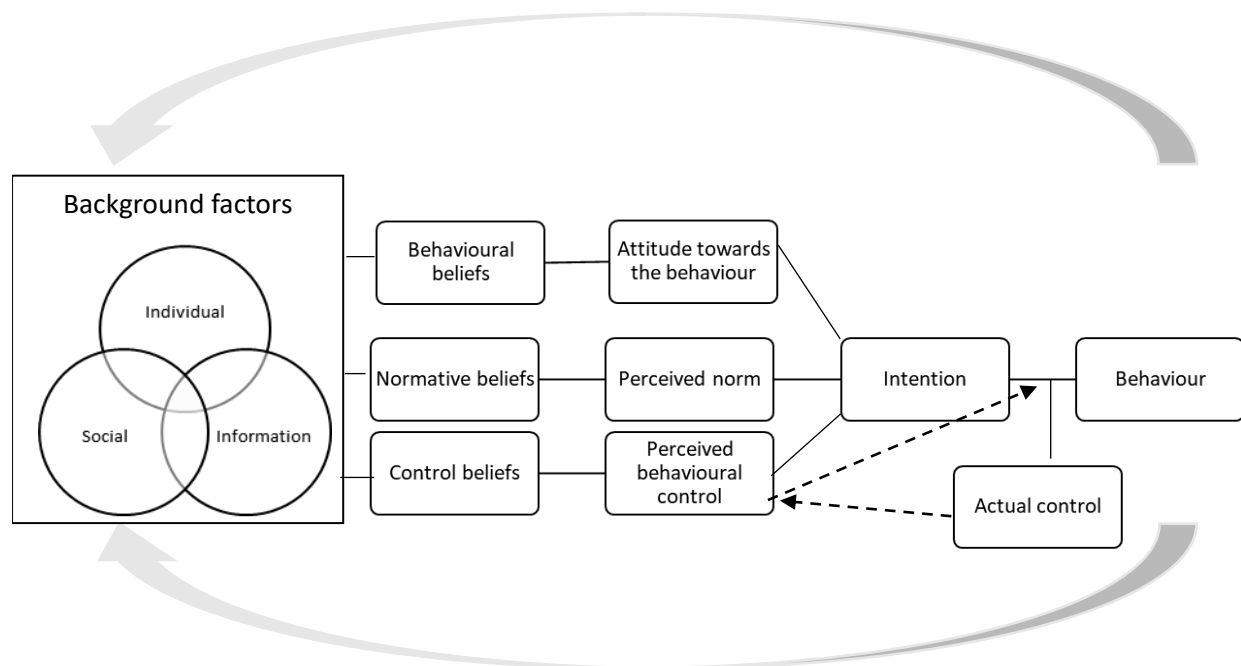
The approach posits that behavioural intentions are immediate antecedents to

behaviour and are also a function of all salient information about the likelihood that

performing the behaviour will lead to a specific outcome. Fishbein & Ajzen (2011)

note that typically, *beliefs* describe the probability that an individual thinks an action

will cause a certain outcome. *Attitudes* describe whether someone thinks that

outcome is favourable or unfavourable. *Intention* is the way that someone intends to

behave in response to beliefs and attitudes. Normative beliefs are a function of what

information an individual receives about the normative expectation around a

behaviour.

Fishbein and Ajzen (2011, p.131) suggest that there are two subcategories of

normative beliefs; *descriptive norms* and *injunctive norms*. A descriptive norm is an

individual's perception that most people who are important to them think they should or should not perform a behaviour and refer to the perception that others are (or are not) also conducting the behaviour in question. Injunctive norms refer to the perception concerning what is appropriate to do. This distinction is derived from the understanding that we may also experience pressure because we believe important 'others' are themselves performing or not performing the behaviour despite there being a collective consensus on how favourable or unfavourable that behaviour is. Essentially, descriptive norms are about what is commonly done, while injunctive norms are about what is approved or disapproved by others. Both types of norms play important roles in shaping individual behaviour within social groups.

Control beliefs are an individual's thoughts about the personal and environmental factors that can help or hinder their attempts to carry out the behaviour. It is said that control beliefs result in a sense of high or low self-efficacy accordingly (Bandura, 1978). The direct path between *perceived behavioural control* and *behaviour* is said to reflect the *actual control* an individual has over a behaviour.

The theories of Planned Behaviour and Reasoned Action have been used in many contexts across social science such as health and organisational psychology. Examples include teen alcohol consumption (Sciglimpaglia, et al., 2020) and employee motivation (Palm et al., 2020). In reviewing its application in education, Erten and Köseoğlu (2022) found that whilst it is less established, it has previously proven helpful in understanding educational behaviours. However, they do emphasise that there is a potential benefit in increasing the literature in this area. Additionally, research using RAA is often conducted with a positivist lens using quantitative measures (Bleakley & Hennessy, 2012). Fishbein and Ajzen, (2011) note that a qualitative approach to new applications of the theory is necessary to gain

accurate and detailed descriptors of existing beliefs first. In this research, the RAA has been used to help categorise the current evidence base and offers a visual framework to organise research findings relating to the perceptions held about inclusion and pupils access to AP.

2.4.2 The Reasoned Action Approach and Inclusion

The foundation of inclusion is the idea of social justice, according to which, all students have a right to equal access to educational opportunities, regardless of any type of adversity. Research suggests that teachers' inclusive classroom behaviour is influenced by their attitudes towards inclusion (Wilson et al., 2016) and a recent meta-analysis showed that the fair involvement of all students is hampered by instructor attitudes and expectations (Dignath et al., 2022).

Dignath et al. (2022) explored the relationship between teachers' belief systems and the inclusion of students with SEND. The authors investigated three aspects of teachers' belief systems: cognitive appraisals (attitudes), emotional appraisals (feelings), and self-efficacy (agency to teach inclusively). The meta-analysis reviewed 102 papers from 2000-2020 and involved 40,898 teachers from 40 countries. On average, teachers' cognitive and emotional appraisals, as well as self-efficacy for inclusion, were found to be in the mid-range, suggesting more needs to be done to support teachers with inclusive attitudes. Pre-service teachers also exhibited higher self-efficacy beliefs than in-service teachers, and teachers with special education training held more positive inclusion views than those with regular education backgrounds. Dignath et al. (2022) note that training and interventions were effective in improving cognitive and emotional appraisals, as well as self-efficacy for inclusive practices, particularly through fostering reflective beliefs and

promoting belief change as teachers gained practical experience in inclusive classrooms. This gives us some insight into the possible control and behavioural beliefs that lead to inclusive behaviours, however, it does not offer a complete picture of what factors help to form inclusive attitudes.

When further reviewing the research with the RAA in mind, it would appear that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are rarely attributed to a particular philosophy (a potential background factor) (Van Steen and Wilson, 2020). However, they have been connected to other background factors such as age, gender and training (Vaz et al., 2015). Research also indicates that a teacher's thoughts about how their teaching will impact students (*behavioural beliefs*) (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), thoughts about how inclusive education is typically implemented in their schools (*normative beliefs*) (Wilson et al., 2020), their self-efficacy or perceived access to support (*control beliefs*) (Avramidis et al., 2002; Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020, Wilson et al., 2020) and physical resources or environmental factors (*actual control*) (Wilson et al., 2016) are all contributing to their behavioural intentions and subsequent inclusive or non-inclusive actions.

Relatedly, Monsen et al. (2014) found that common concerns connected to negative attitudes towards inclusion held by teachers were: providing the adapted time demands for students with disabilities, the disadvantage this may bring to other students in the classroom, being concerned about the quantity and quality of work produced by children with SEND, not having enough support services or resources, and their perceived limited competence in promoting inclusive education. Similar to the work of Dignath et al. (2022), the factors presented in the work of Monsen et al. (2014) appear to show a mixture of *behavioural beliefs* and *control beliefs* all playing a role in the inclusive attitude formation of teachers.

To assess the impact that background factors, such as culture, have on inclusion, Van Steen and Wilson (2020) conducted an international meta-analysis of individual and cultural factors in teachers' attitudes. From the 64 papers reviewed, results indicated that internationally, teachers hold positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools and that these attitudes are moderated by an interplay of cultural and demographical factors. The authors propose that training, intervention and policy to support inclusion must consider the importance of culture and demographics to increase the likelihood that staff take heed of the message. This would suggest that the ideology of inclusion may be embedded in many countries including England, and if school staff act incongruently with this, there may be something more complex happening within an individual's approach to reasoned action. Perhaps research into the significance of *descriptive* vs. *injunctive* norms may be beneficial in helping us to understand this further as this may provide information about how culturally espoused beliefs, such as inclusion, are overlooked in practice.

It should be noted, however, that Van Steen and Wilson's (2020) meta-analysis did not differentiate between different disability types as most of the studies included in the review did not make reference to this. This means categories such as ASD and ADHD were not explicitly discussed which is problematic considering the disproportionate demographics of pupils who are excluded or attend AP. Furthermore, the overall finding from this analysis is that inclusive attitudes are well developed in many cultures when considering children who are defined as having a disability, however, it could be argued that we can only say positive inclusive attitudes exist for those children whose circumstances are 'disabling'. This may mean that for those young people absent of diagnosis, the inclusion argument is less

considered due to a misgiving in our *normative beliefs* about disability and or diagnosis.

All students are entitled to equal access to high-quality educational opportunities, irrespective of disability or any other form of disadvantage. A child is defined as having a special educational need (SEND) if he/she has a learning difficulty under one of four areas which calls for special educational provision to be made for them (SEND CoP, 2014). Using this definition, advocates have argued that all pupils selected for AP could be considered to have SEND (IPSEA, 2023). This argument is not to advocate mass classification of any pupil in AP as having SEND or to discard research relating to the inclusion of those who are disabled, it is to highlight the lack of appropriate consideration for the broad needs of young people struggling to access mainstream education.

2.4.3 Inclusion and SEMH Needs

As discussed above, many of the pupils accessing AP are considered to have behavioural or SEMH needs. The definition of SEMH needs are considered by some to be loose within the legislative context (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) states that a SEMH need can include:

"…becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or medically unexplained physical symptoms. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder" (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section 6.32, p.98).

The inclusion of young people with SEMH needs appears to be an ongoing challenge for educators, which is a concern when considering existing research underscores the significance of teacher attitudes in shaping inclusive behaviours toward children and young people with SEND (Dignath *et al*., 2022; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Wilson *et al*., 2020; Woodcock *et al.,* 2022). Historically, much of the research into inclusion has centred around disability and classification, with less consideration for SEMH. The research that does specify SEMH needs indicates that educators perceive students with these needs as the most complex to integrate into regular classroom settings. As the statistics show, these learners endure a higher risk of being placed in alternative education and are disproportionately more susceptible to receiving suspension or permanent expulsion from mainstream institutions, in contrast to their peers with different forms of SEND (Bryant et al., 2018; DfE, 2022a; Monsen et al., 2014).

A teacher's positive attitude towards the inclusion of disabilities and SEND increases the likelihood of them behaving inclusively (Dignath *et al*., 2022) and we may hypothesise that this would include SEMH needs. However, research presents a different picture. Monsen *et al*. (2014) surveyed 95 primary teachers in England and found they were less willing to include pupils with behavioural difficulties than pupils who were able or had physical difficulties, irrespective of attitude to inclusion. The authors suggest this may be due to behavioural beliefs that they would disrupt other pupils learning. Preventing the disruption to other students is reported to be a reason schools may consider exclusion or commission AP for pupils (Gutherson *et al*., 2011).

The finding that teachers hold more positive attitudes towards other types of SEND compared to SEMH has also been replicated by others (De Boer et al., 2011;

MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour to the inclusive attitudes of teachers and found that primary teachers who had received more in-service training showed moderately positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with SEMH needs. They also found that attendance at SEMH training sessions predicted teachers' feelings towards pupils with SEMH (*subjective norms*) but did not predict beliefs or willingness to work with those pupils (*behavioural intention*).

In the Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control are said to predict behaviour; whilst being mediated by behavioural intention. In MacFarlane and Woolfson's (2013) study, the collective subjective norm alone predicted behaviour but not behavioural intention. This means that the normative school beliefs about SEMH inclusion outweighed an individual's inclusive intentions when predicting behaviour. This reinforced the importance of holding collective positive normative beliefs about SEMH inclusion. Consequently, the authors suggest that senior leaders play an important role in promoting inclusive practice within education.

Like MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013), Goddard et al. (2004) also found a strong correlation between the positive attitudes of headteachers towards inclusion and that of teachers within their schools. When applying the RAA (seen previously in Figure 2.2), it is possible that in large professional organisations (i.e., schools) a teacher's behavioural beliefs and personal attitudes towards behaviour are suppressed in favour of acting in line with descriptive and injunctive normative beliefs. This finding that inclusive intentions can be overhauled by an individual's understanding of what others in the organisation are doing adds weight to the importance of fully understanding all factors involved in the formation of attitudes

towards SEMH needs and the subsequent actions of educators (like choosing to commission AP).

2.4.4 Inclusion and Alternative Provision

Educational experiences for young people struggling to access mainstream schooling can be negative and fraught with complications (Malcolm, 2019). Research has also indicated that pupils who have experience of AP can feel they are given substandard educational opportunities (Malcolm, 2021), experience a lack of readiness for the next step in their lives (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018), or are deprived of the espoused individualised or calm learning environments assured (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). However, there is an increasing body of research that shows young people may also have qualitatively better experiences in AP than those afforded to them at mainstream (Goodall, 2019; Malcolm, 2019; Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2023). Russell et al. (2023) reviewed the qualitative data of 64 young people with ADHD and 28 parents of children with ADHD. They conclude that young people found themselves on a more positive trajectory after they were placed in AP or where they were able to study topics related to their strengths and interests. Although this does not show AP as definitively inclusive it does show that pupils' initial mainstream experiences were perceived to be exclusive.

Many of the recommendations for improving the inclusion of pupils with ADHD made by Russell et al. (2023) are also noted to be the beneficial aspects of AP in the wider literature. These include environmental adaptations, training for educators, relational approaches, support for children and their families, and flexible curricula that give the pupil range without breadth becoming a barrier to learning more

generally (Dodds, 2023; Goodall, 2019; Malcolm, 2019). A criticism of this research however is that the data originates from the Children and adolescents with ADHD in transition between Children's Services and Adult Services (CATCh-uS) study, which was a funded study related to the transition of people with ADHD from child to adult mental health services in the UK (Janssens et al., 2020). Due to the nature of the CATCh-uS research, those recruited to take part were known to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. Consequently, this may not give a representative cross-section of young people with ADHD or pupils who attend AP. Nevertheless, it provides an important perspective on young people struggling to access mainstream education. It also mimics other small scale qualitative findings that show when the right AP is commissioned, many young people ultimately value their journey and come to see AP as inclusive (Goodall, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Johnston & Bradford 2022).

2.4.5 The Role of the Educational Psychologist and Inclusion

EPs are in a unique position to support the development of inclusive practices because of their strong groundings in evidence-based practice, factors situated within their professional role, and the ethical principles which underpin it. Evidence of this can be seen within the Division of Educational and Child Psychology Inclusive Education Position Paper (2019), which provides an EP perspective on how to promote inclusive education. This paper discusses the need to move away from 'deficit model' approaches and towards collaborative solutions that involve families, teachers, other professionals and the community.

When reviewing the literature looking into EP views of inclusion further, there is a predominant positive discourse that shows concern with rising exclusion rates (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Hardman & Worthington, 2000; Toye et al., 2019; Zaniolo, 2021). The profession of Educational Psychology is also associated with moving away from within-child perspectives regarding inclusion, instead utilising consultative and systemic psychological approaches in order to generate inclusive practice (Davies et al., 2008; Hamre et al., 2018; Kjær & Dannesboe, 2019; Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). For example, using 12 individual interviews, Zaniolo, (2021) investigated EPs perceptions of their role regarding the inclusion of children with SEND. Despite some variability in definitions and models of inclusion, reflective of wider controversies in defining inclusion, the findings highlight a strong EP commitment to inclusion, underpinned by social justice, children's rights, and valuing diversity. From the participants' perspective, inclusion underpins most EP practice, both at the individual and systems level. This is a view that also extends to the use of AP.

There are many ways that EPs can facilitate inclusive practice for young people. One approach is through sharing psychological knowledge via training. Toye et al. (2019) investigated educational professionals' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with ADHD. It was found that EPs hold more knowledge about ADHD compared to Senior Leaders, teachers and support staff. The authors note that it is likely the increased knowledge that in turn leads to less stigmatising beliefs and positive attitudes towards ADHD inclusion. They conclude that EPs sharing their knowledge regarding ADHD through training is one way to improve the inclusion of these pupils. A second way is through using consultation to developed shared understandings and apply psychological theory to situations (Lambert &

Frederickson, 2015). Kjær and Dannesboe (2019) conducted a 6-month ethnographic investigation into Danish EP consultative practice. It was concluded that change on the part of school staff occurs after engaging with consultation and that it is within the consultative work that this transformation occurs, as the desired reflection takes place. They highlight that the use of consultation by EPs has the power to evoke emotion for consultees and shift professional narratives towards inclusive practice. In addition to this, through consultation, EPs have also been heavily involved in the development of relational whole school behaviour policies (Babcock, 2020; Brighton & Hove, 2019). A third way of promoting inclusion is through applying systems psychology, organisational psychology and action research (Lambert and Frederickson, 2015). In the field this involves school communities working in collaboration with EPs through a whole-school audit, Charter Mark or certification regarding inclusive practices. For example, Sparling et al. (2022) provides a qualitative evaluation of an ACE-informed whole-school programme led by one EPS. Evaluations were conducted with the project team and four headteachers. It was highlighted that EPs were well placed to support such a programme due to their knowledge of school context and research understanding. Other such programmes exist through mechanisms such as the Sandwell Wellbeing Charter Mark (n.d., as cited in Hardy et el., 2020, p.183) and Trauma-Informed or Attachment Aware certifications (Jones & Harding, 2023).

Through my professional experiences I have seen that EPs may be involved at numerous points concerning a child's experience with AP. This includes preventative work to support inclusion within the mainstream setting, transitional support to manage a change of setting, supporting the pupil or setting whilst at AP and reintegration support back into mainstream from AP. In addition to this some AP

settings may use EPs to support whole-school, organisational change. It is possible that the role of the EP in AP stems from the unique contribution of the profession in applying psychological knowledge to understand and meet young people's needs as well as the reputation of the profession for advocating for inclusion. Brown (2018) looked at inclusive practice and the use of AP through focus groups with four SLT members, four AP leads and four EPs. Participants were in agreement that EPs have a role and represent a valuable support in including young people who are placed part-time in alternative provision. Participants identified that EPs can offer consultation, direct work and systemic work as part of this support. Here it is further reinforced that EPs have the capacity to support young people and school settings at various stages of a pupil's educational journey. This places EPs in a unique professional position to promote inclusive actions through both preventative and responsive measures.

2.5   Partnership Working

Due to the variety in AP experience, selecting the right alternative provider can be considered pivotal in the system working for a student. This is why the partnership between commissioners and AP is ultimately so influential. Pennacchia and Thomson (2016) identify two case study examples that highlight the benefits of partnership working to replace the idea that AP will 'repair and return' young people. They propose that working together with a new appreciation for the complementary support AP can provide will help to "disrupt the binary of mainstream and alternative" (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016, p. 77). Therefore, understanding why key decision makers place pupils in AP, and their attitudes towards this, may help us to understand how the AP system can improve given its historically elusive role.

Furthermore, previous research indicates that despite positive intentions, training and intervention, teachers remain uncertain about how to enact inclusive intentions towards young people struggling to access mainstream education, particularly those with SEMH needs (Dignath et al., 2022). Understanding the experiences and motivations of the staff contracting with AP is key to helping us further understand the inclusion of such pupils, whether in mainstream or elsewhere.

2.6 Summary

The literature on the effectiveness of AP remains inconclusive due to the difficulties experienced with appropriate data collection and a lack of agreement as to what may constitute as progress for these pupils. As seen, stigmatising behaviours and attitudes remain persistent within education. The RAA shows how teachers' attitudes towards inclusion can impact their actions. Inclusive attitudes also appear to have progressed at a slower pace concerning pupils with SEMH needs. This raises concerns as pupils with SEMH needs represent a group of children who are most likely to access AP and or become excluded.

Historically, AP has been positioned as a lesser catchall for those who have either been excluded or are at risk of becoming excluded from their mainstream settings. A shift in research, perceptions and policy appears to now show an appreciation for the values and ethos many AP have come to adopt. To complement government plans to improve the use of AP and the advancing view that AP is an integral safety net in education there is a greater need to understand partnership working and commissioning of these resources further. It is proposed that looking into the perceptions and experiences of those mainstream educators commissioning AP will offer a unique insight into the partnership working between the two settings,

and further expand the knowledge base around the use of dual registration and responsibility-based models as they relate to AP.

