Primary School Staff's Views and Experiences of Working with Children of Imprisoned Parents/Carers: A Case Study Exploration

By

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Abstract

Parent/carer imprisonment (PI) is classed as an adverse childhood experience (ACE) and there are estimated to be over 100,000 children in the United Kingdom (UK) experiencing PI at the time of writing. There is a vast body of international research which has highlighted associations between PI and adverse outcomes/impacts, such as anti-social behaviour (e.g., Ruhland et al., 2020), poor mental health and wellbeing (e.g., Davis & Shlafer, 2017), and negative school related outcomes including school non-attendance or withdrawal, low academic achievement, fighting and truancy (e.g., Bell et al., 2023; McCauley, 2020; Trice & Brewster, 2004). Some research has also found negative outcomes to extend into adulthood (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005). Education settings are viewed as having a key role in supporting children of parents/carers in prison (CoPiP) (Roberts & Loucks, 2015; Tuite, 2016) and there is some local authority (LA) and charity guidance on how schools can support this group. To date, limited research has explored the needs of children of CoPiP in school and what support is currently available to them in UK educational settings.

This current study explored mainstream primary school staff's views on how CoPiP present in school, current practice for supporting and responding to these pupils in school, and what further support is perceived to be needed. A case study design was adopted, with the research taking place in one mainstream primary school in the Northwest of England. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five staff members in this setting which were analysed inductively using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Findings indicated that some CoPiP are perceived to experience challenges in school, specifically academic difficulties, poor school attendance, and emotional and behavioural challenges. CoPiP were also viewed to seek increased adult connection in school, and it was also cited that challenges or adverse changes are not always apparent. In terms of current school practice, CoPiP were

found to be supported through various means in the case school; considering and adapting the curriculum, time with adults who they can connect with, as well as offering individualised, flexible support and extending support to the wider family. Information sharing with and within school was viewed as both a means of current support and where improvement was desired. Finally, staff training was spoken of as a way that support could be strengthened. The implications for professional practice and further research are considered in this paper.

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

This volume is part one of a two-part thesis that forms the research and academic requirements of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate at the University of Birmingham. This volume presents a small-scale case study that explored the views of five staff members working in one English mainstream primary school who had experience of working with children of parents/carers in prison, hereafter referred to as CoPiP. Individual interviews were conducted and analysed using reflective thematic analysis (RTA). This chapter will outline the influences which led to this research being conducted, along with the research context. Finally, the research objectives and the volume structure will be detailed.

1.1 Research Influences

I began training to become an educational and child psychologist at the University of Birmingham in September 2021, and I have since learnt about various theories, concepts and ways of working, and had several placements as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) in different local authorities (LAs). A key theory that has been repeatedly spoken about has been Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) bioecological model of human development. This theory draws attention to events in the various systems surrounding children and the interactions between them, and how this may impact on a child's presentation. Hence, I recognise the importance of thinking about children within a set of interacting systems and I strive to consider systemic factors within my practice, such as events happening within the home/family context.

Parent/carer imprisonment, henceforth referred to as PI, is an experience which has been increasingly spoken about within the Northwest LA Educational Psychology Service (EPS) where I have worked as a TEP for my second and third year of the doctoral training program.

During an emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) supervision, an ELSA expressed how there was a growing number of CoPiP in the primary school they worked at, and they shared their uncertainty about what support to offer. This sparked an initial curiosity in this area and the thought of exploring it further through my volume one research. Following this, I informally spoke with colleagues and other school settings to see if this was a situation they also encountered, as well as considering LA and EPS priorities and scoping out the current literature.

1.2 Research Context

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) publish weekly figures on the United Kingdom (UK) prison population and the latest figures at the time of writing (May 2024) indicated that there were 87,505 people in prison (MoJ, 2024). In 2012, the MoJ estimated that each prisoner had on average 1.14 children, which would mean that at the time of writing over 100,000 children in the UK were estimated to be experiencing PI (Williams et al., 2012). Elsewhere, the number of children who experience PI in a year in the UK has been estimated to be between 200,000 and 310,000 (Department for Education, 2023; Kincaid et al., 2019). However, there is no formal or coordinated national or local systems which track how many children are experiencing PI (Kincaid et al., 2019).