2.7 The Present Research

This research has three main aims, which are to understand motivations, experiences, and perceptions, of secondary school staff in relation to the AP system and seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the reasons for using alternative provision from the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff?

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream secondary school staff working with AP?

RQ3: What perceptions exist regarding AP from the perspectives of mainstream secondary school staff?

The following chapter will detail the research methodology.

3 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the reasons for using alternative provision from the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff?

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream secondary school staff working with AP?

RQ3: What perceptions exist regarding AP from the perspectives of mainstream secondary school staff?

In this section, the philosophical underpinnings that guided the research methods, data collection and analysis will firstly be explored. I will then detail information about participants, the pilot interview, ethical considerations and the research procedure. Finally, I will outline the data analysis technique and discuss the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

3.2 Philosophical Position

Philosophical presumptions form the foundation of all research (Howell, 2012). These presumptions are inextricably linked to the type of study conducted, the information sought, the techniques used, and frequently the conclusions drawn (Avgousti, 2013). Thus, it is necessary to take into account the ontological and epistemological stance of this research.

This research assumes a critical realist ontology with an interpretivist epistemology. Critical realism is a philosophical branch that Bhaskar developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Bhaskar, 2013). It has been advanced by other academics and is viewed as an alternative to the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism (Archer et al., 2013; Bhaskar, 2013). Critical realism makes a distinction between the "observable" and the "real" world. The 'real' exists outside of human conceptions, theories, and perceptions. The world that we perceive and comprehend is shaped by our viewpoints and life experiences, utilising what can be considered "observable." Thus, unobservable structures give rise to observable events, and people can only comprehend the social world by comprehending the structures that produce events, according to critical realists.

Bhaskar (2013) suggested that reality is limited to what is empirically known and contended that since the nature of the world cannot be reduced to our understanding of it, inference cannot be drawn from it using experiments, unlike in natural science. He argued that reality is not fully constructed by the knowledge or discourse of social actors in response to constructivists (Bhaskar, 2013) and that reality exists apart from our conception and knowledge of it, but that this is not observable directly. According to critical realism, our understanding of the outside world is based on subjective interpretations that are prone to error because they are shaped by the conceptual frameworks that the researcher uses to conduct their work (Bhaskar, 2013; Sayer, 2004).

As it emphasises social justice and acknowledges the significance of the participant's perspective as well as the impact of social structures on meaning, critical realist ontology is well-suited for studies involving participants who might be viewed as marginalised due to the actions and perceptions of others. Research

conducted by individuals in value-based professions is also deemed well suited for its application (Robson, 2002). Given that critical realism provides a comprehensive explanation of ontology, appreciating both positivist and constructivist methods, critical realism can be considered an inclusive philosophy of science (Sayer, 2004; Fleetwood, 2014). With a better understanding of the issues at hand and the ability to propose strategic solutions to address social problems, this approach aims to analyse and understand the underlying relationships between social events (Fleetwood, 2014). Considering the research context and topic, and my role as a trainee educational psychologist, critical realism aligns well with the research topic explored here.

Critical realism asserts that qualitative methods can be used in obtaining rich explanations of existing mechanisms in the phenomenon of interest (Bhaskar, 1998). Epistemology is concerned with how we come to understand and gain knowledge. This research applies an interpretivist epistemology in order to seek the rich explanations critical realism considers. By adopting a critical realist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, I accept that individuals have the capacity to construct their own realities, meaning that there are multiple realities and experiences of using AP. Therefore, I believe that the use of AP can be understood further by understanding the experiences and perceptions of those adults commissioning that resource. Considering this research aims to understand the participants' experiences; by using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as the primary method, the research methodology aligns with an interpretivist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.3 Positionality of the Researcher

In the interest of reflexivity, Braun & Clarke (2021a) advise sharing biographical information about oneself as a researcher. I am a white woman, from a working-class background, pursuing a doctorate in applied educational and child psychology. I am currently on placement in a local authority with many AP settings. Consequently, I have worked on a number of cases involving the use of one or more of these provisions. Prior to the doctorate I have had previous roles working as an assistant educational psychologist, multisystemic therapist (intensively working with pupils and families who had experienced AP), and within a specialist provision for children with Autism. Overtime I have developed an interest in the philosophy of inclusion and its rational implications for practice. At the time of writing this research my position, as it stands, is that there is no singular correct way to support inclusion in education.

3.4 Research Design

Simons (2009) defines a case study as, "…an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, institution, programme or systems in a 'real life' context…" (p. 21). This research employs an exploratory case study design in order to collect the perceptions and experiences of 6 mainstream secondary school staff working with AP settings.

Data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). RTA is as a technique which involves analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data and emphasises the persistent commitment to reflexivity throughout research (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.7). RTA aligns itself to qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and is explored in greater detail below in this methodology chapter.

3.4.1 Participants

Participants were recruited who fit the inclusion criteria of working in a mainstream secondary school and having direct communication and professional relationships with AP settings that are currently utilised by the school. 6 participants from different secondary schools responded and all 6 were recruited to take part. Table 3.1 below offers a brief description of each participant whilst affording as much anonymity as possible.

Table 3.1. Participant Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Role and Time Spent in Role	Previous Experience
P1	Male	Vice Principal of Behaviour, DSL and member of SLT, 2 years	Pastoral Teacher, over 10 years of experience in education
P2	Female	SENDCo and member of SLT, 10 years	Science Teacher and Head of Science, over 15 years of experience in education
P3	Female	Deputy Head of Pastoral and member of SLT, over 5 years	Drama Teacher, Head of Year, Maths Lead, over 15 years of experience
P4	Female	Assistant Headteacher, 1 year	Physical Education Teacher
P5	Female	Assistant Head, SENDCo and member of SLT, 5 years	Teacher, SENDCo in a resource base, over 10 years of experience
P6	Female	SENDCo, 6 months	Pastoral Behavioural Support, English Lead Teacher, 10 years of experience

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this research were informed by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2021) and British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) which were strictly adhered to. Ethical approval was also granted by

the University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee (Appendix C). Table 3.2 shows the ethical considerations applicable to this research and how they were considered and mitigated.

Table 3.2. Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration	Descriptor	Mitigating action taken
Informed consent	Participants must be fully informed about the purpose, risks, benefits, and their rights (BERA, 2018).	Prior to commencing this study strict adherence to ethical guidelines was upheld, ensuring the acquisition of informed consent from all participants. Information sheets were provided, detailing the study's objectives, data collection methods, confidentiality, anonymity, withdrawal options, and contact information. Researcher and supervisor contact details were written on the background information sheets so that staff could contact me with any queries. Additionally, discussions were held with participants before the interviews, offering them an opportunity to inquire and decide on their participation. Consent was reaffirmed before the interviews commenced. I Explicitly displayed information both in the initial contact email/ call and again before signing consent which may have helped to build trust and increase participant confidence in the research process, as suggested by Denscombe (2017).
Confidentiality and Anonymity	Respecting the privacy rights of participants and institutions, steps were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2018).	Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, the school, and the LA involved in the research during data analysis. All information shared and collected from participants remained confidential, and data storage adhered to stringent security measures, utilising pseudonyms and encrypted devices.
Data security	All data should be stored securely (BERA, 2018).	In line with university and BERA policy, a data management plan was

		completed (see Appendix D) and electronic data will be kept for 10 years after completing the project. After this time, all data will be erased. Interviews were audio recorded on a recording device and subsequently transferred onto a password protected and encrypted computer file which can only be accessed by me. The audio recordings were then deleted from the recording device. Any printed transcripts of the data were kept in a secure, locked cabinet which only I had access to and were scanned, stored securely and shredded after analysis.
Right to Withdraw	Participants' have the right to withdraw at any time (BERA, 2018)	Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, with detailed information provided on their rights to withdraw. During interviews, participants were reminded of this right, both at the outset and up until data analysis (around two weeks post interview), and provided with contact details for ease of withdrawal.
Disclosure and Safeguarding	Researchers have a duty to disclose any potentially harmful acts or behaviours to the appropriate authorities (BERA, 2018).	Although there is little risk posed with this research, safeguarding was still discussed during the discussion about consent and also within the consent form. Prior to interviews, I discussed the school's safeguarding procedures with staff, to ensure proper reporting of any potentially disclosed information that might supersede confidentiality and anonymity considerations. Throughout the research process, careful attention was also given to potential physical or psychological discomfort experienced by participants (BERA, 2018). Efforts were made to mitigate power imbalances, establishing a comfortable environment for participants through rapport-building activities conducted during interviews. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix E

3.4.3 Recruitment

A purposive sampling method was employed. This was done due to the need to target information-rich participants (Palinkas et al., 2015), and so staff who hold working relationships with AP were specifically sought after. To recruit participants, secondary school staff who liaise with AP in the west midlands city where the research is based were contacted either by telephone call and then email or just by email, either from myself or the school's link EP. The email consisted of a recruitment letter that outlined the research aims, research background information and a consent form for them to complete (Appendices E & F).

Before confirming participation, the documentation was sent, and participants were given an opportunity to discuss any questions with the researcher. They then signed a consent form. Once signed, I spoke with each participant to discuss the research in detail again and the logistics of the research such as inclusion criteria, ethics, safeguarding, data collection, interview times and dates, and the medium they wished to use (in-person or via video conference).

Lakens (2022) notes that there is less literature covering sample size justification in the domain of qualitative research however it remains important to consider. Lakens (2022) discusses the concept of data saturation, which is where new data begins to replicate earlier observations without adding new information (Morse, 1995). Although many repeated themes were discussed during data collection, considering the nature of this topic and the variety of personal experience, I did not feel data saturation was possible in this instance. Braun and Clarke (2021b) also write that concerning interpretivist data collection with saturation is not consistent with the values and assumptions of RTA. Saturation is therefore of less concern within this research, as individual experience is valued as equal to a

collective one. Considering the exploratory nature of the research, pragmatic requirements and resource constraints (Lakens, 2022) placed on this research, between 4 and 8 participants were deemed sufficient to explore the depth of the topic.

3.4.4 Pilot Interview

It is recommended that researchers conduct pilot interviews in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the questions and to obtain interviewing experience (Cohen et al., 2018; Magnusson, 2015). As a result, a pilot interview was carried out prior to the primary data collection. The pilot interview was conducted with a suitable participant who fully met the inclusion criteria. Therefore, data gathered in the pilot interview was suitable for inclusion in the dataset. This interview showed that the interview schedule itself was suitable however with the addition of some statements for participants to give their opinions on (see Appendix G). The statements were required as the pilot participant provided a significant amount of process and systems information. Although this information is helpful to contextualise understanding of the use of AP, the statements were included to support participants to reflect upon working with AP more broadly and elicit conversation regarding beliefs and attitudes that would inform the deductive analysis further.

In discussion with my research supervisor, the statements were devised using existing literature and research regarding AP, and advice provided by Fishbein and Ajzen (2011) on developing attitude related questionnaires (p.449-462). Using statements to elicit the views of participants is widely used in research regarding perceptions and attitudes; most notably in surveys using statements and Likert

Scales (Vogel, 2016, p.394). When reviewing the research into the RAA, a large portion of studies utilise statements to gain participants beliefs and attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011). For this research, it was deemed that asking participants to offer their own thoughts on these statements rather than using a Likert Scale was a strength as it removed any potential for certain biases, such as central tendency bias (Crosetto et al., 2020) and allowed participants to expand on their reasonings for their beliefs, thus adding to the qualitative rich picture of the use of AP. To encourage participants to think deeply about their answers, statements and questions were all provided ahead of time. In addition to this, to address any concerns regarding confirmation bias (Peters, 2022), some statements used were in line with what the literature says about the use of AP and some statements were reversed to be in contrast to the literature. This is a method commonly used within research to mitigate potential bias when researching attitudes (Santesso et al., 2020).

3.4.5 Data Collection

Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews using a single data collection point. Interviews were held at a date and time that suited the participant. All participants were offered both face-to-face and virtual interviews as I understood it may be difficult for participants to express themselves fully at their place of work or their schedule may support a virtual meeting better. This resulted in 4 face-to-face interviews and 2 virtual video conference calls via Microsoft Teams. Interviews lasted for around 50-70 minutes each. The interview schedule (see Appendix G) provided an overall framework for some consistency among interviews. The schedule

consisted of a mixture of questions and statements that participants were asked to give their perspectives on.

3.4.5.1 Developing the Interview Schedule

To develop the loose interview schedule, I began by outlining simple rapport building questions as advised by Robson (2002). I then used the research objectives to identify key themes of interest related to the research questions. I used each research question as an overarching open-ended question and developed additional open-ended follow up questions, related to the literature, to elicited greater detail if required, ensuring a balance between structure and flexibility. Appendix G shows the interview schedule with the relevant literature associated to these probing questions. I grouped questions logically to guide the flow of the interview, starting with rapport-building and brief background information questions before delving into more research-specific questions. I considered possible probes or follow-up questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses. I paid attention to the sequence of questions to create a natural progression and maintain participant engagement. The schedule was pilot tested with a colleague to gauge timings and then again with a suitable participant.

3.4.6 Using Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews unite with the interpretivist assumptions underpinning this research that value depth over breadth. As this research is concerned with developing a deeper understanding of the use of AP, data collection methods such as questionnaires were not appropriate. Qualitative methods were

better suited for this subject area as they can allow for flexible data collection and richer participant involvement (Hammersley, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were used to gather participants' experiences and perceptions of AP. Using this type of approach afforded a calm environment where participants were able to alter the course of conversation should they wish.

Semi-structured interviews present both advantages and disadvantages in terms of application, providing a balance between structure and flexibility (Howitt, 2019). Their versatility is one of their main advantages since it gives interviewers the opportunity to ask pertinent questions that come up during the conversation in addition to using a pre-planned list of questions. The ability to delve into particular areas of interest or clarify unclear points with follow-up questions allows for a deeper understanding of the interviewee's responses (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, the semi-structured format facilitates the development of a rapport between the interviewer and the subject, fostering a more relaxed atmosphere that welcomes honesty and openness in the answers. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are especially helpful for delving into delicate or complicated subjects (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). They give the interviewer a structure to cover important topics and allow the interviewee to share their ideas and experiences in their own words. Rich, qualitative data are frequently produced by this method, providing detailed insights into the topic that may not be possible with more rigorously structured approaches.

Semi-structured interviews do have certain drawbacks. Potter and Hepburn (2005) offer an analysis of qualitative interviewing, with a special emphasis on the problem of the researcher internal biases, which can pose a threat during both the phases of data collection and analysis (e.g., leading questions or analyses in favour of the researcher's viewpoints). The possibility of variation and inconsistency

amongst interviews is another major obstacle also. Different approaches to data collection and analysis may result from the interviewer's interpretation of the respondents or departures from the interview guide (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). In this format, it can be challenging to maintain dependability and guarantee consistency in questioning across various interviewers. Although these limitations are difficult to mitigate, as Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest, I do accept the influence a researcher may have on interpretivist data collection and analysis. Information regarding my background and positionality can be found in both chapter one and again in this methodology section. The application of RTA has also supported me to assess my interview style and potential impact during this process.

In conclusion, by striking a balance between structure and flexibility, building rapport, and delving into intricate subjects, semi-structured interviews provide insightful information. This has proved crucial when collecting the views of mainstream staff liaising with AP. However, in order to minimise potential inconsistencies or biases with collecting and analysing qualitative data, careful planning and thorough analysis has been undertaken. Additionally, RTA has been selected in order to support the reflective, explicit and transparent reporting of data.

3.4.7 Online Interviews

Researchers may benefit from unique advantages and disadvantages associated with multi-medium interviewing, which in this research included in-person and video call interviews. By using both interviewing methods, participants could be reached more widely, independent of their location, which promotes inclusivity and diversity among the study population (de Villiers et al., 2022). Video conferences can

enable the researcher to see nonverbal cues and visual signals that are comparable to in-person interactions, creating a more intimate connection and possibly improving rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee, compared to telephone interviews (de Villiers et al., 2022). It is imperative to acknowledge certain limitations also however. Because of the physical presence, in-person interviews frequently offer a richer setting for developing rapport, trust, and deeper connections, which may result in more nuanced and honest responses (Jenner & Myers, 2019). Having noted this however, upon reflecting on the interview process, I did not feel the quality of the interviewee responses was impacted by video conference from the researcher perspective. Perhaps if participants may have felt differently. Relatedly, if the research was more emotive for the participants, in person interviews may have been more appropriate. Problems with technology or restrictions on internet access when making video calls may also be experienced, however, there were no difficulties during data collection in this instance.

3.5   Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained in this study were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA, is a form of thematic analysis that emphasises reflexivity, a critical examination of the researcher's role and influences on the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Similar to Braun and Clarke's earlier work on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2016), RTA includes six phases which are outlined in Table 3.3

Table 3.3. The Six Phases of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.34-35)

Phase	Label	Descriptor
Phase 1	Dataset Familiarisation	Immerse yourself in the dataset by thoroughly reading and, if applicable, listening to audio recordings. Make brief notes on analytic ideas and insights for each data item and the dataset as a whole
Phase 2	Coding Process	Systematically identify and label potentially meaningful data segments. Code with precision to capture specific meanings or concepts. Code the entire dataset comprehensively and compile relevant data segments for each code.
Phase 3	Initial Theme Generation	Begin identifying shared patterns across the dataset by clustering codes with core ideas or concepts. Understand that theme development is an active process constructed by the researcher based on data, research questions, and insights.
Phase 4	Theme Development and Review	Assess the fit of provisional themes to the data. Ensure themes collectively highlight important patterns related to the research question. Revise themes as needed and consider their relationship to existing knowledge in the research field
Phase 5	Theme Refinement and Naming	Fine-tune themes for clarity and coherence, ensuring each revolves around a strong core concept. Write brief synopses for each theme and assign concise, informative names. Remain open to further development if necessary.
Phase 6	Writing Process	Initiate writing early on, starting with informal notes and journaling. Craft the analytic narrative, integrating data extracts into a coherent story addressing the research question. Complete sections like introduction, method, and conclusion in a research report, emphasising the significance of thorough editing.

This approach allows for a systematic coding and analysis of qualitative data to identify patterns and themes across the dataset. It also encompasses a number of values, identified by Braun and Clarke (2022, p.7) to be "qualitative sensibilities".

Table 3.4 below outlines these ideas. RTA diverges from traditional thematic analysis by prioritising reflexivity and acknowledging the subjective nature of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA is also accompanied by ten core assumptions, outlined in Table 3.5 below. Throughout this process a researcher is required to actively engage in self-reflection, documented in a reflexive journal, which catalogues thoughts, feelings, and reflections throughout the research journey, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022, p.19).

Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise the need to consider how assumptions, experiences and values may shape the analytical process. In adhering to RTA, researchers must actively engage with reflexivity throughout any research process. To do this I adopted my own reflexive journal. This journal enabled me to document my actions, thoughts and reactions during the research process. Appendix H displays example accounts from my reflective journal.

Table 3.4 Qualitative Sensibilities Identified by Bruan and Clarke (2022, p.7)

	Qualitative Sensibilities
1	Interest in process and meaning, over cause and effect.
2	Critical and questioning approach to life and knowledge.
3	Ability to reflect on the dominant assumptions embedded in your cultural context – being a cultural commentator as well as a cultural member.
4	Ability to read and listen to data actively and analytically – the development of an analytic orientation to data.
5	Desire for understanding that is about nuance, complexity and even contradiction, rather than finding a nice tidy explanation.
6	Ability to embrace the idea that knowledge comes from a position, and a disinterest in the idea of a singular universal truth to be discovered.
7	Ability to tolerate some degree of uncertainty.

Table 3.5 Ten Core Assumption of RTA, by Bruan and Clarke (2022, p.9)

	Ten Core Assumptions of RTA
1	Researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA, as knowledge generation is inherently subjective and situated. Your subjectivity is not a problem to be managed or controlled, to be gotten rid of, but should be understood and treated as a resource for doing analysis (Gough & Madill, 2012). This means the notion of researcher bias, which implies the possibility of unbiased or objective knowledge generation, and the potential to control such bias, make little sense within reflexive TA.
2	Analysis and interpretation of data cannot be accurate or objective, but they can be weaker (e.g. unconvincing, underdeveloped, shallow, superficial) or stronger (e.g. compelling, insightful, thoughtful, rich, complex, deep, nuanced).
3	Good coding can be achieved alone, or through collaboration – if collaborative coding is used to enhance understanding, interpretation and reflexivity, rather than to reach a consensus about data coding.
4	Good quality codes and themes result from dual processes of: (a) immersion and depth of engagement; and (b) giving the developing analysis some distance. The latter usually takes time and is often achieved through taking a break from the process.
5	Themes are patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning or concept. They are not summaries of everything about a topic.
6	Themes are analytic outputs – they are built from codes (which are also analytic outputs) and cannot be identified ahead of the analytic process.
7	Themes do not passively 'emerge' from data but are actively produced by the researcher through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the dataset.
8	Data analysis is always underpinned by theoretical assumptions, and these assumptions need to be acknowledged and reflected on.
9	Reflexivity is key to good quality analysis; researchers must strive to understand and 'own their perspectives' (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).
10	Data analysis is conceptualised as an art not a science; creativity is central to the process, situated within a framework of rigour.