There are significantly more males than females in prison (MoJ, 2024), likely meaning that more children have a father in prison. However, Nacro, a UK based social justice charity, state that two-thirds of imprisoned women in the UK have children (aged 18 or below) when they receive a custodial sentence, and 50 children were born to women in custody from 2021 to 2022 (Nacro, 2023). Overall, these figures highlight the high number of CoPiP in the UK who warrant attention due to the likely disruption to family life.

Within the UK, the vulnerability of CoPiP was recognised in the 'Every Child Matters' initiative (Department for Education, 2003), which referred to potential impacts and approximate figures of children affected by this circumstance at the time of publication. Aside from this, CoPiP have not been referred to within national policy or legislation. There is also no government guidance on how to support CoPiP other than signposting to the National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO) (Department for Education, 2019). NICCO is delivered by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in partnership with the well-established children's charity Barnardo's. The website provides comprehensive information (including services which offer support, resources, and research) related to CoPiP and their families which is pooled from a range of voluntary and statutory agencies (primarily within England). Barnardo's and Families Outside are key agencies who have contributed to this advice. These charities provide guidance for schools in terms of developing school policy, raising staff awareness, and direct support for children (Families Outside, 2018; Morgan et al., 2015; Roberts, 2012). Recommendations on how to speak about PI and how to support the maintenance of contact between CoPiP and the imprisoned parent are also provided (Families Outside, 2018; Morgan et al., 2015; Roberts, 2012).

LA guidance on supporting CoPiP in schools is relatively sparse, with Buckinghamshire (2013, as cited in Weidberg, 2017), Oxfordshire (Evans, 2009) and Gloucestershire (Gloucestershire County Council, 2010) being the few LAs who have devised specific policies relating to the education of CoPiP. These policies draw attention to key issues that education staff should be mindful of (e.g., prison visits, financial implications, attendance and bullying) and provide guidance on information sharing and identification. They also recommend that there is a designated, named person in school who is responsible for liaising with relevant school staff, the family and other agencies, convening multi-agency meetings, and monitoring achievement, attendance, and behaviour.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 Aims

This research aimed to develop a better understanding of the needs of CoPiP in school and contribute to the knowledge base pertaining to current UK school practice for supporting CoPiP. It is hoped that this will support in developing evidence-based practice in terms of how UK educational settings could respond to the perceived needs of CoPiP and support them in school.

1.3.2 Research Questions

To achieve the research aims, this study captured the perspective of staff who work within a mainstream primary school setting. The rationale for focusing on this perspective is outlined in Chapter 2. The research addressed the following research questions:

1. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, view how children of parents/carers in prison present in school?
2. What is the current practice for responding to and supporting children of parents/carers in prison in an English mainstream primary school?
3. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, perceive that children of parents/carers in prison could be further supported?

1.4 Structure

Subsequent chapters will include the following:

- Chapter 2 provides a narrative literature review, reviewing research relating to CoPiP and PI.
- Chapter 3 outlines this study's methodology; presenting the underpinning philosophy and providing an account of the research methods used.

- Chapter 4 outlines thematic findings.
- Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to existing theory and research, along with strengths and limitations of the study, and research implications. Finally, a concluding statement is given.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides the context for the current research by exploring the literature base surrounding PI. PI has an extensive international research base; thus, it was not within the scope of this review to discuss all research pertaining to this topic. I chose to conduct a narrative literature review using a funnel approach, with the literature review becoming increasingly focused on the literature deemed most relevant and close to the current study. Within this review, attention is first drawn to childhood adversity and then research exploring PI is discussed, namely the potential challenges for CoPiP. I then move on to discuss the role of educational settings in supporting CoPiP and explore papers which have considered how schools support and respond to this group.

To select the texts included in this literature review I completed an initial scoping search of the research base. I used the search term 'parental imprisonment OR parental incarceration' across Google Scholar and Findit@Bham (University of Birmingham's online library). These searches produced an unwieldly number of hits; however, some seminal papers were identified, and I began to identify key themes across the literature. This included perceived challenges of childhood adversity broadly, PI and the association with emotional wellbeing and externalising behaviours, school-related outcomes associated with PI, children and young people's direct voices/experiences, etc. I considered where these areas/themes sat within my 'funnel' (an upside-down pyramid visual was used here) before conducting further searches pertaining to these different areas. For example, when considering and searching for research around PI and school-related outcomes, I used the search terms 'parental imprisonment OR parental incarceration' AND 'school OR education'. I also explored grey literature (theses and dissertations) and carried out some snowballing; I looked at the references and citations within key papers. These methods further shaped my literature review, for example the literature within the 'theoretical perspectives on the challenges of PI'

section was predominantly located through snowballing. Overall, I aimed to draw upon seminal papers and more recent research throughout.

I adopted a narrative and funnel approach as I wanted to summarise and synthesise key themes, patterns and perspectives within a vast research area. I also wanted to build the reader's understanding of the topic area as well as highlighting a clear thread to my aims and research questions.

2.1 Adverse Childhood Experiences

This section considers childhood adversity broadly, outlining how it is typically classified and some research around the possible known impacts. This is considered due to PI falling under the umbrella term of 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACEs). Some critique of the term ACEs will also be offered.

Felitti et al. (1998) carried out the ACEs study, which involved the distribution of a seventeen-item questionnaire to 13,494 adults in the United States (US). They captured childhood experiences and mapped this on to adult health outcomes. Felliti et al. (1998) were interested in nine categories of experience, of which they termed ACEs, which fit into three overarching groups. See Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1

ACE Categories and Their Groupings

Overarching Groupings	**ACE Categories**
Abuse/maltreatment	Physical abuse
	Emotional abuse
	Sexual abuse
Household dysfunction	Parent substance abuse
	Parent separation or divorce
	Parent mental illness
	Imprisonment of household member
Neglect	Emotional neglect
	Physical neglect

ACEs are events that occur in the first 18 years of life and can be defined as *"...potentially traumatic events that can have negative lasting effects on health and wellbeing"* (Boullier & Blair, 2013, p.132). Although there have been slight changes to their categorisation, with experiences such as exposure to domestic violence and parental death also being considered as ACEs by some researchers (Martín-Higarza et al., 2020), ACEs are typically still separated into the three overarching groups detailed in Table 2.1 (Boullier & Blair, 2013). Since Felitti et al.'s (1998) seminal research, PI has been coined as an ACE, falling into the imprisonment of a household member category and household dysfunction grouping.

Understanding the impacts of early adversity is important so steps can be taken to mitigate these through preventative work and to support children and societies to reach their full potential (Metzler et al., 2017). A significant proportion of the research surrounding ACEs investigates the possible consequences, such as those related to physical and mental health (Hughes et al., 2017). Additionally, research has found American adults with higher ACE scores to be more likely to report high school non-completion, unemployment, and be living in a household below the federal poverty line than adults who reported no ACEs (Metzler et al., 2017).

Felitti et al.'s (1998) study was one of the first to explore links between child adversity and health, with ACEs being compared with adult health risk behaviours, health status and disease conditions. A graded relationship was identified between these measures and the number of ACE categories exposed to. For example, in comparison to adults who had not experienced any ACEs, adults who had experienced four ACEs or more had a four-to 15-fold increase in health risks for alcoholism, drug use, depression and suicide attempts. Since then, an abundance of research has investigated these graded associations, with analyses

considering the impact of different ACEs. Felitti et al. (1998) did not investigate these nuances with each ACE being weighted equally in the final ACE score. Martín-Higarza et al. (2020) found that parent mental illness or having a parent who has attempted or died by suicide were most strongly related to physical health related quality of life in Spanish adults, and Negriff (2020) found that experiencing maltreatment was a stronger predictor of poor mental health among American adolescents than household dysfunction.