3.5.1 Rationale for using RTA

The selection of RTA as the data analysis technique was deliberate, considering its suitability for an interpretivist perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A strength of RTA is considered to be its theoretical flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2022), making it appropriate to utilise with a critical realist ontology as critical realism is inclusive of both realist and relativist perspectives. It is for this reason that discourse

analysis was also deemed to be inappropriate due to its social constructionist theoretical beginnings (White, 2004). RTA has also allowed for both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) orientations, aligning with the ability to explore patterns of meaning across participants' experiences and connect these themes to the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011). This contrasts with other techniques such as IPA, which is considered inductive in nature (Alase, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest using RTA when the research interest is in personal experiences that are located within wider socio-cultural contexts, which is particularly fitting when considering the working relationships between two connected, but also separate, systems (mainstream and AP). Ultimately, using RTA has also facilitated actionable conclusions and implications for educational practitioners, and ensured coherence between theoretical assumptions, research questions, and methods. Ultimately, the choice between mediums should consider the research objectives, participant preferences, and the balance between accessibility and the depth of interaction needed for the study which were all considered when conducting this research.

3.5.2 Applying RTA

The RTA steps and application can be seen in Table 3.6 below (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA is a recursive and reiterative process. Despite Braun and Clarke (2022) presenting the phases as a progression, they advise that the process involves moving in and out of the phases. Consequently, I moved between phases often, altering and refining concepts. Once the inductive analysis was completed, I then applied codes to the RAA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011), creating the deductive analysis aspect (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest deductive

analysis is not about making your themes fit your preconceived ideas (p. 210), and

so, I will emphasise that the codes and themes developed from the inductive

analysis were highly congruent with the model and thoroughly considered before

including the deductive analysis.

Table 3.6 Application of RTA

RTA Phase	Application of Phase
Phase 1 Dataset Familiarisation- Immerse self in the dataset by thoroughly reading and listening to audio recordings. Make brief notes on analytic ideas and insights for each data item and the dataset as a whole	I read and listened to each transcript at least five times in various orders. I did not take any notes the first time. The second time, I used a Dictaphone to record my audio reflections. After this I began to make written notes. I then wrote down my ideas and the interpretation I gave to the information. I also created handwritten mind maps (see Appendix I) that summarised my main points according to their transcript.
Phase 2 Coding Process- Systematically identify and label potentially meaningful data segments. Code with precision to capture specific meanings or concepts. Code the entire dataset comprehensively and compile relevant data segments for each code.	I coded each transcript with one research question in mind at a time using NVivo 14 software. I did this in different orders each time to ensure the codes weren't being impacted by things such as the primacy effect (Ebbinghaus, 2013). I then came back to refine and adapt codes to ensure they were capturing what was being said.
Phase 3 Initial Theme Generation- Begin identifying shared patterns across the dataset by clustering codes with core ideas or concepts. Understand that theme development is an active process constructed by the researcher based on data, research questions, and insights	By grouping related codes together to create candidate themes, I was able to create the initial themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.79). To help me think more deeply about the initial themes that were developed and make potential connections between the themes, I then began to code using NVivo software (See Appendix J)
Phase 4 Theme Development and Review- Assess the fit of provisional themes to the data. Ensure	I took a few days off from the data and analysis to evaluate the appropriateness and depth of the initial themes. At this point, I had meetings with my supervisor to go over my initial themes and the narrative the themes of the data told in connection

themes collectively highlight important patterns related to the research question. Revise themes as needed and consider their relationship to existing knowledge in the research field	to the research questions. Getting input from my supervisor was beneficial for refining themes. Revised themes can be seen in Appendix K.
Phase 5 Theme Refinement and Naming- Fine-tune themes for clarity and coherence, ensuring each revolves around a strong core concept. Write brief synopses for each theme and assign concise, informative names. Remain open to further development if necessary.	The fully developed themes for research questions are presented in Appendix K. Theme definitions were composed after the selection of themes and are included in the Analysis and Discussion section. The deductive analysis began once the inductive was considered to be complete.
Phase 6 Writing Process- Informal notes and journaling. Craft the analytic narrative, integrating data extracts into a coherent story addressing the research question. Complete sections like introduction, method, and conclusion in a research report, emphasising the significance of thorough editing.	Informal notes were taken throughout the process including a reflexive journal. The results from the data analysis in relation to the previous literature are discussed in the Analysis and Discussion chapter. Purposeful decisions were made regarding the presentation of the data. The underlying concepts from each themes can be found in Appendix K. Many of these could be considered to be subthemes however I have conceptualised them more as topic summaries (e.g. cost). As Braun and Clarke (2022) note that topic summaries do not constitute a theme and that having too many 'subthemes' can weaken the overall strength of the discussion point, I have chosen to analyse each theme without referring to any 'subthemes'. This is to prevent any fragmentation of the analysis. Similarly, to strengthen the flow of the thesis I have made the choice to combine both the analysis and discussion sections (also advised by Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.6   Trustworthiness

In interpretivist research, the focus shifts from traditional measures of validity, to ensuring trustworthiness in data. Interpretivism emphasises understanding social phenomena through the lens of individuals' perceptions, meanings, and contexts, making the conventional notions of and validity less applicable (Shenton, 2004).

Instead, ensuring trustworthiness of data becomes a central concern which, Shenton (2004) states, typically involves several components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Below is Table 3.7 that identifies these key components and the actions taken to fortify the trustworthiness of this data.

Table 3.7 Trustworthiness actions taken based on Shenton (2004)

Component	Descriptor	Action taken
Credibility	Do the findings reflect the reality of the subject?	• The philosophical assumptions have been carefully considered. • The methodological choices were made with philosophical assumptions in mind as well as consideration for the most fitting way to research the subject matter. • All actions were taken in light of the current research literature. • I have additional experience interacting with the field of research through my work so am able to contextualise the information provided by participants.
Transferability	Could the findings be applied to alternative situations?	• I have detailed the unique and contextual nature of this research and made note that the analysis is highly connected to the research context.
Dependability	Could the research and or its findings be replicated?	• Although it is not possible to guarantee participants would say the same things again or perform the same for a different researcher, I have been transparent with the interview schedule and research design, making the research easy to replicate.
Confirmability	Do the findings reflect the participants and not the researcher?	• I have made statement to my positionality to allow the reader to analyse any potential biases involved in the data collection or analysis process and remained committed to rigorous application of the design and data analysis.

3.7   Local Context

To contextualise this research, I will finish this methodology chapter by highlighting the responsibility-based model enacted within the area this research is conducted, as it may help to further understand the perceptions that exist within this particular LA. As discussed previously Bryant et al. (2021) examine responsibility-based approaches in response to the use of AP. They describe responsibility-based models to mean "approaches that seek to foster responsibility on the part of mainstream schools" (p.5). The LA in which this research is conducted adopts a responsibility-based approach.

The type of responsibility-based model utilised within this LA would be categorised by Bryant et al. (2021) as a 'devolved funding model'. A devolved funding model is where schools are made aware of the "finite resources that are available for supporting pupils who may require AP", which requires school leaders to "use this devolved funding, along with their own delegated resources, to put in place timely support" (p.5). Consequently, when making use of AP within this LA, school staff with responsibilities for commissioning AP need to consider their school budgets. In addition to this consideration, it should also be noted that schools within this LA are not able to access any additional money to fund AP placements (other than applying for an EHCP if appropriate). Bryant et al. (2021) found that schools operating under such mechanisms had lower proportions of pupils in AP, lower rates of permanent exclusion and were more likely to use AP as preventative and spend on AP in line with their budgets.

3.8   Summary

This chapter has outlined how the critical realist philosophy of this research has guided the methodological choices made. RTA has been used to add a reflexive lens to the data collection and analysis. A qualitative case study design has been developed to explore the in-depth analysis of mainstream secondary school staff perceptions of working with AP. The views of 6 participants from different mainstream settings have been gathered through individual semi-structured interviews. These interviews have been analysed using both an inductive and deductive thematic approach, which will be detailed in the following chapter.

4   CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter the themes developed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) are outlined, to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the reasons for using alternative provision from the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff?

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream secondary school staff working with AP?

RQ3: What perceptions exist regarding AP from the perspectives of mainstream secondary school staff?

The outcomes of the analysis are presented through themes, supported by a narrative description. Themes are illustrated using thematic maps and the data extracts drawn from participants. The section also draws upon previous literature to raise discussion points regarding the generated themes. Finally, this section will discuss the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) in relation to the analysis and aims to visually display the factors that may be contributing to the attitudes staff hold regarding AP and subsequently its continued use.