This research highlights the vulnerability associated with ACEs, especially multiple ACEs, and how impacts may vary between different ACEs. Felitti et al. (1998) have been crucial in generating this insight and their seminal research has also *"...catalysed an influential movement on behalf of trauma informed institutions and resilience building efforts"* (McEwen & Gregerson, 2019, p. 1). Despite this, Felitti et al.'s (1998) original study can be critiqued for its under representative and biased sample, with participants being predominantly white, middle class, private health care patients in the US. Investigation of socioeconomic disadvantage and ethnicity has been excluded, despite such factors being associated with a risk of ACEs and possibly contributing to the perceived effects (Walsh et al., 2019). For example, poverty and inequality in childhood have been found to have detrimental effects on education, family life, mental and physical health (McEwen & Gregerson, 2019). This exclusion of poverty and inequality is present across the ACEs literature. Walsh et al. (2019) screened 2,825 papers on ACEs to find that only six mentioned socio-economic status (SES). Moreover, the term ACEs has been criticised due to focusing on a deficit model of families which does not acknowledge assets or protective factors (McEwen & Gregerson, 2019) and the narrow operationalisation of childhood adversity with all ACEs being situated in the home (Treanor, 2019). It has been argued that consideration should be given to broader contexts, including poverty, racial segregation, violence, overcrowding in

homes, unaffordable housing, food insecurity, homelessness, environmental pollution and so on (McEwen & Gregerson, 2019).

Overall, despite the term ACEs being helpful to an extent, it is somewhat deterministic, and the associations between ACEs and adverse outcomes are likely to be complex, with other variables, such as socioeconomic factors, coping strategies and protective factors being important to consider. The research discussed so far has not studied PI in isolation; this will now be focused on.

2.2 Challenges Associated with Parent/Carer Imprisonment

There is growing academic interest in PI which has primarily translated into a surge of research investigating the associated outcomes (Knudsen, 2016), with externalising and internalising behaviours, poor mental health, and school-related challenges being among the most researched. These areas will be discussed further in this section. Quantitative and qualitative research will be drawn upon along with the exploration of international and national literature. Research which has identified relatively clear associations between PI and adverse outcomes will be outlined, in addition to contradictory research.

2.2.1 Quantitative Research Exploring the Challenges Associated with Parent/Carer Imprisonment

2.2.1.1 Emotional and Behavioural Challenges.

Within the PI literature, externalising and internalising behaviours are widely referred to. Johnson and Arditti (2022) describe externalising behaviours as *"…outwardly directed manifestations of distress,"* (p. 27) and internalising behaviours as inwardly directed manifestations. Externalising behaviours include (but are not limited to) aggression, attention difficulties, substance use and anti-social or offending behaviour, and internalising behaviours include depression, anxiety and withdrawal (Johnson & Arditti, 2022). Such

behaviours are typically perceived as problematic, and research has investigated their association with PI from childhood to adulthood.

Some studies have found associations between PI and externalising and/or internalising behaviours when controlling for confounding variables, highlighting that PI may be an independent risk factor for these adverse outcomes. In terms of externalising behaviours, Geller et al. (2012) found a significant relationship between paternal imprisonment and aggressive behaviours in American children aged five which was robust to control variables (e.g., maternal imprisonment, parent's employment status and drug use during pregnancy). Additionally, after controlling for participants' gender, race and poverty, Ruhland et al. (2020) found higher externalising behaviours (including theft, fighting and damage to property) on all self-report measures for American adolescents with currently or formerly imprisoned parents, compared to those who had not experienced PI. In terms of internalising behaviours, Jones et al. (2024) found that when controlling for other ACEs and confounders (e.g., race, ethnicity, household income and education levels), American adolescents experiencing PI were more prone to depression when transitioning to adulthood compared to those who had not experienced PI. Furthermore, Davis and Shlafer (2017) investigated a broader range of mental health measures (suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and mental health difficulty diagnosis), not just internalising difficulties as defined by Johnson and Arditti (2022). PI was found to be strongly associated with higher rates of poor mental health in American adolescents, even after controlling for socio-demographic risk factors. Collectively, this US research shows that PI may be linked to emotional and behavioural challenges at different ages; however, this may not be generalisable to the UK.

Murray and Farrington (2005; 2008a) conducted seminal research in the UK which compared antisocial-delinquent outcomes and internalising behaviours for boys who experienced PI before age 10 with four control groups: separation due to hospitalisation or

death, separation due to other reasons, no separation, and imprisonment before birth. Using data from a survey of 411 English males, they found that PI predicted these outcomes from adolescence to adulthood. For example, 71% of boys who experienced PI before age 10 were classed as having an 'anti-social personality' at age 32 compared to only 19% in the no separation group. Although reducing, associations remained significant after controlling for parental criminality and other childhood risk factors (e.g., family income, family size and low junior attainment). Murray and Farrington (2005; 2008a) proposed that this confirmed their hypothesis that PI is an independent risk factor for externalising and internalising behaviours. Murray and Farrington (2008a) also found that 68% of boys exposed to PI before age 10 experienced co-occurring internalising and externalising difficulties at some point in their lives, suggesting that multiple challenges may be encountered. Despite providing insight into the emotional and behavioural challenges that CoPiP in the UK may experience, Murray and Farrington (2005; 2008a) investigated only males, so their conclusions cannot necessarily be extended to females with this circumstance.

Although relatively strong associations have been found between PI and internalising and externalising behaviours in the previously outlined studies, study differences and methodological limitations exist. Across the studies there are differences in the variables measured (e.g., maternal or paternal imprisonment, or PI generally) and controlled for, and the number of CoPiP is typically smaller than control groups, limiting the extent to which the studies can be meaningfully compared. Furthermore, most studies have conducted secondary analyses on longitudinal survey data. Although providing access to a significant proportion of data that would be difficult to replicate, secondary data has typically been collected for a different purpose, meaning that detailed information can be lacking (Smith, 2008). In the case of PI, longitudinal surveys from which data has been drawn have not tended to provide information on the duration or timing of PI, or the type of offense (e.g., violent or

nonviolent); such information may provide additional insight and elicit differential effects. These differences and limitations reduce the extent to which firm conclusions that PI is a distinct risk factor for adverse outcomes can be drawn.

Despite some research evidencing an association between PI and externalising and/or internalising behaviours, the nature and strength of this relationship remains contentious, with other international research producing conflicting findings. For example, Kinner et al. (2007) found that after controlling for some risk factors (e.g., maternal education, mental health and alcohol use), paternal imprisonment in Australia was not significantly associated with externalising behaviours at age 14. However, it was the imprisonment of children's mothers' partners that was classed as paternal imprisonment. This could have affected the results as mothers' partners may not have been residing in the same home or had a close bond with the children. When comparing rates of adult offending between Swedish children who had experienced PI and those who had not, Murray et al. (2007) found that parental criminality, rather than PI, explained higher criminal behaviour when CoPiP reached adulthood. Such research highlights that there may not be a direct association between PI and adverse outcomes, although national differences in judicial systems and prison policies may account for these diverging findings (Murray & Murray, 2010).

However, research within the same country where there is consistency in judicial systems and prison policies have also found conflicting findings. Wildeman and Turney (2014) found that although American children with imprisoned mothers exhibited higher levels of 'behavioural problems' at age nine, after controlling for other variables (e.g., maternal hardship, drinking during pregnancy and paternal imprisonment), an independent association was not present. This is inconsistent with other research investigating the impacts of maternal imprisonment in the US (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson, 2007). Furthermore, Geller et al. (2012) found no relationship between paternal imprisonment and internalising

difficulties for American CoPiP, which differs to Jones et al.'s (2024) and Davis and Shlafer's (2017) US research. Although these contrasting findings may be due to the differing ages of the CoPiP studied, they suggest that PI may not be a clear, distinct risk factor for adverse outcomes and that associations are more nuanced and complex.