4.2 RQ1: What are the Reasons for Using Alternative Provision from the Perspective of Mainstream Secondary School Staff?

Figure 4.1 Thematic Map Related to RQ1.


```
RQ1 What are the reasons for using alternative provision from
the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff

    ── Unable to support within the confines of mainstream school

    ── AP have resources not available to mainstream schools

    ── Staff see AP as a hopeful option
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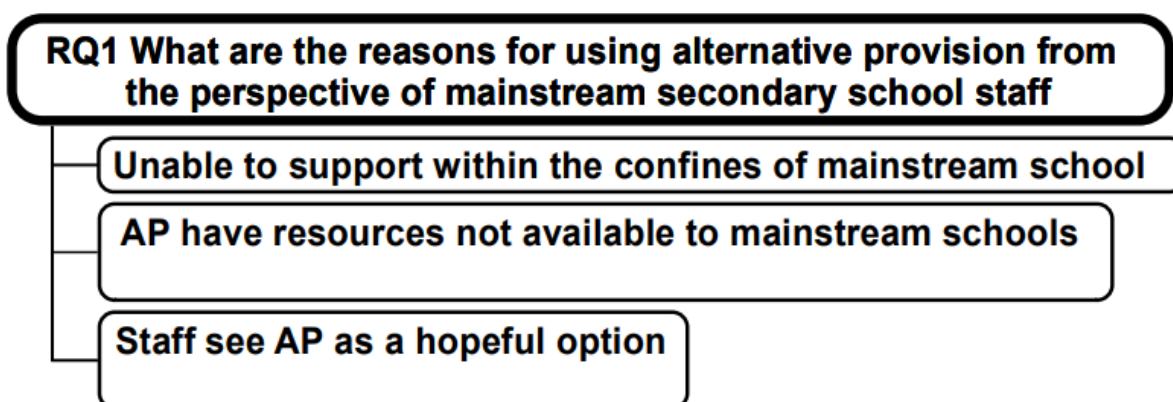
4.2.1 Theme 1: Unable to Support Within the Confines of Mainstream School

This theme considers a shared understanding that constraints experienced in mainstream settings have led participants to feel that using AP is a necessary and worthwhile option. It was noted amongst all participants that there are certain constraints within the current mainstream schooling system that prevent adaptation for pupils and may lead to the use of AP. Some of the most common phrases referred to mainstream schools finding it hard to be everything to everyone, and staff noting the mainstream is *"not right"* for every pupil. The most notable were discussions about mainstream settings being too large or full beyond capacity: *"Over the last 15 years the pan has gone up. The space hasn't got any bigger, but the pan… so we are kind of fixed bursting" (P3)*. Another participant noted that this has led to some pupils struggling to cope in mainstream as the size is incompatible with their levels of anxiety:

> *"…anxiety due to sheer size or volume of school. And some of the*
> *steps that would have led up to that may include trying that child for six*

weeks, only in small groups in our little base as proof that the small

groups work, but we can't maintain that" (P2)

Comments such as these indicate that although participants were aware that smaller class sizes would be an appropriate adaptation for some, the current structure of their settings would not cater for this as a long-term option for those pupils. This is in line with other research from Dodds (2023) that indicates staff struggle to use relational approaches with children due to the large volume of pupils they teach. Notably, time to build relationships in a small setting is a key factor in the reasons why AP may benefit some young people (Malcolm, 2019; Goodall, 2019).

Staff also felt that other macro-systemic and exo-systemic (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) factors such as policy driven rules and curriculum expectations within their settings are too orthodox and unchangeable: "*…even for some kids just not having to wear a uniform. And starting at nine o'clock not 8:30, and, you know, not having this detention system, it can just make all the difference for them" (P2).* This indicates that the systems in which participants are required to teach perpetuate the need for AP. Building upon existing literature, this corroborates the notion that restrictive policies and standardised behavioural management models do not work for all pupils, particularly those who go on to experience AP (Jones et al*., 2023;* Dodds,2023).

Relatedly, it was discussed that the behavioural policies implemented in their mainstream settings can produce a graduated response to behaviour that leads to AP. This would imply that once a pupil has exhausted all avenues of consequence or intervention one of the few options available to schools is then AP:

"…the way we use alternative provisions is it's part of our behaviour system. So it's written into our behaviour policy, part of our graduated response as sort of either providing opportunities for pupils because this is not the right provision for them…" (P1).

The implication here is that some mainstream settings are using AP as a prescriptive and automated response to escalating behaviour. This approach is at odds however with research that suggests comprehending how students view authority and discipline is essential to understanding how discipline affects student behaviour (Jones et al*., 2023; Oxley, 2021; Payne, 2015). For example, Jones et al*., (2023) found that students react more favourably to sanctions that they comprehend, and punitive actions may cause behaviour to worsen. This may mean that policies that discuss using AP as part of the graduated approach run a risk of creating a pathway towards AP.

Other participants felt that the type of support a pupil may require may be too 'expert' or require a level of support that staff feel is unachievable in mainstream and this is what led them to consider AP:

"…So both of those boys have got SEN. One is going to care as well. Different one. we've had two boys in year 10 both go into care one was a PLAC. And one was in a family and has been under child protection for quite some time…" (P3).

Very complex pupil stories were common amongst all participants and this was a common reason as to why staff felt unable to support in mainstream. Participants often labelled AP students as being particularly vulnerable or partaking in highly risky behaviours. This was then perceived by participants as the school not

meeting that child's needs and the student requiring something different from their educational setting. Low self-efficacy for helping vulnerable SEMH pupils is something Dignath et al. (2022) also found to be a factor in the exclusion of such pupils. This reinforces the need for continued improvement and training regarding SEMH difficulties.

Where participants did know what support a student required, they often felt they would still be unable to provide it as there would be a lack of resource available to implement this. For example, all staff felt that there is simply not enough funding to create a high ratio of adults to students or the flexibility these pupils require. This lack of resource and funding has been highlighted in much of the research linked to the use and proposed reasons for using AP (Bryant et al., 2018; Goodall, 2019; Gutherson et al., 2011; House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; Owen et al., 2021) and shows that staff feel there are fundamental barriers to resources which cause them to consider that AP is a necessary educational option for some.

In addition to this, mainstream schools are encouraged to consider the impact of pupil behaviour on the larger cohort. Many of the staff felt exposing other pupils to the behaviour exhibited by one student was unfair to that majority. For example, one staff member noted that pupils are often sent to AP "*…. because they're just so incompatible with other young people" (P1).* Another noted that: "*…when you're presented with 30 children, and you've got one spoiling the education of the others, you've got to think about the 29 and not the one" (P5).* Teachers raising these concerns for the wider cohort is something echoed in literature regarding the inclusion of pupils with SEMH difficulties (Dignath et al., 2022) displaying a strong sense that the needs of the majority in mainstream schools often take priority.

Three participants also discussed students who are newly arrived to the country and learning with English as an additional language (EAL). These participants felt that there is almost a cut-off point at which pupils should be joining mainstream secondary schools, as the language expectations in KS4 make accessing meaningful content very difficult. Consequently, they felt expecting those pupils to succeed in mainstream is unfair and that they have used AP for this reason:

"…*You can never really judge it and you can't judge the level of English acquisition or skills that the child's got when they're coming in either. But especially in Key Stage 4 for EAL. There needs to be a better protocol of saying okay, well, you've missed two thirds of year 11 now or a third of Year 11*" (P5).

When searching the literature, I have not found reference to EAL pupils requiring AP previously. Although this research must be contextualised to the city it took place within this would indicate that there is a cohort of pupils potentially accessing AP due to a gap in appropriate planning and foresight regarding their education.

Analysis of the data indicates that schools seek to work collaboratively with AP because they are filling a void mainstream staff feel they cannot plug with the current resources available to them. Qualitative research on AP largely focuses on pupil life stories and their experiences of AP (Goodall, 2019; Johnston & Bradford, 2019; Malcolm, 2019) and research on inclusion shows in many cases it's a lack of time, resource or knowledge (Dignath et al*.,* 2022). Participants' comments regarding complex pupils, large class sizes and barriers to resources within mainstream aligned with such research. These reasons appear to show the broader difficulties that are at play regarding resources and systems pressures. This theme suggests

that there are a number of systemic factors impacting the use of AP that relate directly to the way mainstream schools are funded, structured and run. In addition to this, having unwavering rules or policies that pupils struggle to adhere to can result in teachers feeling that the school is not right for a pupil. Together these factors indicate that there are many confining aspects to mainstream provision that lead staff to consider AP.

4.2.2 Theme 2: AP Have Resources Not Available to Mainstream Schools

There was a common perception amongst participants that AP settings have additional resource, knowledge, or expertise that mainstream educators and systems cannot. This theme differs slightly from theme 1, as it concerns the belief that AP settings have access to something that mainstreams schools do not. Consequently, many staff felt that even with the ability to make sufficient changes to the mainstream environment, AP settings would still offer something different. One example of this was using a college-style provision:

"… the college route also offers sort of a more grown up if you like, environment because it you know, it has older pupils there. They, their start times are significantly different. They go out for lunch, they can go off site, they can go to the local shop etc" (P1).

Another participant stated:

"…he lived literally over the road from one of the campuses. Was really key because in some ways he'd present as being quite grown up. He likes being around adults, didn't like being around young people" (P3).

Literature often discusses the importance of adding more scaffolding and increased layers of support for pupils requiring AP (Goodall, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018) however the use of a more 'adult' approach brings into question the potential impact an alternative pedagogy (or andragogy) may have for some students. This appreciation for a more flexible curriculum was often noted by participant's: "*They can explore areas of interest, they can go out and do more practical hands-on things and particular students that we probably wouldn't be able to do as a larger school, they could be more flexible*" (P5).

An alternative pedagogy or additional flexibility is also highlighted by Russell et al. (2023) as a beneficial aspect of AP. Hamilton & Morgan (2018) also suggest experiencing a combined sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness lead to changes in behaviours for pupils in AP further reinforcing that the teaching approaches used in mainstream may be reducing opportunities for this. There may be some disconnect here between what staff perceive AP can provide and what is actually on offer however. Although literature suggests alternative approaches are beneficial, Pennacchia and Thomson (2016) found that AP settings have returned to highly behaviourist routines, with talking therapeutic approaches operating within this Skinnerian frame. This would suggest that what some staff are seeking from AP may not be an accurate representation of what a pupil will receive.

There was also a perception that staff in AP are better trained to deal with certain SEND or behavioural needs than those at mainstream schools.

"*… all of their staff will be trained, usually to a higher level. So the one alternative provision that specialises really with students, autistic students, so all of their staff have really detailed knowledge about you*

know, what, what is presenting as part of their need and what actually is

poor choices and they need help you know, redirecting those" (P6).

This sort of perception was common amongst participants however again, this is in opposition to literature that suggests AP settings are often faced with challenges such as teacher training and staff retention which are likely to impact on the quality of support provided to a pupil (Malcom, 2021; Gutherson et al*., 2011*). One participant noted that it was more likely that staff in AP settings are encouraged and have room to prioritise engagement and the wellbeing of pupils over completing the educational content. Something that the national curriculum pressures and mainstream systems do not account for.

"…It's really difficult even in a class of 20 to get one kid a rest break

while the rest of the class carries on and you know, they're set… they're

able to set up and if one kid needs a 10-minute rest break, probably the

whole class does" (P2).

This could be considered to be more in line with the literature suggesting that it is the additional adult time and reduced pressures afforded to pupils in AP that makes the difference (Brown, 2018; Goodall, 2019; Malcolm, 2019). Perceptions such as these also link with research by Dignath et al. (2022) who note that staff not trained in SEND or SEMH feel less able to support and include pupils within their classrooms. It is possible that a continued belief that AP staff have better knowledge perpetuates its use as mainstream teachers believe AP have a greater knowledge base than they do.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Staff See AP as a Hopeful Option

This theme captures the shared experience that all participants assigned an element of hopefulness to the use of AP. AP was not viewed as a student's final chance at education in most cases and instead considered to be one of the last options a school can try before permanent exclusion and consequently the use of a PRU. Many of the participants felt that by making the active choice to sought and fund dual registration at an AP, schools were giving a message to pupils and families that they believe in this pupil and want to make a good choice for their future trajectory:

> *"… if it's managed well, you know, it can be, you know, we do think that you're able to do something good with your life. And we do think that you can succeed and we haven't given up on you, try this instead, this might be better" (P6).*

This concept of avoiding exclusion through the use of AP was common amongst the participants. Staff note they opt for the use of dual registration in certain cases to avoid the prospect of excluding pupils that they believe are 'worth it': "*…I think it's their life chances… they… that at least they have finished with some qualifications because they've gone to an alternative provision. Potentially they might have been permanently excluded" (P4).* This theme appears to be both aligned and in conflict with the experiences of pupils who attend AP. Cockeril (2019) found that some AP students feel a greater sense of belonging in their AP however, many felt forced out of their mainstream settings. It is possible that remaining involved through dual registration acts as a supportive mechanism for pupils causing staff to feel hope from placements in AP.

In cases where staff recalled pupils who were refusing to attend or who experienced anxiety, they saw AP as an option that may be flexible enough to work at a pace set by the student, before they disengaged from services and education altogether:

"… and so you know, for some of our kids AP is not the last chance corral in terms of permanent exclusion, It's the last check around in terms of them, voting with their feet and being completely disengaged, refusing to come to school or go anywhere" (P2)

Hope appears to be built into much of the staff discourse, through previous experience in many cases. Staff recalled success stories from students who they had sent to AP and much of this appeared to stem from pupils enjoying their time in AP. This indicated that self-reports from the pupils is another factor guiding staff perceptions of AP being more hopeful than exclusion:

"…And so he's gone down there. He absolutely loves it. Mom said he's like a different child." (P3).

Ultimately this may suggest that a driving factor in the use of dual registration with AP is a core belief that it offers hope to a pupil's circumstances. This has possibly developed through avoiding permanent exclusion, working together with pupils and families, and experiencing successes using AP. This is in line with Cockeril (2019) who suggested that for some pupils, shared placements led to greater engagement with mainstream education and improvements in behaviour, however, it also contrasts research highlighting poorer outcomes for those who attend AP (Centre for Social Justice, 2020). This would suggest that there is a need to further understand and possibly redefine what success looks like for pupils in AP.

4.2.4 Summary: RQ1

This analysis generated three main themes related to participants' reasons for using AP. The first theme, highlighted a difficulty supporting pupils within the confines of mainstream schools relating to a number of factors such as the school being too large, rules and regulations, a lack of resources, teacher self-efficacy for supporting pupils with complex needs, and a need to consider the impact on the wider mainstream cohort. Much of this is in line with current literature suggesting that the structures within mainstream settings are what prevent the inclusion of pupils with SEMH needs (Dignath et al., 2022; Dodds, 2023) which in turn impacts the use of AP.

Secondly, Participants commonly perceived AP settings to possess additional resources, knowledge, or expertise not available in mainstream schools. This belief stemmed from the notion that AP settings offer something different, such as a more mature environment akin to college, with flexible schedules and off-site privileges. Literature draws attention to the importance of increased support and flexibility for AP students, however, there is a possible discrepancy between staff perceptions and actual provision (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016). Furthermore, participants perceived AP staff as better equipped to handle complex issues compared to mainstream educators. This sentiment contrasts with literature suggesting AP faces challenges in teacher training and retention, potentially impacting support quality (Gutherson et al., 2011; Malcom, 2021). Some participants noted AP staff prioritise pupil engagement and well-being over completing curriculum content, a luxury when bound by National Curriculum pressures. This aligns with research emphasising the significance of additional adult time and reduced pressures in AP (Brown 2018;

Goodall, 2019). It is suggested that this belief that AP staff possess superior knowledge may perpetuate AP use.

Lastly, there was a prominent theme of hope associated with AP among staff. AP was not seen as a last resort, but rather as one of the final options before permanent exclusion and placement in a PRU. Staff view the decision to use AP as a sign of belief in the student's potential and a commitment to their future success. This fits well with previous literature noting that students who received dual registration experienced greater educational engagement (Cockeril, 2019). Ultimately staff considered AP as a flexible option that can cater to students' individual needs, prevent complete disengagement from education and success stories from students who flourished in AP, reinforcing staff perceptions of hope. Despite contrasting research outcomes regarding the effectiveness of AP, staff believed in its potential to positively impact students' circumstances which suggests a need to further explore the dynamics of shared placements between mainstream and AP settings.

4.3   RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream staff working with AP?

Figure 4.2. Thematic Map for RQ2 Barriers and Facilitators.

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream staff working with AP

- Barriers
  - The marketisation of AP
  - Negative parent and pupil perceptions
  - Lack of guidance and regulation
- Facilitators
  - Positive parent and pupil perceptions
  - Regular and transparent communication
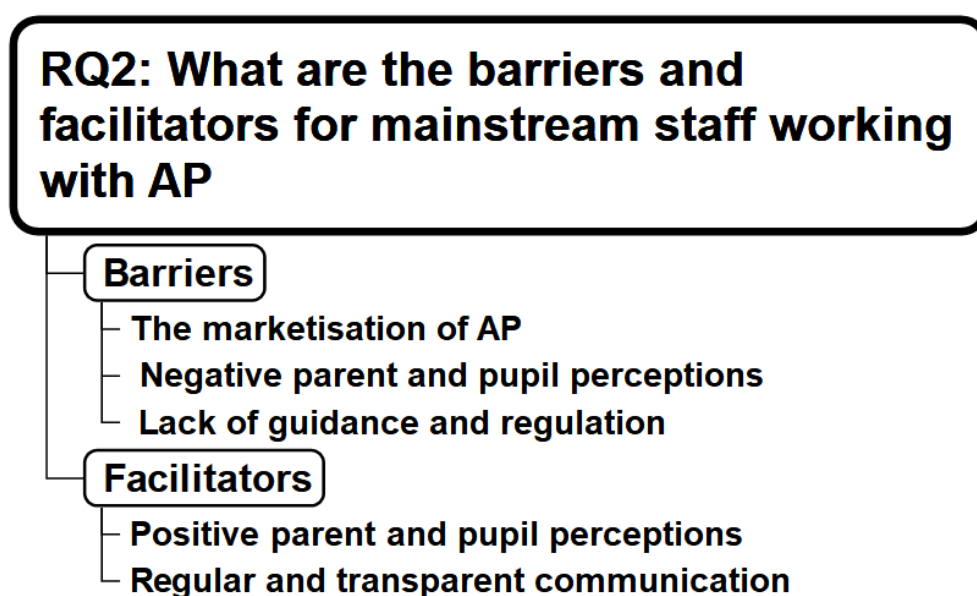
4.3.1   Barriers for Mainstream Staff Working with AP

Figure 4.3. Thematic Map of Barriers.

RQ2: Barriers for mainstream school staff working with AP

- The marketisation of AP
- Negative parent and pupil perceptions
- Lack of guidance and regulation
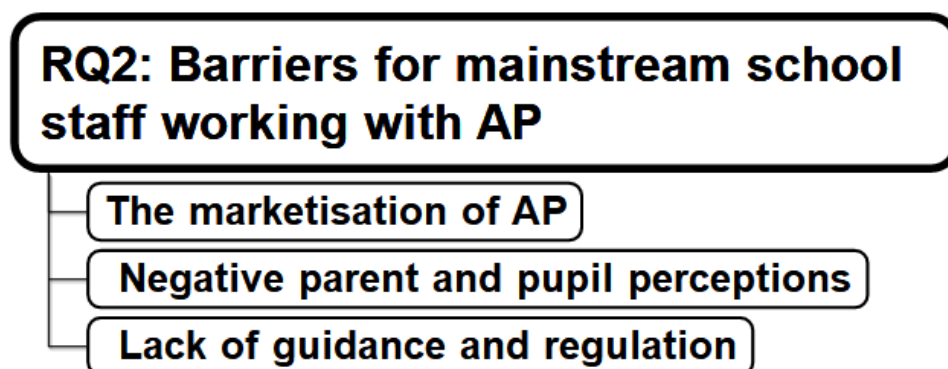
4.3.1.1 Theme 1: The Marketisation of AP

A number of elements were discussed that act as a barrier and or facilitator when working with AP including cost, partnership working and competing priorities. These factors can be associated with the marketisation of education and the AP system. The marketisation of education is where schools are encouraged to compete

and act more like private businesses (Whitty & Power, 2000). Whitty and Power (2000) suggest that policy reforms have led to the marketisation of education over time which has encouraged increases in private decision making from public sector institutions. The analysis aligns with this to suggest that the impact of marketisation is present in the working relationships between mainstream schools and AP. Here, the marketisation of AP refers specifically to the partial removal of funding and responsibilities away from government and towards independently ran settings. The devolved funding models discussed previously (see introduction section 1.2.3) could also be framed as representing the marketisation of AP (Bryant et al., 2018; Tomlinson & Johnston, 2024).

Initial discourse associated with this theme concerned finances. More specifically, participants felt that a significant barrier to the use and working relationships with AP is cost. All participants felt using AP was a costly mechanism for schools. This meant that schools were often saving the use of AP for those pupils in very severe and disrupting circumstances. Similarly, it was noted that the cost makes school carefully consider AP placements and possibly reduces the numbers of pupils who can access these alternative routes in education. For this reason, the cost could also be considered a facilitator as large financial decisions are possibly encouraging more thought and consideration into the use of AP as well as an expectation around a certain standard of delivery for the price. Examples of finance being a consideration for participants included:

> *"…AP is not something that we just use willy nilly, it's not something… we haven't got the money to do it." (P3)*

"…Barriers, probably all comes down to money for some they're just too expensive. Depending on how expensive they are. So if a child is going to an AP in year 9, potentially you've got two years of education to fund them which is a big commitment from the school." (P4)

"…The cost has been a factor in saying, we're not going to use that provision anymore because the cost is just extortionate. For what's actually being delivered." (P1)

In addition to the cost of each child, AP settings have a duty to maintain pupil numbers to ensure a constant flow of finances, enabling them to run. With this being the case, some participants felt there may be competing priorities from AP settings that could impact the working relationships with mainstream schools. For example, working relationships between schools may become prioritised by AP themselves, in order to support a steady flow of pupils:

"Yeah, because if you go to a specific provider and they're looking to fill spaces, obviously they also work on a funding basis, don't they … Then the Head of school for one of the APs does often present things to the rest of the school. So rather than being seen as like a removed kind of part of the partnership, they are very much involved in things that take place." (P4)

Possibly related to this is the idea of partnerships that can form across educational institutions. In the city where this research is based, local clusters of schools join together to form a panel in order to make arrangements such as managed moves or short-term trial placements with other schools. To join, each school pays a membership fee. All participants noted that AP settings also sit on

these panels. Many of the participants felt this was a helpful and important way to stay connected with other schools and AP. By having AP settings on the panel, they can offer places in their provision if none of the mainstream schools are able to accommodate a move for a student. Some participants did also note, however, that this can impact their decision making and choice of AP. For example, the AP associated with each panel offers a discounted rate for members of the same panel or partnership. Discussion of the membership prompted one participant to note:

> *"I think they'd be the first, the forefront of our mind if we did think about APs. Think, okay, this child needs somewhere slightly different. And we have to be an AP within [AP name] or [AP name] first, rather than anyone, any other places. So yeah, maybe they have managed to position themselves like that." (P5)*

Here the participant is noting that as the AP is in regular contact with them through being on the panel and offers a reduced rate, it is likely that they have positioned themselves to be chosen first over another setting. Although participants feel these preexisting relationships with AP are helpful mechanisms for schools and facilitate the use of AP, staff need to be given information about how to think critically about them and assess the setting for its suitability over discounts or professional relationship. It should also be noted that such a model has been cautioned by Higham and Earley (2013) and Tomlinson and Johnston (2024), who suggest that increasing operational power for schools, declining LA support and differentiated school autonomy have potential to exacerbate existing local hierarchies between schools.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Negative Parent and Pupil Perceptions

Parental perceptions were reported to stunt use and progress of AP by participants however perceptions also featured as facilitators (see section 4.3.2.1. Facilitator Theme 1). Examples of the impact of negative perceptions were seen when staff recalled parents or pupils having preconceived ideas about AP as they may not wish to attend due to the stigma this may bring:

"Parents, parents can be a potential barrier. A lot of our parents still see SEN as a stigma. And they still see their child going to a certain school because of social stigma in their community. The child themselves the stigma from the child. So still, I ain't going to no special school. That stigma that happens still" (P2)

This stigma has then led parents to refuse the offer of AP:

"…So we were just about to start a place with [AP name] there over in [location]. Unfortunately, the pupil and parent have refused that placement… I think that the calibre of students that they have, can sometimes put off parents and put off students, they'll say, you know, I don't want to go there." (P2)

Consequently, the staff were then required to find an alternative option or possibly exclude the pupil as they were not prepared to pay for a setting they believe would break down if parents refuse to send their child or if the student would refuse to go.

4.3.1.3 Theme 3: Lack of Guidance and Regulation

All participants felt that there is little guidance or legislation informing their use of AP which can act as a barrier to being able to work effectively with these settings. The lack of guidance means that the participants are interacting with AP in

accordance with basic safeguarding policies and their previous experiences. This can mean that the use of AP by mainstream schools is bound by the knowledge gained by staff either through their preconceptions about AP or through discussions with colleagues from other settings:

"It's like a skeleton framework almost with no specifics. There's a lot of grey areas. So, it's quite easy for someone who hasn't had experience in doing the alternative provision process in schools to fall foul of certain things or to find themselves in a sticky situation with individual cases… The only problem with them [AP colleagues] is they know how theirs work. Could be difficult with other alternative providers. So that's not a guarantee. But there is not very much out there in terms of guidance for it." (P1)

This is concerning as the difficulties trying to navigate the AP system may lead to improper or ill-informed usage by schools. Many welcomed increased regulation in this area. All participants felt that having minimal guidance can make working with AP settings problematic as mainstream schools are required to set their own standards and expectations regarding their communication with the AP and what should be provided by the setting.

Similarly, the lack of regulation impacts what they come to expect from settings as they are cautious that what each AP offers varies considerably:

"Guidance and legislation? Yeah, there isn't. I don't think there's that much. And it probably would be a little bit more helpful. If there were a few more things added, just in terms of expectations, from schools to AP

and AP to schools. And potentially, from a parental point of view, as well."
(P3)

"…But there's no like, if I googled APs, there is no list of good ones. It's just the location, I guess that you're looking kind of specify APs in this part of the city. Unless you went out to visit them, and I think there does need to be like a vetting process or whoever checks APs because they're wildly different in terms of like, not behaviour as such, but just in terms of like…even the buildings…" (P4)

For the participants, there was frustration around the lack of central oversight regarding the type and location of settings. Not only does little regulation make it difficult for participants to find and quality assure AP, but they also felt that it has led to an uneven profile of AP settings that serve a very specific purpose. Most AP available to their schools is tailored towards KS4 pupils and focused on functional English and maths skills. Participants noted that there is a dearth of younger and preventative placements, as well as settings with vocational focus. Staff felt that access to short-term or preventative options sooner has the power to reduce exclusions in earlier year groups:

"The issue we have is if we have to pick someone in year seven, eight or nine for example, particularly year seven or eight, because there isn't anything out there, or there wasn't until the [AP name] started offering this 12-week programme that you could use as AP for the younger ones that we're aware of. So that is when they'd be PX and they would end up in a pupil referral unit…" (P3)

This lack of oversight has also possibly led to a cluster of AP settings located in the city centre. Consequently, some staff noted how this has led to accessibility problems for families and pupils:

"I've had experience with children going to sort of the centre of [city name], and if they've come from specific areas of [city name], sometimes the crossover on vulnerabilities, if they've got safeguarding issues, if those are surrounding any form of sort of gangs or exploitation, you know, that can be you almost creating a melting pot in the centre of the city with pupils from different areas." (P4)

"Other alternative provisions outside of that one can depend on where you're located in the city so actually, when I came over to this area of the city, the south of [city name], there was a lot of provisions in this area I didn't know about, and depending on where you're located in the city, you have sort of better opportunity or access to some alternative provisions then in other areas of the city. So, it's quite limited in this area compared to where I was previously". (P1)

With no clear expectation of what an AP will provide for its service or transparency regarding funding structures, staff are heavily reliant on building working relationships within their educational communities to source appropriate AP. This lack of guidance and regulation was touched upon briefly in the previous theme and is discussed by the government and in much of the literature regarding AP (DfE, 2023b; Tomlinson & Johnston, 2024; Malcolm, 2019). It is possible that the lack of guidance for schools is linked to this concept of marketisation of education as the

government continues to step away from prescriptive policies (Tomlinson & Johnston, 2024).

As stated, participants would welcome additional regulation and guidance with regards to AP and they were able to show where certain changes to regulation over time has impacted their practice today. Those with experience were able to pinpoint that their adoption of dual registration with AP can be related to increased legislation around the movement of pupils:

> *"There's all the information that we can't off roll. So, I think years ago, people used to kind of decide that year elevens, were going off to AP and they'd be taken on roll at the provider, and then they didn't really get anything at the end of it. And you know, that's called off rolling. And obviously, that's illegal and that can't be done. So it's definitely tightened up a lot more and it's a much bigger focus of my job now than it used to be."* (P3)

This would indicate that with greater guidance around the use of AP, school staff may feel empowered to work in more inclusive ways with AP settings for the benefit of their students. This could be supported by MacFarlane and Woolfson's (2013) study finding that normative school beliefs about SEMH inclusion outweighed an individual's inclusive intentions when predicting behaviour. This is to say that with improved guidance for schools, normative beliefs that follow may encourage more inclusive actions.

4.3.2 Facilitators for Mainstream Staff Working with AP

Figure 4.4. Thematic Map of Facilitators.
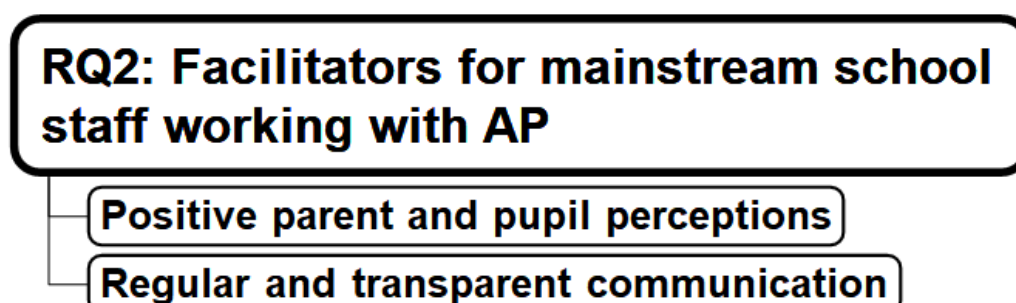
4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Positive Parent and Pupil Perceptions

Listening to the views of parents and pupils was raised as important when working with AP settings. This theme captures the shared belief that listening to the voices of parents and pupils is an important way to understand what is best for a pupil. Staff felt that this then informs the schools perception of whether an AP is providing a good service. For example, if a family has a positive experience with an AP, participants noted they would remember this and be more likely to continue to use them.

> *"…it would come down to the happiness of the child. You know, if you sent somebody to alternative provision, and you know, you found that they were avoiding going to school and their attendance really dropped or, you know, at home, parents were reporting that they were seeing more, you know, kind of meltdowns or they were concerned about their wellbeing." (P6)*

As a result of positive experiences, three of the participants also reported instances where an AP was initially sought by a parent and not the school: *"When*

the parents said, well, actually my older child went here, and I think this could work really well for them" (P6). Which further reinforces that community discourse and parental perceptions can facilitate and drive the use of AP.

Relatedly, five of the six participants discussed the importance of extending the working relationship with AP to parents, in order to improve their experience and acceptance of such a setting:

"… It didn't break down because we helped get him to where he needed to be. So yeah, I'd like to, I'd like to think we try and do the best we can for all of them." (P3)

"…because generally parents are involved before the AP move takes place. Parents are always involved at an early stage so they know it's gonna happen. It's not like a shock to the system. Even parents that are a bit reluctant, they have to be present at that meeting." (P4)

In many cases staff felt that acting in partnership together with parents strengthened the potential benefit of using an AP. This was noted as a particular benefit of offering dual registration for pupils. One participant described the sense of security dual registration can offer by noting: "*…families knowing that we're not going to lose touch with the child and we are going to visit them regularly is another supporting factor for that channel. And also for the child" (P3*). This perspective is at odds with Robb (2019), who suggests that dual registration can bring about uncertainty for younger students and families, but aligns well with the conclusions drawn by Mills and Thomson (2018) who state that AP see value in mainstream schools remaining involved and invested in the progress of young people.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Regular and Transparent Communication Between Settings

Participants were all in agreement that good and regular communication is a key facilitator for having an effective working relationship with AP. Participants all noted that their main expectation from AP is that they provide timely and accurate updates about pupils at their settings.

"Communication is great, you know, so like I said, we get, most of them now have automated sort of daily information around attendance, so we get that, you know, before nine o'clock in the morning to say present or absent, and if a child is absent at that point that comes in late we have a new message to say they've arrived. Any behaviour issues email to me directly. I'm invited to attend meetings because I go there regularly." (P1)

Those AP who didn't provide good communication were looked upon less favourably by participants and staff felt they were less inclined to use them again:

"We've got one provider that I haven't been very impressed with. And I would, I've already raised it with the headteacher and said, this is not somewhere I would be keen to use again" (P3).

Consequently, good contact between mainstream and AP staff was considered to be a key facilitator in the use of AP. This theme of regular and transparent communication between settings echoes findings by Blanchard (2023) who described that staff share views regarding communication as both a barrier and a tool or opportunity for information sharing between schools, PRUs and families.

4.3.3 Summary: RQ2

Five themes have been discussed in relation to the barriers and facilitators involved when working with AP. The theme of *The Marketisation of AP* centres on the influence of financial considerations, partnership dynamics, and competing priorities stemming from the broader market-oriented approach in education. Participants highlighted cost as a significant barrier, leading to careful allocation of resources and potentially limiting access to AP for students in severe circumstances. Additionally, the need for AP settings to maintain pupil numbers for financial sustainability may influence their priorities, potentially affecting relationships with mainstream schools. Partnerships between educational institutions, while beneficial for collaboration, may also influence decision-making processes, potentially favouring AP settings associated with existing partnerships. However, caution is advised as this form of collaboration may exacerbate existing hierarchies within the education system (Tomlinson & Johnston, 2024). While partnerships and financial considerations play crucial roles in facilitating the use of AP, careful assessment and critical thinking are necessary to ensure suitability and avoid reinforcing inequalities within the educational landscape.

The theme of a *Lack of Guidance and Regulation* concerning AP focuses on the absence of clear directives or legislation guiding use, which presents a significant obstacle to effective engagement with these settings. Participants expressed concerns about the dearth of guidance, indicating that their interactions with AP are primarily guided by basic safeguarding policies and past experiences. The absence of comprehensive regulation not only complicates the interaction between mainstream schools and AP settings but also affects the expectations and standards set by schools regarding communication and provision from AP. This reliance on

personal knowledge and informal networks may consequently result in inconsistent or uninformed practices regarding the use of AP within mainstream schools. Participants highlighted the need for increased oversight and clarity in this area, emphasising the importance of defined expectations and quality assurance processes. Additionally, the unplanned geographical concentration of AP settings has created challenges for families and pupils from different areas. Participants noted that greater clarity and oversight could empower schools to engage more inclusively with AP, aligning with research suggesting that collective normative beliefs (from senior leaders and policy) influence inclusive practices (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013).

Themes of *Positive and Negative Parent and Pupil Perceptions* highlight both the facilitative and inhibitory role perceptions play. Participants emphasised the importance of listening to parents and pupils as a means of understanding their preferences and needs, which can influence the perception of AP effectiveness. Positive experiences reported by families can enhance the likelihood of continued use of AP, demonstrating the impact of community discourse and parental endorsement on the uptake of AP services. Conversely, stigma surrounding AP, often rooted in preconceived notions, was identified as a barrier, with parents or pupils resistant to engaging with AP due to social stigma or negative perceptions. This resistance may result in refusal of AP placements, necessitating alternative options and potentially leading to exclusion if suitable alternatives cannot be found. To address this, collaboration with parents was seen as particularly beneficial, with dual registration offering a sense of security and continuity for families and students. This aligns with previous research emphasising the value of mainstream schools' continued involvement in the progress of young people attending AP (Mills &

Thomson, 2018). The theme discusses the complex interplay between parental and pupil perceptions, highlighting the need for inclusive decision-making processes to optimise the effectiveness of AP interventions.

Finally, the theme of *Regular and Transparent Communication Between Settings* demonstrates the agreement among participants regarding the role of effective communication in fostering a productive working relationship with AP. Participants held an expectation that AP would provide timely and accurate updates on pupils. Good communication practices were seen as essential for maintaining trust and facilitating collaboration, while instances of poor communication were viewed unfavourably and could impact the likelihood of using the AP provider again in the future. This aligns with Blanchard (2023) and Robb (2019), which also illuminates communication as both a barrier and an opportunity for information sharing. The theme suggests the benefit of regular and transparent communication in optimising the effectiveness of working relationships between settings, thereby enhancing support for pupils accessing AP.

4.4 RQ3: What Perceptions Exist Regarding AP from the Perspectives of Mainstream Staff?

Figure 4.5. Thematic Map Related to RQ3.
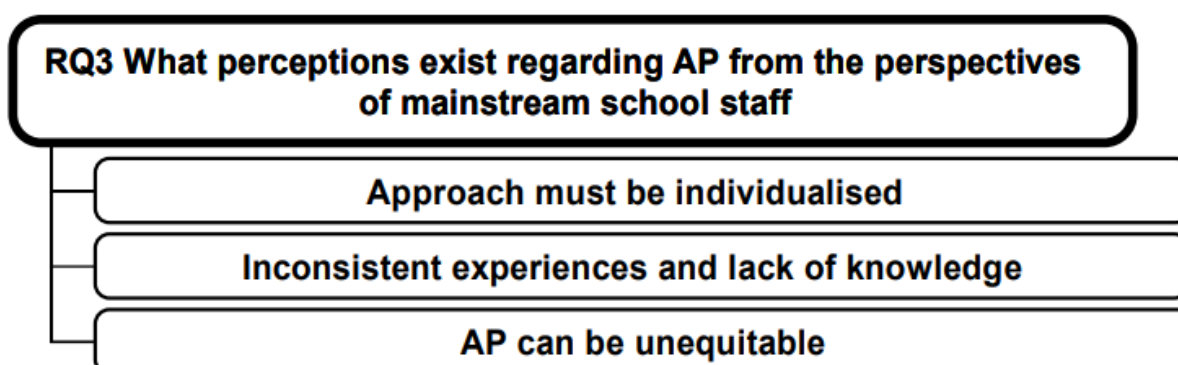
4.4.1 Theme 1: Approach Must be Individualised

All participants felt that the process and circumstances surrounding the use of AP vary so widely that any placement needs to be tailored to each individual pupil. This was seen as important because many students' lives are complex and multifaceted, so looking at each circumstance can be the key to better success with AP placements:

"… it really just depends on the needs of the children. So we send some, we've had incredible success with some children. At that provider. And not for others, because you learn what kind of kid they can do. And then you stop referring the kids that they can't do from your experience. That's what we've had to start doing." (P2)

"It's about the whole child and it's about the mental health and safeguarding issues and Sen, Pupil Premium, whether they're free school meals, their family situation, their kind of long-term career, I'd like to think

for us we think about everything, but I do think there are people in AP for

behaviour because ... It's easier that they're not in school that staff don't

have to deal with it." (P3)

It was noted that without an individualised approach, placements are more likely to fail for a few reasons. The placement itself may be inappropriate for the pupil's needs, parents may become disheartened with the setting, a pupil may feel the process is done to them and not with, SEND or mental health needs may not be considered, or the location of the placement may be untenable for the family. This mimics other small scale qualitative findings that show when the right AP is commissioned, many young people value their journey and come to feel a sense of belonging at AP (Goodall, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Johnston & Bradford 2022).

Ultimately most participants felt AP should be used to meet each individual pupils' needs and not as a reaction to behavioural concerns in school:

"…if you're offering it as a, we're not really meeting your needs

here. This alternative provision can meet your needs better then that's the

right thing to do. If you're saying your behaviour isn't good enough, and

therefore we are sending you here, then that's potentially not the right

thing to do." (P6)

Similarly, as seen previously (Table 1.2), the routes to accessing AP are so varied that the steps in between mainstream and AP also need to be considered:

"…well, trialling another school isn't gonna work. He's not took to

the GCSEs. He's not taken to the courses, you know, we could send him

to one of the other schools, they would have him as a favour for six

weeks- we do passport swaps. If he likes relationships, he's going to have

none, he'll just refuse to go. And then we're in a situation where he then

won't go anywhere. So we talked about, we've got him some careers

interviews, and he really, really, really wants to do construction that says

he's fixated on construction…" (P3)

Here the participant is recalling a time when the usual graduated response before AP was deemed to be inappropriate for a pupil. Although not all participants used AP in this way, this level of individualisation seems to imply that having AP as a resource at the end of a graduated response could be using it inappropriately as it risks creating a scenario whereby a pupil is given intervention to fail, layering their negative educational experiences in honour of policy. Struggling to individualise support and the use of restrictive, 'one size fits all' policies were also noted in theme 1 of RQ1. The presence of this theme within the current research indicates the need to tailor systems and approaches to further illuminate and improve the use of AP for pupils and teachers.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Inconsistent Experiences and lack of Knowledge About AP

All participants felt that their experiences of AP were inconsistent, both across settings and, at times, with the same setting. Participants felt the quality of resources, staffing, communication and education varied significantly between AP. This then places significant pressures on staff to appropriately monitor the suitability and quality of AP placements:

"There are even some registered provisions where, you know,

we've used previously. We haven't, we're not happy with their

safeguarding process procedures. We're not happy with the

communication between a provision and cost sometimes is a factor, you

know, sometimes for what's offered versus what the outcome has been for

the child at the end of the placement or, versus what the child is receiving

as an experience on the placement" (P1)

All participants maintained this idea of expecting a certain standard and delivery from

an AP however that standard varied. This inconsistent quality and regulation has

been noted by the DfE to be a difficulty with the current AP system (DfE, 2016; DfE,

2023b). Whilst this may be a result of increased school autonomy over time, as

suggested by Tomlinson and Johnston (2024), we can see here that the lack of

regulation is adding tension to the working relationships between mainstream and

AP settings.

Alongside these differing experiences, staff did not have access to enough

knowledge or research regarding AP in order to make well informed decisions every

time. For example, schools need to source their own settings as there are no central

systems showing them all, new ones were reported to "*pop up*" regularly and in

some cases, Ofsted may have not completed assessments yet. In addition to this, no

participants knew of any evidence-base surrounding AP or its effectiveness for pupils

outside of their own qualitative experiences:

"I've never thought about that actually. I don't know how much

evidence there is. I'm Working out what I think. I think it should be

evidence-based practice. I think in reality, it's S***, what do we do

practice, sorry." (P2)

When asked if they knew of any evidence-base that may exist one participant simply

stated: "*..I don't know any so no" (P6).* In all cases staff had found AP settings

themselves which was mostly achieved through talking to colleagues in other settings or asking during the panel/ partnership groups. When asked how they gained their knowledge of the AP system one participant recounted: *"just more hearsay and, like colleagues, professional experiences and that type of thing"* (P4).

Additionally, all participants felt strongly that there is a need for some transparent, quality assured, local oversight regarding availability and use of AP:

"… I think having clarification on what type should be available because it will vary as well, from authority to authority. So having one sort of model, countrywide model wouldn't work. Looking at your demographic of your local authority and those sorts of things, what would work in [city name] wouldn't work in [neighbouring city name] …" (P2)

"The alternative provision guidance from the DfE doesn't stipulate you have to do those things. Where probably ought to be statutory that you do those." (P1)

Participants' varied experiences highlight the inconsistency within AP in terms of quality and regulation, placing pressure on staff to decide suitability and monitor quality. Despite the expectation of a certain standard, this is often not met due to the lack of regulation and access to comprehensive knowledge. The absence of an accessible evidence base compounds this issue, leaving staff reliant on hearsay and professional experiences to navigate the AP landscape. There is a clear call for transparent, quality-assured local oversight to address these challenges and ensure better outcomes for all involved. This reinforces the potential benefit of creating a considered national framework for AP as proposed by the government (DfE, 2023b).

4.4.3 Theme 3: AP Can be Unequitable

All participants felt that there were aspects to the current AP system that they deem unequitable for pupils. Participants reasons for this varied slightly however some reasons were shared by all. Staff were concerned with how selective they are required to be when selecting pupils that can attend AP. Selectivity was seen as necessary due to cost implications, belief a pupil will succeed and location (i.e. is there an appropriate provision in safe distance of where that child can attend):

"I think that because it's a costly provision. And not just in terms of actually paying for the provision, but then also having a member of staff to manage that dual role and all the safeguarding checks and everything else that go on behind the scenes. They are only used in the most severe of cases" (P6)

"it's a real commitment, when we say we're going to put them out, we have to make sure we can afford to pay that for that that whole time. And also be aware that those costs might increase, which they are they are going to increase for September." (P3)

"There's probably lots of other students in our school at the moment that would benefit from alternative provision. So I think that it's a bigger debate, really, in terms of where we're going wrong with the with the education system to the point where we need these alternative provisions and schools are desperately trying to find the money to send students to these alternative provisions because they're better for them." (P6)

Adding to this view of inequity, participants also felt that a lack of preventative and short term placements perpetuates a need to use fulltime off site provision and so pupils are perhaps not supported early enough or in a way that may prevent education in a different setting for KS4: *"…I think, the way the education system is at the moment, sometimes there is no other option but to use alternative provision. So you know, you're kind of almost forced into that." (P6)*

Lastly, some participants felt that there are AP settings out there that have competing motivations that may prevent an equitable system:

"…because I assume the AP will just always say that the kid is doing well because they're offering a service. You pay for it and then they come back. I don't know that if it's different kind of with a managed move there is no monetary kind of exchange its just someone willing to give your child an opportunity. And kind of there's more regular communication there." (P4)

"…it's gonna sound horrible, I think for some of them, they just think about bums on seats and the money not really having a plan for what the students should be doing while they're there and what the outcomes should be and you know how to meet their needs, and then it fails." (P5)

Here it can be seen that some participants hold a critical view of some AP settings due to the competitive market nature and funding streams applied to these types of institutions. Consequently, these competing priorities have reinforced the notion that the use of AP is unfair for many students. This perceived lack of equity may also be linked to the changes in oversight, funding structures and the marketisation of

education seen over the years, as discussed previously (Whitty & Power, 2000; Tomlinson & Johnston, 2024).

4.4.4 Summary: RQ3

The perceptions of mainstream secondary school staff regarding AP, provided three prominent themes. The first being the *Approach to AP Must be Individualised.* Participants unanimously discussed the diverse circumstances surrounding AP usage, highlighting the need to customise placements to each student's needs. Without individualisation, staff felt placements are at risk of failure due to mismatched needs, parental dissatisfaction, and oversight of SEND or mental health. Additionally, the various pathways to accessing AP emphasise the importance of considering intermediary steps between mainstream education and AP. Reflecting on past experiences, participants highlight instances where traditional approaches proved ineffective, demonstrating the significance of flexible, tailored interventions. Here, there is an argument to move beyond policy uniformity, towards a nuanced, personalised approach to AP that prioritises student well-being and educational success.

The theme of *Inconsistent Experiences and Lack of Knowledge About AP* was generated as participants expressed frustration with the variability in quality across AP settings, including disparities in resources, staffing, communication, and education. This inconsistency places pressure on staff to monitor the suitability and quality of AP placements. Additionally, staff reported a lack of access to comprehensive knowledge or research about AP, relying instead on anecdotal experiences to navigate the landscape. The absence of an evidence-based