Other research has proposed alternative hypotheses to explain the links between PI and adverse outcomes. Kjellstrand et al. (2020) found that PI did not significantly predict internalising trajectories across adolescence when controlling for other family risk factors, including inconsistent and strict discipline and maternal depression. However, CoPiP did tend to be represented by 'riskier trajectories.' Therefore, it was posited that PI may serve as a risk marker for internalising problems, whereby PI is a marker of other risks and *"...family and community dysfunction"* (Kjellstrand et al., 2020, p. 5) that together result in internalising difficulties for CoPiP, rather than PI being a distinct, standalone risk factor. This aligns with Boch et al. (2019) who found PI to be a marker of accumulative risk. American adolescents aged 11-17 who were exposed to PI experienced three times as many ACEs compared to those not exposed to PI. Furthermore, although CoPiP were more likely to experience behavioural challenges (internalising and externalising) this was attenuated by economic hardship (current at the time of the research) as well as exposure to an increasing number of ACEs (Boch et al., 2019). Additionally, Jones et al. (2024) found that depression levels amongst CoPiP increased with the frequency of PI, and inadequate school resources worsened mental health difficulties. These findings were explained through the lens of 'cumulative disadvantage', where additional challenges intensify the experience of PI and its associated outcomes. Overall, these studies highlight the complexity of the associations between PI and adverse outcomes, and how PI is unlikely to be a direct cause.

2.2.1.2 School-Related Challenges.

Some research, predominantly in the US, has explored the associations between PI and negative academic outcomes. After controlling for socio-economic factors (e.g., household income), educational factors (e.g., number of full-time teachers), and school level measures (e.g., area crime rates), Hagan and Foster (2012) found paternal imprisonment to have a significant association with average secondary school grade and college attainment. More recently, Bell et al. (2023) compared reading and numeracy attainment between children of imprisoned mothers, some of whom had experienced additional adversities (maternal mental illness and/or child protection services involvement), and children without these adversities. Children who had experienced maternal imprisonment alone, as well as those exposed to the additional adversities, had higher odds of below average attainment and lower odds of above average attainment from ages eight to 15, compared to children with no recorded adversities. These studies suggest that there may be links between PI and academic outcomes.

Although some research highlights the negative impact PI may have on academic outcomes (Bell et al., 2023; Hagan & Foster, 2012), other research has found contrasting results. When comparing reading and maths test scores and grade retention between American children with and without imprisoned mothers, Cho (2009a; 2009b) found that test scores did not differ. Additionally, grade retention was less likely for CoPiP immediately after their mother's imprisonment, compared to the comparison group. This suggests that PI may not result in poor academic outcomes, although this may be attributable to differing effects of maternal and paternal imprisonment, or the different ages of CoPiP across studies. More recently, McCauley (2020) found that although PI was linked to lower probabilities of achieving a grade B or higher in English or mathematics, these effects reduced when considering factors such as gender, race, age, parental education, parents' marital status and

household income. This suggests that the association between PI and academic outcomes may be due to other pre-existing risks and disadvantages, hence supporting the risk marker hypothesis (Boch et al., 2019; Kjellstrand et al., 2020).