understanding compounds this issue, leaving staff unsure of the effectiveness of AP for pupils. There is a clear consensus among participants for transparent, quality-assured local oversight to address these challenges, indicating support for a national framework for AP proposed by the government (DfE, 2023b). This theme details a need for better regulation, access to information, and oversight to ensure improved outcomes for all involved in the AP system.

The final theme, *AP Can be Unequitable,* was developed as participants perceived various aspects of the current AP system as unjust for pupils. Participants expressed concerns about pupil selection for AP, driven by factors such as cost implications, perceived likelihood of student success, and geographical constraints. This selectivity was viewed as exacerbating inequalities, creating difficulties with access to suitable provision. Additionally, participants highlighted a lack of preventative and short-term placements, which some believe perpetuates the need for full-time, off-site provision, and may hinder early intervention efforts to support students. Furthermore, staff voiced scepticism about the motivations of certain AP settings, suggesting that some prioritise financial concerns over meeting students' needs, possibly compromising the fairness of the system. These concerns have been proposed to reflect broader issues related to changes in oversight, funding structures, and the marketisation of education, as discussed in existing literature (Thomlinson and Johnston, 2024; Whitty and Power, 2000). This theme accentuates the call for systemic reforms to address inequalities within the AP system and ensure equitable opportunities for all students.

4.5 Deductive Analysis: Mapping Out Analysis to the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011)

This section presents the deductive analysis of thematic findings within the context of the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA), highlighting the interplay between attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and the data.

Figure 4.6 An adapted representation of Fishbein and Ajzen's Schematic presentation of The Reasoned Action Approach (taken from Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011, p.22)
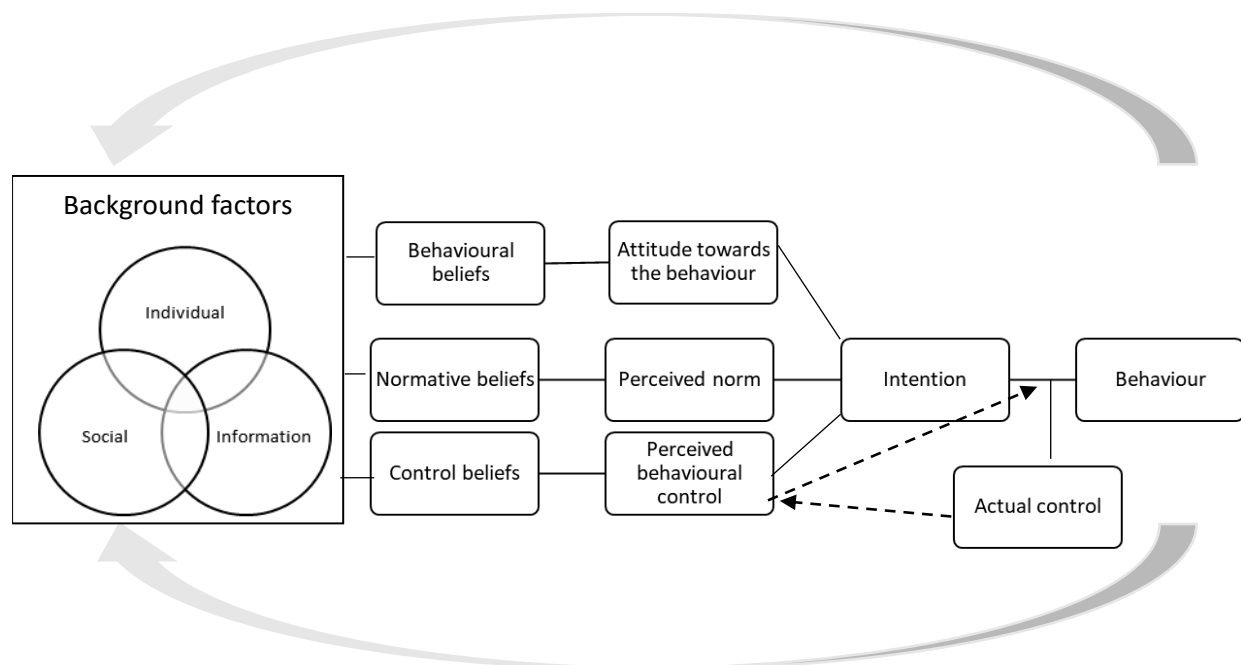
4.5.1 Reasoned Action Approach Recap

The RAA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) is a theory used to help understand an individuals actions based on their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Table 4.1 below shows the definitions of these basic tenets. According to the RAA, these factors combine to influence an individual's intention to perform a behaviour, which in turn increases the likelihood of the behaviour

occurring. The model suggests that the stronger an individual's intention to perform a behaviour, the more likely they are to engage in it, provided they have the necessary resources and opportunities.

Table 4.1. RAA Definitions

Label	Definition
Attitudes	An individual's positive or negative evaluations of performing a behaviour. It includes beliefs about the consequences of the behaviour and the individual's evaluation of those consequences.
Norms	The perceived social pressures to perform or not perform a behaviour. It involves beliefs about whether important others approve or disapprove of the behaviour and the motivation to comply with those beliefs.
Perceived Behavioural Control	An individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour. It encompasses beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or hinder the behaviour and the perceived power to overcome those factors.

4.5.2 Deductive Analysis Using the Reasoned Action Approach

To complete this second stage of analysis, after completing the thematic process for the inductive themes, I then went back to the data and began to make sense of the initial codes with the RAA in mind and where possible I assigned codes to each subgroup of the framework. The purpose of this analysis was to offer a visual

structure to the data and possibly organise the factors impacting upon the use of AP

using a framework that has already been utilised in the research when considering

inclusive decision making in education (Dignath et al*.,* 2022; Monsen et al*.,* 2014;

Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). This process was iterative and took a number of

revisions before settling on the final analysis (appendices I, J & K display examples

of the initial analysis and data extracts related to the subcategories of the RAA).

Once the analysis was considered complete, I was able to see how the elements

associated with each subgroup aligned well with the inductive analysis, further

confirming the usefulness of using this visual structure to map out the cognitive

evaluations and background factors present for participants regarding the use of AP.

The analysis has been displayed visually in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7 RAA Deductive Analysis Map.

Background Factors

Systemic changes:
Off rolling made illegal
Small regulations to AP system over time
Reduced central oversight
Growing MS school sizes
Lack of consideration for older EAL pupils

Community:
Parental views
Pupil views
Historical use of AP
Unregulated AP sector

School:
Position within own school system
Financial implications
Institutional views on inclusion

Individual:
Experience and training of staff member
Individual views on inclusion

Behavioural Beliefs
Sending to AP will be helpful
MS have tried all they can in house

Normative Beliefs
Motivated to support pupil as best possible
Motivated to support MS cohort
Motivated to follow MS processes and remain compliant
Using AP is routine
AP provide something MS can not
Most pupils enjoy AP

Control Beliefs
AP can do more for these pupils than MS
The use of AP is already unequitable

Perceived Normative Beliefs: Injunctive (what you think others do)
Other schools do this
Sharing practice between schools
Lack of consideration for evidence-base
Some schools have 'go to' APs

Perceived Normative Beliefs: Descriptive (what you think others want you to do)
Not off rolling
Regular checks for offsite pupils
Maintain oversight of pupil
Honour parental choice
Existing relationships with APs
Communicate with colleagues

Perceived behavioural control
MS can not change enough to meet need
We can control some choices around the use of AP

Actual Control Beliefs
Lack of resources
Cost
Large class sizes
Low adult ratios
Lack of time and training/ SEND knowledge

Attitude towards the behaviour
AP is hopeful / pupil is 'worth it'
MS school is 'not right' pupils

Intention
Increase engagement with education
Avoid exclusion
Reduce impact on MS cohort
Improve mental health / anxiety concerns

Behaviour
MS staff using and maintaining working relationships with AP

Note: the term MS in this figure is used to represent 'mainstream'

4.5.2.1 Background Factors

As highlighted in the inductive analysis, participants turned to AP due to various systemic, community, school, and individual factors. Systemic changes, such as the illegality of off-rolling and reduced central oversight coupled with small regulatory adjustments to the AP system over time, impact school decisions. Furthermore, the growing sizes of mainstream schools (written in Figure 4.7 as 'MS'), and the lack of consideration for KS4 EAL pupils, creates a need for alternative provision to cater to diverse student needs. In the community, parental and pupil views, the historical usage of AP, local partnerships, and an unregulated AP sector influence school choice further. Within schools, factors like the participant's role within their own systems (i.e. SENDCo/Pastoral/Senior Leader), financial implications, and institutional views on inclusion also guide decisions. Lastly, individual factors such as professional experience and training, as well as their personal views on inclusion, all seem to shape how schools utilise AP. These factors are also seen throughout the inductive analysis in themes such as 'Unable to Support Within the Confines of Mainstream School', 'Lack of Regulation and Guidance' and 'Approach Must be Individualised'. Together, these multifaceted factors show the complex landscape within which schools navigate to provide effective and inclusive education for all students.

4.5.2.2 Beliefs: Behavioural, Normative and Control

The RAA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) sheds light on the beliefs held by participants leading to why they may opt for AP based on their behavioural, normative, and control beliefs. Behavioural beliefs reflect what people think will happen if they engage in a specific action. Behavioural beliefs present within this research are represented through the indication that schools perceive sending

students to AP as helpful when mainstream efforts prove ineffective. This notion stems from the belief that choosing AP will lead to continued engagement with education for a pupil and that AP will offer tailored support that mainstream cannot, due to the reasons discussed earlier in the themes associated with RQ1.

Normative beliefs reflect the perceived opinions, approval, or disapproval of significant others such as colleagues, parents and pupils themselves. These types of beliefs could be seen when participants spoke of the importance of listening to parents and pupils, ensuring the education of the wider mainstream is not impacted, and complying with established processes championed by their colleagues. Additionally, it seems that using AP becomes routine for fellow colleagues within their localities or partnerships, coupled with the lived experience of students and parents approving of AP. These ideas have been explored in the inductive themes of 'Staff See AP as a Hopeful Option', 'Positive Parent and Pupil Perceptions' and 'Approach Must be Individualised'.

Control beliefs represent the factors deemed to facilitate or hinder the performance of a behaviour. Control beliefs appear to further shape the decision-making process as participants emphasised that AP can better cater for certain pupils compared to mainstream. This is also coupled with a perception shared by many that the use of AP is already unequitable. This belief highlighted concerns about equitable access to AP, suggesting a need for reassessment of current practices to ensure fairness and inclusivity within the education system. These types of control beliefs have been discussed through the earlier inductive themes of 'Unable to Support Within the Confines of Mainstream School', 'The Marketisation of AP', and 'AP Can be Unequitable'.

Dignath et al. (2022) also suggest that difficulties including students with SEMH needs are impacted by beliefs that they would disrupt other pupils learning (behavioural beliefs) and the low self-efficacy staff have in their abilities to manage pupils (control beliefs). Preventing the disruption to other students is also reported to be a reason schools may consider exclusion or commission AP for pupils (Gutherson et al., 2011). Research such as this aligns with the analysis suggesting that there are some shared beliefs present amongst teachers when considering the use of AP beyond the area in which this research was conducted.

4.5.2.3 Subjective Norms

The analysis has highlighted that teaching staff often grapple with numerous perceived normative beliefs regarding the use of AP. There are two types of perceived normative beliefs described by Fishbein and Ajzen (2011) which are explored below.

Descriptive Normative Beliefs

Descriptive normative beliefs reflect the existing behaviours, actions, or attitudes that are deemed typical or expected by individuals within a group or community. Participants discussed a prevailing ethos among educators not to off-roll students, led by changes to policy, instead opting to maintain regular checks for off-site pupils to ensure continuity in their education. Moreover, there exists a rhetoric dedicated to honouring parental choice when selecting appropriate AP pathways for students, recognising the importance of collaboration between schools, AP and parents in decision-making processes. Additionally, the emphasis on nurturing existing relationships with AP and fostering open communication channels with colleagues represents a collective approach towards supporting students in AP

settings. These features of common practice have been explored throughout many of the inductive themes such as 'Lack of Guidance and Regulation' (where staff rely on connections to inform their use of AP) and 'The Marketisation of AP' (where partnership working with AP and a growing consideration for parental choice has influenced the landscape of AP use).

Injunctive Normative Beliefs

Injunctive normative beliefs are based on notions of what should be done according to social norms, values, or expectations rather than observations of what is currently practiced. There is an understanding that other schools are engaging in similar practices, leading to a culture of sharing best practice between institutions. However, this can sometimes mean there is a lack of consideration for evidence-based approaches, where 'go-to' AP may be chosen based on tradition rather than 'best fit' or effectiveness. Despite this, there's recognition that some schools have established effective partnerships with certain AP, which serve as collaborative and supportive mechanisms. These elements have also been discussed through the inductive themes of 'Inconsistent Experiences and Lack of Knowledge' and 'Approach Must be Individualised'.

Overall, these normative beliefs, both descriptive and injunctive, play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and actions of teaching staff towards the use of AP. Fishbein and Ajzen (2011) suggest that normative beliefs impact subjective norms. Normative beliefs appear to be playing a role here in impacting the subjective norms making it difficult for educators to wheedle out what is a belief shared by many verses a belief developed from an evidence-base.

4.5.2.4 Behavioural Control

A person's perceived behavioural control is affected by a number of variables, including abilities, opportunities, resources, and limitations that impact a person's capacity to carry out an action. For instance, a person's perceived behavioural control over exercising would be high if they believe they have the abilities, means, and opportunities to exercise regularly. On the other hand, their perceived behavioural control would be low if they felt that there were substantial obstacles or that they lacked the required resources (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011). Despite experiencing barriers, a sense of behavioural control appeared to be present around staff capacity to monitor and work in partnership with AP and parents. Comments that aligned with an ability to control the use of AP can be seen in the themes of 'Approach must be Individualised' and 'Regular and Transparent Communication'. Overall, however, it seems a low sense of perceived behavioural control was present amongst participants regarding changing the trajectory of pupils who access AP and the range of choice afforded through the current AP system. As shown in the inductive themes developed for RQ1, staff perceive many external factors to be impacting upon the continued use of AP. These types of factors have been conceptualised as Actual Control Beliefs (see Figure 4.5). This can be interpreted to imply that staff feel they hold more control regarding their own conduct with AP and the expectations they place on those settings, opposed to their capacity to change a student's trajectory towards AP itself. It's possible that this type of cognitive appraisal leads staff to feel that the use of AP may be 'inevitable', however, they feel they are able to have some influence on its success via their continued involvement.

4.5.2.5 Attitudes

An attitude is defined as a person's positive or negative evaluation of performing a behaviour. These attitudes are formed as a result of the various perceived behavioural control and subjective norm beliefs held by the person. The attitudes prevalent within the data collected appear to be that the use of AP is hopeful, and that mainstream is 'not right' for some pupils. These attitudes are also explored through the themes 'Staff See AP as a Hopeful Option' and 'Unable to Support Within the Confines of Mainstream School'. This may suggest that participants' intentions to continue to use AP largely stem from their hopeful conceptualisation of the AP process and negative appraisal of a student's ability to manage in mainstream.

5   CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1   Research Summary

The aim of this research was to understand the motivations, experiences, and perceptions, of secondary school staff using and commissioning AP. The previous chapters included in this volume offer an account of the literature which informed this work, details of how the research was carried out and a description and discussion of the analysis. RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022) has supported me to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the reasons for using alternative provision from the perspective of mainstream secondary school staff?

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream secondary school staff working with AP?

RQ3: What perceptions exist regarding AP from the perspectives of mainstream secondary school staff?

To conclude this volume of work, this chapter considers the implications for practice, strengths and limitations of the research, areas for further research and ends with a concluding statement.

5.2   Implications

5.2.1   Implications for Policy

This research has identified a difference in the way that participants conceptualise AP in comparison to its official definition (DfE, 2013). Participants all considered AP settings to be separate from PRUs. This was likely because PRUs

were the setting used in the event of an exclusion. Currently, according to the DfE, PRUs are a type of AP (DfE, 2013, p. 3). Although this may be a finding unique to the location of this research, it may be necessary for policy makers to consider these definitions more closely to avoid any misunderstandings for educators and parents. Additionally, despite being called for in previous research (Centre for Social Justice, 2018; Davies, 2012; Thompson & Russell, 2007), improved regulation and quality assurance measures set by central and local government regarding AP remains a concern for mainstream school staff when deciding which placements are in the best interests of each young person.

The analysis also highlights a desire amongst mainstream educators for improved data and outcome measurment, particularly for pupils who experience dual registration. It is important that any data collected by the government are useful in establishing patterns regarding AP infrastructure, to ensure settings meet the individual needs of each unique community context. Alongside this, continued efforts must be taken to further explore the aspects of mainstream school policy that act as market driven and confining mechanisms preventing mainstream staff from providing what AP can (such as a lack of resource, student autonomy, or aspects of behaviour and uniform policies). Finally, it should be cautioned that any new systems must take active steps to prevent the negative effects of marketisation of education (such as high stakes competition between settings, unregulated fees or biased partnership working) and encourage consultation with communities and those commissioning AP to further understand the problem at hand.

5.2.2 Implications for Mainstream and AP Educators

Participants identified an absence of evidence-informed practice amongst mainstream staff working with AP. It is important professionals develop an understanding of alternative forms of education, informed by research in addition to their practice-based experiences. There is also a need for educators to work together with LAs to inform local strategies regarding AP and improve the equity of provision. Additionally, school professionals should remain conscious that their own appraisals and the normative beliefs of educational institutions, parents and pupils all influence the use of AP both positively and negatively, and staff must reflect upon their motivations regularly to prevent oppressive practice. Finally, the research suggests that educators should not underestimate the merit of maintaining dual registration for those pupils accessing AP. Dual registration is a potentially protective factor in supporting some student's sense of connection with education when implemented well.

5.2.3 Implications for Educational Psychologists

This research suggests that there are numerous complex decisions and attitudes at play regarding the use of AP. EPs should be encouraged to understand the mainstream-AP relationship within their LAs and consider where the EP role can support positive adaptations to improve those systems. EPs may wish to work consultatively to support schools and AP to develop accurate methods of evaluating progress for dual registered pupils to improve outcomes. As EPs are doctoral trained practitioner psychologists, they are well positioned to support schools to understand the research base surrounding alternative forms of education and critically evaluate what may be an action informed by evidence verses an attitude informed by collective system norms. This also requires EPs to support staff with their awareness

of the wider influences that impact the use of AP such as organisational constraints or parental perceptions.

Additionally, the analysis indicates a shared belief that choosing AP is more inclusive over alternative options (e.g. exclusion) and that staff actions are bound by numerous constraints. As noted in the work of Van Steen and Wilson (2020) teachers tend to hold positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities but these attitudes are moderated by an interplay of cultural and demographical factors. We see this enacting itself in the use of AP. Participants held positive attitudes towards the inclusion of AP pupils, however, their ability to do this is impacted by behavioural and control beliefs. Therefore, it is also essential that EPs support all educational professionals to develop an informed perspective on how inclusive practice is best achieved within an education system that makes use of AP. The research highlights the importance of showing curiosity for individual constructions of inclusion with educators to encourage an open dialogue surrounding the goals of inclusive practice. This could begin by holding space for the challenging and timebound decisions staff are required to make and by gaining a complete perspective of the attitudes present within a system using a framework such as the RAA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011).

It has been highlighted previously that EPs are able to use a number of mechanisms to improve the inclusion of pupils within their educational settings (Lambert & Frederickson, 2015). EPs can utilise their professional skillset when working alongside schools to develop collaborative solutions, and improve inclusive decision-making, within their LAs. EPs are in a unique professional position to promote inclusive actions through both preventative and responsive measures. This research sheds light on a continued need for EPs to promote preventative measures

to support schools to educate pupils successfully within the mainstream educational system.

The current literature regarding relational approaches suggests that, when embedded with fidelity, the move away from constricting behavioural policies towards a nuanced relational approach can encourage positive attitudes towards inclusion (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2018; Sparling, 2021) and that such approaches have the potential to reduce exclusion through altering attitudes (Edwards & Edwards, 2018; Ford et al., 2017). In turn, this could improve any potential use of AP by impacting on how and when school staff choose to make use of this avenue. To achieve such changes, EPs should continue to use and reinforce mechanisms such as, SLT and whole-school training (Dignath et al., 2022; Toye et al., 2019), consultation (Kjær & Dannesboe, 2019) and organisational approaches (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2018; Jones & Harding, 2023; Sparling et al., 2021; Zaniolo, 2021) to promote inclusive actions. Additionally, it is also key that the profession of educational psychology continues to increase its workforce capacity to allow EPs to broaden the scope of their practice and work more systemically, preventatively, and inclusively.

5.3   Strengths and limitations of the Research

This study contributes to the existing research exploring the perceptions and use of AP. The research offers a new perspective by exploring the perceptions of staff who commission AP as their own unique participant group. Additionally, a strength of this research is the use of RTA and its focus on reflexivity. The use of RTA as an approach to the research and not solely a data analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2022) has allowed deeper reflection of my own influence on the research

through explicit reflexivity and a reflective journal (see Appendix H for reflective journal extract). The deductive analysis has generated thought about the many interacting factors contributing towards the attitudes which may underpin the AP process. This research is therefore unique in establishing a link between such attitudes and the working relationships between mainstream and AP settings.

The themes developed represent an interplay between the structures and experiences present within the location of the research, the small sample of participants and my own construing of the data gathered. Consequently, caution must be taken when considering the themes in relation to other experiences of AP across England. Additionally, the use of individual interviews could be considered a limitation of this research. Whilst I found this data collection technique beneficial for participants to reflect upon their own personal experiences free from the judgment of colleagues, it may have been helpful to include a group interview, so participants were able to validate or query each other's experiences. It is possible that this may have deepened my understanding of participants attitudes and added to the quality of the deductive analysis. In addition to this, the difficulty asserting the attitudes of participants may be viewed as a limitation. Whilst I have applied a well cited theory to conceptualise participant attitudes, it may be argued that it is not the attitude of school staff driving the use of AP, but rather the wider systems driving its use regardless of attitudes. It is hoped that the visual representation using the RAA displayed in figure 4.7 demonstrates the complex relationship between all factors and exhibits the reflective and recursive cycle of attitudes and behaviours (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011).

Another potential limitation of this research could be the use of statements to elicit participant's views. Whilst the use of statements is widely used within this research context (Vogel, 2016; Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011) there is the possibility that

this method may influence the type of responses gathered. It could be considered that developing statements for participants to answer creates a form of researcher bias where participants are required to respond to predetermined items. To mitigate this, I consciously exhausted the original open-ended questions first and asked each participant if they would like to expand or add any thoughts throughout the interviews. I also made sure to address any potential power imbalances by explicitly stating the purpose of the research and reassuring participants that they are not being judged for any of their perceptions. Similarly, any potentially identifying information has been omitted to ensure participants could feel confident that their views would not be attributed to them through the research.

5.3.1   Strengths and Limitations of Using the Reasoned Action Approach

The use of the RAA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) as a framework for deductive data analysis has both strengths and limitations. A strength is that the model acts as a useful organising framework to understand and think about the cognitive evaluations and background factors present regarding the use of AP by mainstream secondary school staff. A limitation would be the difficulty separating out a participants perceived behavioural control from their actual control. The use of RTA has allowed me to reflect upon my limitations as an independent researcher who is unaware of the financial and hierarchical structures within each setting. For this reason, factors present within the Actual Control subgroup could also be perceived as a belief of no control and not a fundamental barrier to control (Actual Control). Additionally, this analysis has not been able to separate the factors that may impact this behaviour either positively or negatively as they all have the power to do so dependant of the context. For example, a positive school vision of inclusion may

increase the use of AP as staff feel it is better than exclusion, however, an alternative positive view of inclusion in another setting may produce less use of AP altogether.

5.4   Directions for Future Research

Future research into the AP sector is welcomed. New research may wish to focus on including the voices of others that commission AP such as LA SEND professionals naming placements on EHCPs. Whilst the participants here represented some significant voices in the process of making the decision to place a young person in AP, parent voice has been mentioned by all participants. Although there is some research considering the voices of parents it may be helpful to further understand what factors are impacting a perceived increase in AP being requested by care givers. Researching the positionality of parents regarding AP will make a valuable contribution for those professionals whose role includes advocating for young people such as EPs. Additionally, whilst RAA was used to further understand attitudes, future research may wish to build on this by employing an organisational change model such as Activity Theory (Engeström et al., 1999) to further understand what artifacts and systems are influencing the commissioning of AP. Lastly, Robb (2019) touches upon the impact of dual registration on pupils who attend PRUs, however, as participants in this research placed PRUs and AP in different categories, researchers may wish to explore the impact of dual registration on a sense of belonging for pupils in AP. Looking further, to assess the impact of dual registration it may be pertinent to employ longitudinal research into the future outcomes of dual registered pupils compared with those registered only with AP.

5.5 Concluding Statement

This research has analysed the perspectives of mainstream secondary school staff working in partnership with AP. The inductive analysis showed that within the context of this research project, mainstream staff felt unable to support pupils which led to the commissioning of AP through dual registration for a variety of reasons such as reduced resources, large school size, and incompatible policies or practices, and deemed AP to provide a form of education that mainstream simply cannot. AP settings were seen to be separate to PRUs and so were deemed to be a more hopeful option for the future of their dual registered students. The analysis also displays that the marketisation of the AP system, negative parent and pupil perceptions, and lack of guidance and regulation of AP can contribute as barriers to these working relationships. Conversely, positive parent and pupil perceptions and regular and transparent communication with AP play facilitating roles. Staff discussed the need for individualised approaches to the use of AP in order to improve its impact for a young person, and concern was raised for the current lack of equitable access to AP, as well as the inconsistent nature of settings and lack of regard for an AP evidence base. The deductive analysis demonstrates that with the RAA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) many elements discussed can be categorised into different background factors, beliefs and attitudes to show the complexity involved in the action of using AP.

Drawing from the analysis I have proposed that much more improvement is required within the AP system to ensure regulation, quality, consistency, and equity, and that educators are in need of more support when faced with these difficult and potentially exclusionary choices to make decisions in the best interest of the pupil. It also represents the potentially protective mechanism dual registration can play in an inadequately regulated sector. It is suggested that EPs are well placed to support

pupils who are dual-registered as they often traverse mainstream and AP settings. Consequently, they may bring additional insight into systems and processes for staff as well as assist in developing effective methods for monitoring and evaluating progress. There is also an earlier role for EPs in supporting mainstream staff to reflect upon their attitudes and the norms of their school systems and to promote the place of evidence informed practice regarding AP.

In conclusion, this research highlights the complex perceptions of mainstream staff who work and commission AP for pupils on roll with their schools, and compliments current literature calling for increased regulation and improvement. It also shows the relevance of understanding the structures and attitudes that drive AP use by displaying the complex interplay between the systems present within just one LA context.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Summary of the current advice applicable to schools commissioning AP

Alternative Provision Statutory guidance for local authorities (DfE, 2013)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fcf72fad3bf7f5d0a67ace7/alternative
_provision_statutory_guidance_accessible.pdf

Power of schools to direct a pupil off-site for education to improve behaviour

24. Under revised off-site regulations the governing body must:
- ensure that parents (and the local authority where the pupil has a statement of special educational needs) are given clear information about the placement: why, when,where, and how it will be reviewed;
- keep the placement under review and involve parents in the review. The regulations specify regular reviews but do not specify how often reviews must take place (that should be decided on a case-by-case basis). Reviews should be frequent enough to provide assurance that the off-site education is achieving its objectives and that the pupil is benefitting from it; and
- have regard to guidance from the Secretary of State on the use of this power

25. This legislation **does not apply to Academies**. They can arrange off-site provision for similar purposes under their general powers, set out in the Academy Trust's Articles of Association. Though the regulations and guidance do not apply, they can provide Academies with an example of good practice.

Good alternative provision

30. Good alternative provision is that which appropriately meets the needs of pupils which required its use and enables them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers. All pupils must receive a good education, regardless of their circumstances or the settings in which they find themselves. Provision will differ from pupil to pupil, but there are some common elements that alternative provision should aim to achieve, including:
- good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools – particularly in English, maths and science (including IT) – with appropriate accreditation and qualifications;
- that the specific personal, social and academic needs of pupils are properly identified and met in order to help them to overcome any barriers to attainment;
- improved pupil motivation and self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education; and
- clearly defined objectives, including the next steps following the placement such as reintegration into mainstream education, further education, training or employment.

Planning for alternative provision

31. All pupils should be helped and encouraged to achieve or exceed the standards of a good education. Commissioners should recognise any issues or barriers, and hence a potential requirement for alternative provision, as early as possible, and carry out a thorough assessment of the pupil's needs. Schools should look to have an increased focus on the early assessment and identification of a pupil's needs before his or her behaviour has deteriorated to the extent that exclusion is the only option.

32. All pupils must receive full-time provision in total, whether in one setting or more,

unless a pupil's medical condition makes full-time provision inappropriate – see the guidance document 'Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs' for further information. A personalised plan for intervention should be prepared by the commissioner setting clear objectives for improvement and attainment, timeframes, arrangements for assessment and monitoring progress, and a baseline of the current position against which to measure progress. Plans should also be linked to other relevant information or activities such as 'Education, Health and Care Plans' for children with SEN.

33. Commissioners should maintain a full record of all placements they make, including a pupil's progress, achievements and destination following the placement. This should also include the pupil's own assessment of their placement.

Commissioning good-quality alternative provision

34. Responsibility for the alternative provision used rests with the commissioner. The nature of the intervention, its objectives and the timeline to achieve these objectives should be agreed and clearly defined. Progress against these objectives should be frequently monitored, appropriate reviews should be built in and continuity into the next stage in the child's life should be considered. Where reintegration to the school is an objective, there should be agreement on how to assess when the pupil is ready to return and the school should provide an appropriate package of support to assist their reintegration. These objectives and plans should be agreed with providers, set out in writing and regularly monitored, including through frequent visits to the provider.

35. All relevant information should be shared with providers and other parties involved. This should be jargon free and include any information on special educational needs, literacy,
safeguarding or other issues, as well as any information requested by the provider as appropriate. Information must be provided in accordance with data protection principles but this should not discourage schools from providing information where they can do so.

36. Commissioners should maintain on-going contact with the provider and pupil, with clear procedures in place to exchange information, monitor progress and provide pastoral support. If a pupil is on the roll of their previous or current school they should remain so and encouraged to feel part of the school. Records should be kept on a pupil's progress in the provision, appropriate staff liaison arrangements should be in place, and appropriate mechanisms of challenge should be agreed.

37. Commissioners need the right information to be able to decide which provision is most appropriate for a pupil. Some local authorities or partnerships of schools have developed a local directory of 'approved' provision, which meets clearly defined standards (including registration where necessary, safeguarding, health and safety, quality of accommodation, quality of education etc.). These lists, where they exist, can provide a helpful starting point. However, prior to placement, commissioners should still assess whether the provision offers high quality education and is suitable for the pupil's individual needs.

38. Alternative provision should be good quality, registered where appropriate, and delivered by high quality staff with suitable training, experience and safeguarding checks. It should have clearly defined objectives relating to personal and academic attainment. Where an intervention is part-time or temporary, to help minimise disruption to a pupil's education, it should complement and keep up with the pupil's current curriculum, timetable and qualification route. If a pupil is referred to off-site provision on a part-time basis, they should attend school as usual on the days on which they are not in the alternative provision.

39. Provision should:

• have a clear purpose with a focus on education and achievement as well as meeting the pupil's needs and rigorous assessment of progress;

• offer appropriate and challenging teaching in English, mathematics and science (including IT) on par with mainstream education – unless this is being provided elsewhere within a package of provision;

• be suited to the pupil's capabilities, give pupils the opportunity to take appropriate qualifications and involve suitably qualified staff who can help pupils make excellent progress; and

• have good arrangements for working with other relevant services such as social care, educational psychology, child and adolescent mental health services, youth offending teams and drug support services etc.

Off-site direction by maintained schools

41. The governing body of a maintained school directing a pupil off-site for education to improve behaviour should have regard to all of the statutory guidance set out in this document. This covers objectives and timeframes with appropriate monitoring of progress and reviews. These should all be agreed and set out at the time a direction is made, and include arrangements for reviews – including how often the placement will be reviewed, when the first review will be and who should be involved in the reviews. Parents and, where the pupil has a statement of special educational needs, the local authority, can request, in writing, that the governing body review the placement. When this happens, governing bodies must comply with the request as soon as reasonably practicable, unless there has already been a review in the previous 10 weeks.

42. Where possible, parents should be engaged in the decision taken by the school to direct a pupil off-site. Once a pupil is directed off-site, information about reviews should be provided to the pupil's parents and to the local authority where it maintains a pupil's statement of SEN. This should include outcomes of the reviews and of the placement.

43. The focus should remain on ensuring that a child continues to receive a good education on par with their mainstream peers whilst the needs which require intervention are being addressed. Therefore, the length of time a pupil spends in alternative provision will depend on what best supports the pupil's needs and potential educational attainment.

education on par with their mainstream peers whilst the needs which require intervention are being addressed. Therefore, the length of time a pupil spends in alternative provision will depend on what best supports the pupil's needs and potential educational attainment.

Appendix B

SEND and AP Improvement Plan Summary as it Relates to Specific AP Provision

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63ff39d28fa8f527fb67cb06/SEND_and_alternative_provision_improvement_plan.pdf

- We are committed to delivering alternative provision that is fully integrated with the wider SEND system. Consultation feedback supported this integration and the vision of alternative provision we set out in the green paper. Respondents recognised the vital role that alternative provision can play in supporting children and young people to remain in mainstream education by offering early, targeted support; and in offering time-limited or transitional places in alternative provision schools for pupils who need more intensive support. The vast majority of pupils receiving alternative provision also have SEND, and these services need to be aligned throughout local planning and delivery. This is why we refer to measures about the 'SEND and alternative provision system' throughout this Plan, with specific reforms to alternative provision embedded within individual chapters.

- The new national SEND and alternative provision system will be well established and bring national consistency to the identification of need and provision of support as set out in the evidence-based National Standards.

- For providers, it will give them clarity on the support they should be providing, who should be working together, and will enable government to hold delivery partners to account and intervene where expectations are not met. It will also provide clarity on the resources available to deliver the right provision, for example, by ensuring that the new National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards are clear on which budgets should be used to provide different types of support

- extend funding until March 2025 of the alternative provision specialist taskforce (APST) pilot programme, which is testing co-location of a diverse specialist workforce in pilot alternative provision schools

- create a ladder of intervention for local areas from 2023, greater powers for the Secretary of State for Health through the Health and Care Act 2022, and robust action for all where statutory duties for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision are not met, to strengthen accountabilities across all parts of the system

- work with local authority, trust and school leaders to review processes and develop options for ensuring transparent and effective movement of pupils without EHCPs, such as those requiring alternative provision, to address behavioural needs

- develop new approaches to funding alternative provision aligned to their focus on preventative work with, and reintegration of pupils into, mainstream schools. We will do this in consultation with mainstream schools, the alternative provision sector and local authorities.

Appendix C

Ethical Approval

Dear Julia Howe ,

RE: Mainstream secondary school staff experiences of working with alternative provision

Application for Ethical Review: ERN_2023-0745

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has ethical approval.

Any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards,

The Co-Chairs of the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee

E-mail: ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Plan Overview

A Data Management Plan created using DMPonline

Title: Mainstream secondary school staff experiences of working with alternative provision

Creator: Lydia Mctigue

Principal Investigator: Lydia Anne McTigue

Data Manager: Lydia Anne McTigue

Project Administrator: Lydia Anne McTigue

Affiliation: University of Birmingham

Template: UoB short template

Project abstract:

The purpose of this research is to explore the practices and experiences of mainstream school staff working with alternative provision. Alternative provision is an educational setting or arrangement made by schools or the local authority for pupils who are unable to receive or access mainstream schooling. Reasons for this may include illness, additional educational needs or exclusion. Types of alternative provision include pupil referral units, vocational or practical courses, therapeutic settings, hospital schools and more. The research will consider the views of those staff within secondary mainstream education who assist with the organisation and coordination of alternative provision for pupils attending their setting. Each participant will be interviewed about their experiences and the interview recorded and transcribed. All interview transcripts will then be thoroughly read in order to identify common and recurring themes. It is hoped that any themes identified will help to support policy makers, alternative provision and local authorities to develop better practice in working together to support young people.

ID: 118058

Start date: 01-03-2023

End date: 31-08-2023

Last modified: 22-02-2023

Grant number / URL: N/A

Created using DMPonline. Last modified 22 February 2023

1 of 3

Mainstream secondary school staff experiences of working with alternative provision

Data description

What types of data will be used or created?

An exploratory case study design will be used to investigate the practices and experiences of 4-8 mainstream secondary school staff in schools across the city in which I am currently on placement. I intend to use a single data collection point to complete face-to-face or virtual one-to-one semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews are expected to last for around 1 hour each to allow participants sufficient time to expand or clarify their answers and to allow the researcher to follow up with any additional questioning that may stray away from the proposed interview schedule, if necessary. I intend to undertake 1 or 2 pilot interviews followed by 4-8 interviews with the selected school staff.

Consent forms will also provide basic data such as participant name, email address, school name and job role. These forms will only be seen by the researcher and research supervisor, and will be stored securely.

interviews will be recorded and transcribed then analysed through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Codes and themes will be deduced from the raw data.

How will the data be structured and documented?

It will be recorded and I will take brief notes during the interviews and reflective notes directly after each one. Both face-to-face and virtual interviews will be offered.

Individual interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim onto a word document. Line by line will be numbered and these documents will also be physically printed to support analysis.

YYYY-MM-DD dates at the beginning of the file or folder will allow chronological sorting, confidential flags will be used where needed and password protection will be applied to participant information data.

Data storage and archiving

How will your data be stored and backed up?

The University of Birmingham provides a Research Data Store (RDS); access to the RDS is restricted to project members. Backup copies of data are taken on a daily basis and data is stored in separate buildings from the live data. The RDS has a backup and retention policy on how it looks after the data including archiving of primary data here :
https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/it/teams/infrastructure/research/bear/research-data-service/RDS/BackupRetentionPolicy.aspx
During the project any paper copies of transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet of the researcher.

Is any of the data of (ethically or commercially) sensitive nature? If so, how do you ensure the data are protected accordingly?

All schools and participants in the interviews will be allocated a pseudonym during transcription to ensure that the data is anonymous, once the data is analysed and reported. Participants will be reminded not to mention names of services/schools/children/families/colleagues; however, if any names are expressed during recording, pseudonyms will be used in transcription. The audio-recording will be listened to and transcribed by the researcher only. The audio recording will not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher. Participants will be informed that their responses will be shared collectively in a research paper and summary report.

Participant consent forms and names including email addresses will be saved onto BEAR RDS in either a confidential password protected file or password protected word document in this database facility with access by the research team only. All participant information whilst in paper form, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office until scanned onto BEARdatashare sytem.

Where will your data be archived in the long term?

Data that underpins the paper will be transferred to the UoB BEAR Archive. Once transferred the data will be set to read-only to

Created using DMPonline. Last modified 22 February 2023

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prevent any inadvertent additions or deletions of the dataset, Any changes will result in a new dataset, which will be archived separately. The BEAR Archive solution has been created to be highly resilient and is located at two data centers in two different sites, with a backup placed in a third site. Data will be stored for 10 years, should access to the data be requested within a 10 year period, the 10 year clock is then reset from the point of last access. After the 10 year period the data will be deleted.

Data sharing

Which data will you share, and under which conditions? How will you make the data available to others?

Anonymised data will not be shared until the end of the project.

Data will be shared through the University of Birmingham's eData repository (https://edata.bham.ac.uk/) which makes the datasets discoverable through search engines like Google. eData uses Dublin Core as a metadata standard and the minimum metadata provided for published datasets will cover amongst others title, type of data, creators, publication date and related publications.

A smaller summary report containing pertinent data may also be distributed to the participants and the local authority Educational Psychology Service in which the researcher works.

Appendix E

Participant Consent Forms

Consent Form

I _____ would like to take part in the study looking staff experiences of working with alternative provision. This study is being carried out by Lydia McTigue, Trainee Educational Psychologist, as part of a Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of Birmingham.

Please read and complete the participant consent form.

	Y	N
I have read and understood the project information sheet.	Y	N
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.	Y	N
I confirm that, as part of my professional mainstream secondary school role I have worked with one or more alternative provision setting(s).	Y	N
I understand that the interview will last approximately one hour.	Y	N
Right to withdraw: I understand my participation in the study is voluntary. I understand I can withdraw from the at any point without explanation. I can also ask for my interview information not to be used in the study up until two weeks after the interview date. If I decide to withdraw from the study during or after the interview, all interview data will also be destroyed.	Y	N
Confidentiality: My views and identity will be kept confidential unless I say anything that suggests I or another are at risk from harm, in which case Lydia would seek guidance from her research supervisor and follow the necessary safeguarding procedures.	Y	N
Privacy: I understand that my voice will be recorded during the interview and Chelsea may also take some hand-written notes. I understand that the voice recordings will be transcribed. I know that neither my name, nor the name of the school, will be included in these reports. I understand that basic details about me (i.e. brief relevant professional history and years of experience) will be summarised in the methodology section. I give permission for my interview recording to be typed up with a different name and for this to be used in the research. I agree to anonymised quotes being used as part of the study.	Y	N
I agree to being audio ☐/ video ☐ recorded and I understand that the recordings will only be viewed by Lydia and her research supervisors.	Y	N
Data storage: All hand-written notes and audio recordings will be typed-up using pseudo-names, the original recordings (including video, if additionally agreed) and notes will be deleted or destroyed. The notes will be kept locked in a filing cabinet that only Lydia McTigue has access to and recordings will be stored on a password protected, encrypted device. The anonymised transcripts will only be available to Lydia, her University Supervisor and University assessors. In adherence to the Data Protection Act (2018), All electronic versions of anonymous documents will be stored on the University of Birmingham secure network for a period of 10 years, after which point, they will be destroyed.	Y	N