Other research has explored the relationship between PI and non-academic outcomes, such as school withdrawal, suspension, fighting and truancy. Trice and Brewster (2004) compared the school withdrawal rates of 58 American adolescents aged 13 to 19 with imprisoned mothers and their best friends (who did not have imprisoned mothers). They found that those with imprisoned mothers were significantly more likely to have dropped out of school compared to those without (36% compared to 7%). However, for CoPiP, school withdrawal was also associated with their mother's educational attainment, their current placement (i.e., living with family members, friends or in foster care) and contact with their imprisoned mother. For example, those who had weekly contact with their imprisoned mother were less likely to withdraw from school (Trice & Brewster, 2004). Cho (2011) conducted an event history analysis of school withdrawal for 6,008 American adolescents (including CoPiP and a comparison group) and risk of school dropout was found to increase during their mothers' imprisonment. These studies highlight the impact PI may have on CoPiP's non-academic outcomes, specifically school withdrawal, although Trice and Brewster (2004) highlight how other factors may be at play.

McCauley (2020) investigated associations between PI and the academic and non-academic outcomes of American secondary school students. Non-significant associations were found between PI and academic outcomes, but PI was significantly associated with non-academic outcomes which persisted when controlling for confounding variables. McCauley (2020) suggested that effects on non-academic outcomes could potentially influence long-term academic achievement, although this was not empirically explored. Additionally, McCauley (2020) found that maternal imprisonment held particular importance for fighting

and truancy outcomes, and paternal imprisonment was closely linked with fighting, truancy, suspension and peer connectedness outcomes. This study highlights how PI in the short term may be more strongly associated with non-academic school outcomes compared to academic outcomes, and that maternal and paternal imprisonment may have differing impacts albeit with some overlap.

Teacher-pupil relationships may also be adversely affected by PI, with some research indicating that teachers view CoPiP as less competent than their peers in several domains. Dallaire et al. (2010) administered questionnaires, consisting of hypothetical scenarios and competency-based subscales, to 92 primary school teachers in the US. Teachers were found to rate children with imprisoned mothers as less behaviourally, academically and socially competent than children in other conditions (i.e., having mothers who are in rehab or away at school). Although providing insight into teachers' expectations of CoPiP, Dallaire et al. (2010) did not explore the expectations of children with imprisoned fathers, which may differ from those with imprisoned mothers. Wildeman et al. (2017) extended this research by recruiting a larger sample of 421 American primary school teachers and exploring their expectations of children experiencing paternal imprisonment. Biases against students based on this characteristic were present, with expectations of increased behavioural problems and decreased behavioural competence. These studies highlight how teachers may have lower expectations and biases which may limit CoPiP's opportunities, create barriers to success and exacerbate existing difficulties. However, as both studies were conducted in the US, the findings are not generalisable to UK school settings. Additionally, teachers in both studies based their responses on hypothetical scenarios and may have responded differently if discussing a child with whom they have an existing relationship. Therefore, although research highlights how US teachers may have lowered expectations of CoPiP in various domains, study limitations are present.

2.2.2 Qualitative Research Exploring the Challenges Associated with Parent/Carer Imprisonment

2.2.2.1 The Views of Children of Parents/Carers in Prison.

The research discussed so far has overlooked the inclusion of CoPiP's direct views and firsthand accounts. However, there is a small body of research which has captured their voices, helping to shed further light on the experience of PI. CoPiP have addressed challenges within the home environment because of PI, namely instability in living arrangements and increased responsibilities (Kautz, 2017; McGinley & Jones, 2018; Saunders, 2018; Smith & Young, 2017; Weidberg, 2017). Further challenges shared include the experience of loss and grief, sadness, confusion, frustration and shock (e.g., if they have witnessed their parent's arrest), as well as frustration over perceived injustices, such as not being able to see their parent, and/or unfulfilled promises made by the imprisoned parent and other family members (McGinley & Jones, 2018; Nosek et al., 2019; Smith & Young, 2017; Weidberg, 2017). CoPiP have also shared school-related difficulties; Turkish adolescents in Kahya and Ekinci's (2018) study spoke of absenteeism due to sadness and depression, while participants in Yau and Chung's (2014) research expressed struggles with concentration and a lack of academic motivation.