Data usage: I understand that the results of this study: • Will be used for Lydia's Doctoral Thesis • Will be shared with professionals from the Educational Psychology Service • Will be made available to other professionals working within the Birmingham Local Authority • May be written up for professional journals or shared at conferences for people working in education (the location will not be named when reporting outside of the area).	Y	N

Staff Name: _____   Researcher: Lydia McTigue

Signature: _____   Signature: _____

Date: _____   Date: _____

Appendix F

Recruitment Letter and Background Information

<u>Does Your School Use Alternative Provision?</u>

Research Project into the use of alternative provision

My name is Lydia McTigue, I am a trainee educational psychologist on placement with ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Educational Psychology Service (EPS). I am a registered postgraduate research student at the University of Birmingham, where I am completing a three-year, full-time professional doctoral training programme in educational and child psychology. As part of this programme, I'm undertaking a substantive research project for my thesis.

I am interested in the experiences of mainstream secondary schools who make use of alternative provision and the various experiences that exist across the city. As part of my postgraduate research, I am hoping to interview secondary school staff who work with alternative provision to provide education to pupils. Staff may include heads of year, other pastoral roles, SENDCOs or teachers. They do not need to be the decision makers but would need to make routine contact with an alternative provision that you might make use of as a school.

The planned research and its impact:

The recent Green Paper, SEND Review: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time (DfE, 2022), outlined the government's drive to improve the regulation of alternative provision amidst a backdrop of increasing demand from school leaders for this type of resource. The purpose of this research is to explore the practices and experiences of mainstream school staff working with alternative provision. This research has three main aims:

- understand the perspectives of school staff members in relation to alternative provision
- discover the various reasons for using alternative provision
- explore staff experiences of working with alternative provision

It is hoped that the research may help to illuminate questions about the variation in alternative provision and provide insight that will inform the future use of these settings. The findings from the study will be written up as part of the postgraduate thesis. It may also be disseminated in a smaller research report for the Local Authority, published in a peer-reviewed journal and or presented at relevant meetings or conferences.

What would be required?

- Consent from both the headteacher and the staff member being interviewed
- A 15-minute phone call between the staff member and researcher
- A 1-hour (approx.) one-to-one audio or video recorded interview between the staff member and researcher. Preferably in person, however, this could also be arranged via Microsoft Teams if required.

Background information

My name is Lydia McTigue, I am a trainee educational psychologist on placement with ▇▇▇▇▇▇ educational psychology service (EPS). I am a registered postgraduate research student at the University of Birmingham, where I am completing a three-year, full-time professional doctoral training programme In educational and child psychology. As part of this programme, I'm undertaking this substantive research today for my thesis.

This information sheet has been given to you because I'm seeking your agreement to take part in this research project. Before you decide to take part, please read the following information so you understand why the research is being conducted and what your involvement will entail. If you would like additional information or would like to ask any questions about the information below, please contact me using the details provided at the bottom.

My Research Aims

I am interested in finding out about the experiences of mainstream secondary school staff working with alternative provision. I am looking to explore the perceptions held by staff around the alternative provision system, reasons for using alternative provision and the barriers and facilitators staff can incur when working with alternative provision.

Justification

Research shows the educational outcomes for pupils who attend alternative provision are poorer than their mainstream peers, which has been a reoccurring finding over time (DfE, 2021). The recent Green Paper, 'SEND review: Right support, Right place, Right time' (DfE, 2022), has outlined ambitious plans to reform the special educational needs and disability (SEND) and alternative provision systems within England. It aims to address the ambiguous use of these educational settings and calls for more robust regulation mechanisms across England in order to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Due to the variety of alternative provision across England and the unique circumstances in which a school begins to make use of alternative provision, I propose that collecting your perspective (the staff who work closely with alternative provision) will help to share an understanding of the current system and may inform future guidance or policy in this area.

Your involvement

If you were able to take part in the study I will make arrangements for an initial conversation that will last approximately 15 minutes where I can introduce myself and answer any questions you might have. We will arrange a research interview that will last approximately one hour, at a time and location convenient to you. The interview will involve an open discussion about your perceptions of

Appendix G

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule version 2

Draft interview schedule

interview schedule	Questions
Introductions and rapport building	- Participants will be thanked for agreeing to meet with me and participating in the research. - I will engage in neutral, rapport-building conversation topics (such as asking participants how their day has been so far and checking the time they have available). - The participant information sheet will be discussed, and the expectations of participation will be clarified. - If they do still agree to participate, their signature will be sought on the consent form. - If the session is being conducted virtually any signatures will be gained ahead of time with additional verbal confirmation during the interview. - Participants will be encouraged to ask for clarification throughout the interview to support an informed response and reduce any chances of misunderstanding.
Professional Experience	Participants will be asked to share their relevant professional history to date including: - Any relevant roles that may inform their understanding of education and alternative provision - Their current role and how it relates to alternative provision - Years of relevant experience
RQ1 and RQ3	RQ2: What are mainstream secondary school staff experiences and perceptions of alternative provision? - Who is involved in your school's alternative provision process? - Could you give me a small summary of your current understanding of the alternative provision system? - how do you think you've formed this understanding? - What types of alternative provision are being utilised by your school currently? - Are you aware of any provisions previously available that are no longer used by yourselves? - How are these settings selected and why? Follow on question- do you have any thoughts about the way this system is ran?
RQ1	RQ1: What are the reasons for using alternative provision from the perspective of mainstream secondary staff?

Commented [LM1]: Responsibility based models Bryant et al. (2021)

Commented [LM2]: Little is known about AP and how is functions DfE 2018; Bryant et al, 2021; DfE, 2023a

Commented [LM3]: Is knowledge of the system coming from policy or more grass routes/ developed through school discourse? - background factors/ Bryant et al

Commented [LM4]: Broad range of provisions being used DfE 2023b

Commented [LM5]: Is there an assessment of the suitability of AP settings happening?

Commented [LM6]: Process of selection- what assumptions or attitudes are at play - RAA/ can EPs impact here

	- What are the motivating factors for using AP? why does your school use AP? - What does the school system believe will be the outcome or impact of using such a setting for pupils? - What do you believe will be the outcome or impact?	**Commented [LM7]:** Why are APs being used **Commented [LM8]:** Espoused beliefs about AP- RAA **Commented [LM9]:** Personal perspectives on AP- attitudes and beliefs RAA
RQ2	RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream staff working with AP? - How is your school working with alternative provision? - what is your experience of working with alternative provision? (consider: staff, pupils, SLT, communication, parents etc) does it work? - In your experience, what has been the outcome or impact of attending alternative provision for pupils? - What are the barriers and facilitators experienced when working with alternative provision? - Alternative way of asking- what elements of the system are working and what (if you had the chance) might you change, alter or abolish? - What is your opinion of the recent SEND and AP improvement plan?	**Commented [LM10]:** Collaborative working? Effective or not? Mills & Thomson, 2018; Robb; **Commented [LM11]:** How does the collaboration work ? Is it working how it should do? Robb 2019; Mills & Thomson 2018 **Commented [LM12]:** Actual outcomes for children beyond just perceptions - DfE 2023c; Gutherson et al. 2011 **Commented [LM13]:** System change : communication? Parents? Funding? Policy? Colleagues? Mechanisms? Agency?- Background factors/ Actual control/ subjective norms - RAA
Debrief	Participants will be given the opportunity to tell me anything else that they feel is relevant. They will then be thanked for taking part, and asked the following questions: - How was this interview experience for you? - How have you been left feeling now? - Would you like any further clarification about the things we have discussed today? Participants will be reminded of the right to withdraw within 14 days and of the contact details should they have any questions or concerns and reminded of the researcher and research supervisor's details should they wish to ask any further questions.	**Commented [LM14]:** Thoughts on change over time to the system

NB. Throughout the interview:

• Ask about events marked by the speaker but not expanded upon (Squire, 2004):

- Can you give me an example?
- Tell me more about why...?

Interview Statements

1. All alternative provision settings work well with mainstream schools.
2. Alternative provision is a child's last chance.
3. A pupil referral unit is the same as all other alternative provision.
4. The use of alternative provision is fair and equitable for all pupils .
5. Pupils with SEND do not go to alternative provision.
6. Pupils with SEND do well in alternative provision.
7. Pupils in alternative provision are there due to their behaviour.
8. The education system needs alternative provision.
9. Enough thought is given to the type of alternative provision selected for pupils.
10. Most of my knowledge about the alternative provision system comes from guidance and legislation.
11. Pupils transition well into alternative provision.
12. The use of alternative provision is an evidence-based practice.

Appendix H
Reflective Journal Entry Example

12.02.24- analysis
Today I discussed my analysis and themes with a colleague to allow myself space to step away from the data and see if I can coherently identify the golden thread between the data and the themes generated. I found this to be a helpful task however it did highlight to me the importance of clarity and coherent links when I come to write up my discussion. I also have concerns regarding the number of themes I have generated, and the word count available. For these reasons I aim to continue to revise my themes and to amalgamate themes where possible. I plan to arrange supervision with Julia for some additional guidance.
20.03.24- refining themes
I have been reviewing and refining the theme of marketization within AP for the last week now. I do have concerns around how complex the theme is and worry if I have assigned too much meaning personally as opposed to finding it from the data. I considered having separate themes regarding cost and competing priorities however I recognise that these are not complete themes and would be considered topic summaries as opposed to subthemes. Braun and Clark recommend that too many themes can weaken the overall theme and thin out the analysis - this is also a concern of mine. I have rested on the theme of marketisation within AP as I faithfully assign the factors discussed within this theme to be associated with Aspects of the AP system that are present due to the quasi-market nature of education.
03.04.24- writing
I'm currently midway through writing my discussion and analysis section which is leading me to feel as though completing this thesis is a mammoth task. I found selecting quotes to align with my themes quite easy but have then found applying the literature more difficult. I have considered that this may be due to a historical positivist mindset that I hold. To avoid this, I will aim to make more reflexive diary entries whilst writing to remind myself of the interpretivist position and RTA methodology I have taken. I must remind myself that this big Q research and does not overly concern itself with confirming previous research and has the power to also exist as a unique rich picture of the circumstances being analysed. I'm trying to remain focused on each small chunk that I can complete daily and consider how I can arrange my placement diary moving forward in order to remain as productive as possible.

PARTICIPANT 4 THEMATIC MAP: RQI

- Mainstream too big — — — — — — — — — → AP can prioritise engagement
- EAL pupils — — — — — — — — — — — — + MH concerns
- Following process — — — — — — — — — — → Flexibility
- Graduated response — — — — — — — — — — Staff better trained
- Curriculum too tight — — — — — — — — — Different pedagogy.
- Risk to mainstream cohort.
- Newly identified SEND.
- Exhausted Resources

Beliefs about AP ability

MS school staff feel no more can be done in setting

- Pupils are "worth it"
- Avoiding exclusion
- AP is an alternative option.
- Continued engagement.

Best/most hopeful option is AP.

THEMATIC MAP: UNABLE TO SUPPORT WITHIN THE CONFINES OF MAINSTREAM SCHOOL.

Curriculum too much.

too big

MS not right school. ①

Identified SEND

Newly arrived EAL

"not right provision"

Location risk to child

"aggression with peers & staff"

Worse boys were seeing this

Impact on MS cohort. ②

"the other children"

school refusal/ no outreach

Money concerns.

"Fiscal bursting"

Don't know how to support.

Exhausted Resources ③

Following Process. ④

lack of early intervention.

"pan has gone up".

Risk of exclusion.

Breaking policy/ rules

Graduated response.

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Appendix J

Example Analysis Using NVivo

you know, all sorts of things. We tried staff, short meetings, staff, short meetings are where we do like a 15–20 minute input just about the child. And it's the teachers and pastoral staff that deal with that person. So that will be Sen needs, Any safeguarding needs, strategies that work because sometimes I work in some lessons for some people and not for others. So we kind of were really struggling so the head teacher said she could find it in the budget for the next 18 months. If him, a mom consented that we would look at AP for him. They both nearly bid our hand off because mom was just like, I was certainly we're gonna PX him. I thought, it's like, that wouldn't be the right thing to do. Even with the other child. It wasn't the ri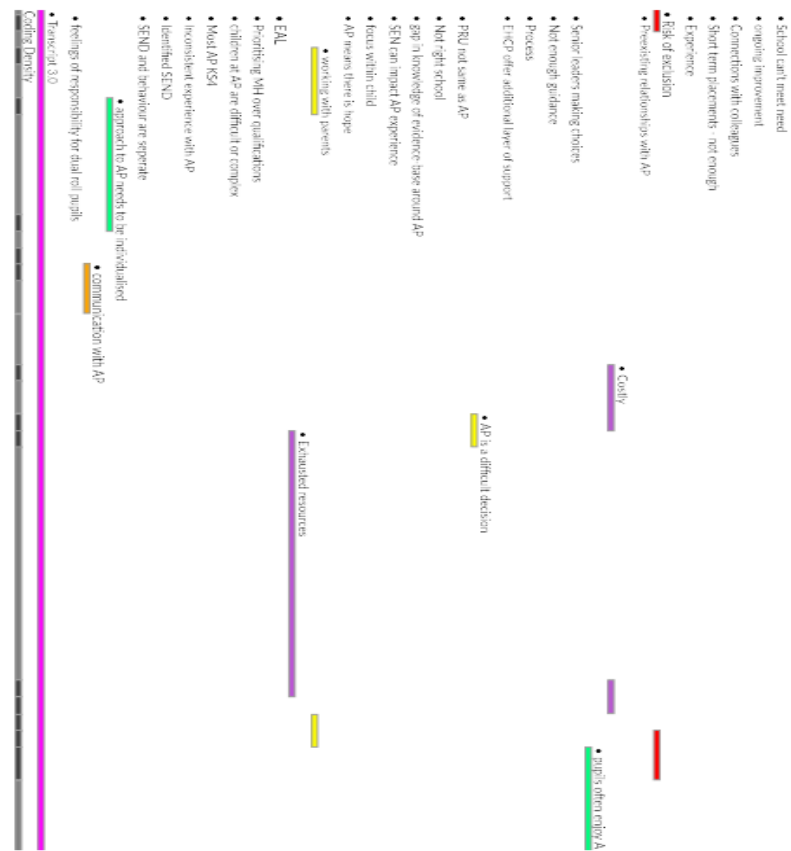ght thing to do. And so he's gone down there. He absolutely loves it. Mom said he's like a different child. She said when he was here, he'd like hide his uniform. She said I'd wash his uniform and then hide it and say I can't go to school mom, I got this. I haven't got the shoes. Hide, things all over the place. She'd have to pack his schoolbag. She'd have to get his lunch together. And interestingly, when we went for his interview, they got us to go to the campus, which is not the campus we were expecting him to go to. Because almost like brilliant that campus. One of the campuses that offers his courses, literally three or four minutes walk from a house brilliant, because sometimes if he'd shut down here, we'd get mom on the phone. You know if you know we are going to phone your mom, you can speak to him on the phone, but then he'd come and speak to mom and mom would get through and he'd be so much better then once he'd spoken to mom. So she was like, if there's any problems, I'm literally down the road. I can take baby in the pram, blah blah, blah. But then we went to the (OTHER) campus and then after when we came out said I really want to come to this one. We're like, Okay, well I do offer it but you do realise that one is literally a walk from your house and you know, if there's a problem you down the road from mom or if you've got medical because he has a few medical issues. No I want to come to this site. He got really fixated then on on that campus. And so he actually goes to that campus. So he gets up early. He has to catch I think he actually has a train and a bus to get there. He stops off for Gregg's in the morning. He's got this little routine. And and it's working quite well. He said, I think he had a week off for holiday, which we didn't know about, which wasn't great. But, you know, mom was like, Oh, I haven't got the money to take him in the summer and stuff. But he, she said he would never have done that before. She said, for here, I'd literally been like 40 minutes going,(CHILDS NAME). Sorry, these people, you gotta get up for school, you've got to do this. Come on, come on, come on, come on. And she said, he called stress every morning, she'd get up, she dread it. And I think because she was anxious about whether he'd go to school or not, she was worried about phone calls or finding from us, he'd then pick up on that, and then they'd just been this sort of, so so the last time I spoke to her, she said, he's like a changed child. And it's been the best thing for him. It's just my concern that are they challenging? Are they going to challenge him enough in year 11. I know that the course he does, will lead him straight on to the next level at that college, if he chooses to stay, which I imagine he will. But I'd like him to get more than he needs rather than the minimum. So I've just got a bit of concern about whether they're going to push him. And for the meeting I had a couple of weeks ago, I felt that that wasn't going to be the case. And that's my concern. I don't want them to push him so much that he's, you know, his mental health is suffering or he's getting low mood, but you know, he is capable of doing GCSE maths and English, they do offer it, that was part of the reason that we looked at that provision, because they did the construction, but they also did the GCSEs. And then to be told that, oh, in September, we'll decide whether he's going to be doing functional skills again, or GCSE. Like, that's my only concern for him. But in terms of what it's done for him for his mental health, stabilising his

Coding labels (right margin):
- School can't meet need
- ongoing improvement
- Connections with colleagues
- Short term placements - not enough
- Experience
- Risk of exclusion
- Preexisting relationships with AP
- Senior leaders making choices
- Not enough guidance
- Process
- EHCP offer additional layer of support
- PRU not same as AP
- Not right school
- gap in knowledge of evidence base around AP
- SEN can impact AP experience
- focus within child
- AP means there is hope
- working with parents
- EAL
- Prioritising MH over qualifications
- children at AP are difficult or complex
- Most AP KS4
- inconsistent experience with AP
- Identified SEND
- SEND and behaviour are seperate
- feelings of responsibility for dual roll pupils
- approach to AP needs to be individualised
- communication with AP
- Enhanced resources
- Costly
- AP is a difficult decision
- pupils often enjoy AP

Coding Density / Transcript 3.0

linked to... is it disassociation, which I know can be linked to other bits and pieces, but lots of other things, there is potential that he has psychotic episodes. So then there's a lot going on with this young man, right. So when a PX is put in place because something really serious happened at school, we didn't look at manage move, because we were like he's not going to cope in any of those places. And we couldn't send him to (AP NAME) because of the nature of the cohort that was down there. That wouldn't have worked. So putting a px in place also helps when we're talking to   in terms of you know, this is someone really at risk. These are all of yes, he's only just got these two diagnosis, but he's lived with these conditions all his life. There's also the fact that he's post looked after, you know, the possible psychosis, all this trauma and all these other things going on. So we spoke to them about the fact he was at risk of a px px was put in place but it was rescinded quite quickly. And alternative provision five days a week was found for him at the (AP NAME)and funded and that was one of our kind of reasonable adjustments for him. We don't fund everybody we hardly fund anyone and but actually for him it was we either PXed him, is it the right thing to do? No, it isn't really, morally. the right thing to do is to try and see the process through to get him an ehcp to get him a named provider that will give him the wraparound kind of care and support he needs for all of his kind of needs, as well as trying to get him an education, but the education bit almost is secondary, because there's so much else going on for him. So it's often five days a week, five days a week at (AP NAME). And he's been there about 10 weeks, but unfortunately, within that time, he's been at (AP NAME) there's been a lot of volatile behaviour and violence and the placement is broken down with his adoptive parents, and he's been taken into care. So it almost started to calm down, and we were and he was building new relationships and things were, you know, going okay, and then there's been this whole other set of circumstances now that you know, this young person is kind of at risk again. So, we are on the phone to   you know, his draft EHCP is due to be issued in 12 days, naming alternative provision as in that he... now whether that will be alternative provision, or SenD provision, I'm not sure what they're saying that he won't cope in a mainstream school. So we're just waiting to see for him. So it's really you know, we tried to manage him here, well, 789 and we got to April of year 10, which with all of that going on in a mainstream school with 671 children and their levels of distress he would display when he was triggered or you know, where he misunderstood someone's language that was being used with him because he was very literal. But even if you were literal with him, sometimes he would only hear part of So if you say, if you do that again, you might get 20 minutes detention, he'd just a 20 minute detention, he wouldn't hear that if I do it again, then you know, the whole world would bthen erupt so that's a really kind of specific case. And the only other case we've put out to alternative provision full time not using two days a week at (AP NAME)or managed move first is the other Year 10 boy who was on report to me. So absolutely just couldn't cope. Here. got diagnosis of autism and ADHD as well. Didn't I think more add than ADHD wasn't hyperactive, you know, just would lose focus, forget things disorganised very, very anxious a lot of the time. Overwhelmed by noise by I mean, this is crowded, but if you went to (MAINSTREAM SCHOOL), it'd be even worse....small corridors, lots of people just found the whole business of school... didn't come back well off COVID at all, and you can kind of understand that anyway. But then you put in the fact that he's got undiagnosed ADHD or aDD and autism. Mom was really
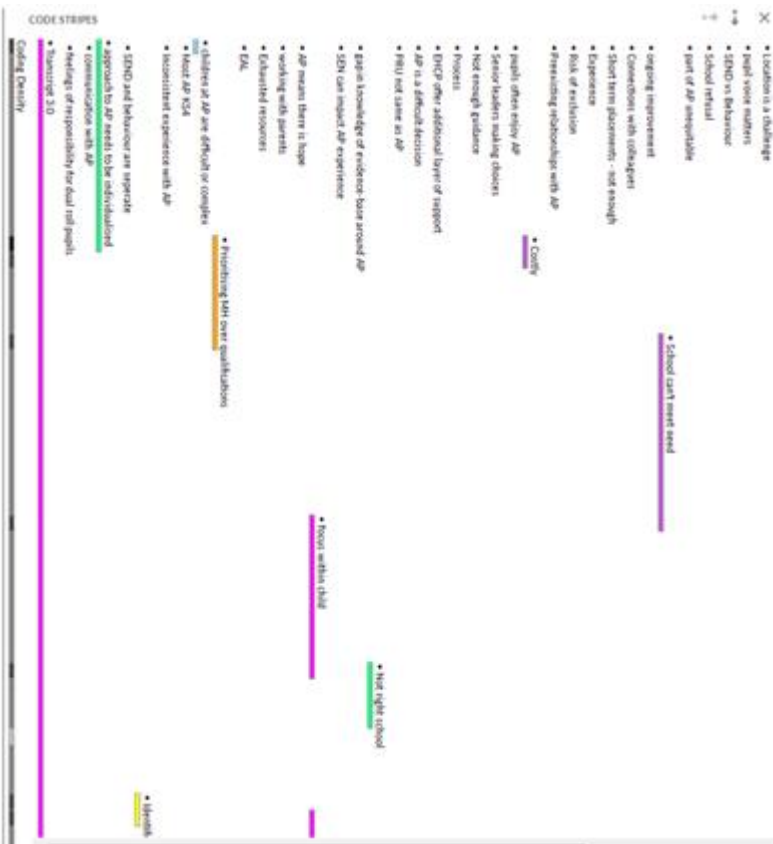
Revised Thematic Maps

Inductive Analysis: Research Question 1

Inductive Analysis: Research Question 2

RQ2 What are the barriers and facilitators for mainstream staff working with AP

- Marketisation of AP
  - Costly
  - Competing priorities
  - Partnerships
- Lack of guidance and regulation
  - Lack of central oversight
  - Word of mouth
  - Navigating system difficult
  - Most AP KS4
  - Location challenges
  - Guidance has driven increased monitoring
- Parent and pupil perceptions
  - Perceptions stop AP use
  - Perceptions drive AP use
  - Process must be done with
  - Part of working relationship
- Regular and transparent communication
  - Regular communication expected
  - Poor communication impacts perception

Inductive Analysis: Research Question 3

Mind map:

RQ3 What perceptions exist regarding AP from the perspectives of mainstream staff

- Approach must be individualised
  - Pupils in AP are Complex
  - Placement will fail
  - Plans need to be localised
  - Various routes
  - Schools can use AP differently
  - SEND needs impact decisions
- Inconsistent experiences and lack of knowledge
  - Knowledge stems from experience
  - All AP is different
  - Standards vary
  - Access to knowledge
  - Evidence base not known
  - Knowledge built through connection
  - Ongoing improvements needed
- AP can be unequitable
  - Selecting pupils
  - Cost implications
  - Competing motivations
  - Lack of KS3 placements
  - Location of settings

Deductive Analysis: Reasoned Action Approach to the Use of AP (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011)

Background Factors

Systemic changes:
Off rolling made illegal
Small regulations to AP system over time
Reduced central oversight
Growing MS school sizes
Lack of consideration for older EAL pupils

Community:
Parental views
Pupil views
Historical use of AP
Unregulated AP sector

School:
Position within own school system
Financial implications
Institutional views on inclusion

Individual:
Experience and training of staff member
Individual views on inclusion

Behavioural Beliefs

Sending to AP will be helpful
MS have tried all they can in house

Normative Beliefs

Motivated to support pupil as best possible
Motivated to support MS cohort
Motivated to follow MS processes and remain compliant
Using AP is routine
AP provide something MS can not
Most pupils enjoy AP

Control Beliefs

AP can do more for these pupils than MS
The use of AP is already unequitable

Perceived Normative Beliefs: Injunctive (what you think others do)

Other schools do this
Sharing practice between schools
Lack of consideration for evidence-base
Some schools have 'go to' APs

Perceived Normative Beliefs: Descriptive (what you think others want you to do)

Not off rolling
Regular checks for offsite pupils
Maintain oversight of pupil
Honour parental choice
Existing relationships with APs
Communicate with colleagues

Perceived behavioural control

MS can not change enough to meet need
We can control some choices around the use of AP

Actual Control Beliefs

Lack of resources
Cost
Large class sizes
Low adult ratios
Lack of time and training/ SEND knowledge

Attitude towards the behaviour

AP is hopeful / pupil is 'worth it'
MS school is 'not right' pupils

Intention

Increase engagement with education
Avoid exclusion
Reduce impact on MS cohort
Improve mental health / anxiety concerns

Behaviour

MS staff using and maintaining working relationships with AP