CoPiP have shared that they commonly experience stigma and shame in school as a result of PI, which leads to poorer social relationships, bullying and rejection by peers (Manby et al., 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Weidberg, 2017). Some CoPiP have reported being called names in school related to their parent's offence (McGinley & Jones, 2018), negative assumptions made by teachers (Saunders, 2018), and some CoPiP have been bullied by peers (Smith & Young, 2017). Moreover, adolescents in Kahya and Ekinci's (2018) study elucidated a link between stigma and school difficulties, with a couple of adolescents explaining that visible 'behaviours' were a result of feeling judged and discriminated against

by peers and teachers. Finally, CoPiP frequently mention using secrecy and withholding information to cope with this stigma and shame (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; McGinley & Jones, 2018; Weidberg, 2017).

2.2.2.2 The Views of Education Staff.

Capturing the views of education staff also provides insight into the challenges that CoPiP may encounter and their experiences in school. There is currently a small body of international research which has explored this perspective, including several US studies which have captured the views of teachers and school counsellors (Brown & Barrio Minton, 2017; Dallaire et al., 2010), along with research in Australia and the UK (Leeson & Morgan, 2014; McCrickard & Flynn, 2016; Morgan et al., 2013; 2014).

Dallaire et al. (2010) conducted interviews with 30 American teachers (who volunteered to participate) to explore their experiences with CoPiP in school. Teachers commented on emotional and behavioural challenges displayed by CoPiP, which were perceived as a 'reaction' to PI. More specifically, teachers noted that CoPiP had a low threshold for frustration, displaying both internalising (e.g., feeling sick) and externalising behaviours (e.g., 'acting out' in the classroom). These teachers also observed that some colleagues were unsupportive, unprofessional and expected less from CoPiP, further highlighting possible biases attached to PI (Dallaire et al., 2010; Wildeman et al., 2017). Moreover, McCrickard and Flynn (2016) conducted interviews and a focus group with eight Australian education staff, recruited through snowball sampling, to explore how they understand and respond to CoPiP. These staff members had different roles within primary and secondary school settings. The participants perceived there to be a link between PI and challenges in school, particularly in terms of 'behaviour' which is similar to Dallaire et al. (2010). The categories of 'troublesome' (e.g., aggressive and anti-social behaviours) and 'troubling' behaviours (e.g., anxiety and depression) emerged, along with grades and

attendance being perceived to deteriorate. Dallaire et al. (2010) and McCrickard and Flynn (2016) highlighted the challenges that education staff perceived CoPiP to experience in school, emphasising the potential need for interventions and support in educational settings. However, generalisation of these findings is limited due to selection bias which is inherent in both recruitment methods (Parker et al., 2019) and the studies were conducted with education staff in the US and Australia. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to the perspectives of education staff in the UK or the needs of CoPiP in UK schools.

Within the UK, two studies have explored the views and experiences of education staff. O'Keefe (2014) conducted research investigating imprisoned fathers' involvement in their children's education and the systems in place to support this. Interviews with five primary school headteachers from one LA were conducted as part of this research. During these interviews, there was discussion of CoPiP's visible behaviours, such as occasional aggression displayed towards peers and a deterioration in behaviour. However, visible behaviours varied and lacked consistency across headteachers' accounts, for example other CoPiP were described as weepy, teary and withdrawn. Headteachers also spoke of PI having a massive impact on attendance, although they did not elaborate on how, and persistent absenteeism sometimes illuminated children in this position who had not yet been identified. Moreover, in 2011, Plymouth University commissioned research within one LA in the Southwest of England which aimed to identify existing support provision for CoPiP in schools and how this could be strengthened. The findings from this study are discussed across three papers (Leeson & Morgan, 2014; Morgan et al, 2013; 2014). Data was gathered from 10 headteachers, alongside mothers, children, and other stakeholders from various agencies through questionnaires and interviews. Headteachers reported various negative effects of PI on CoPiP, including difficulties managing behaviour, involvement in bullying, losing friends

and attendance difficulties. These UK based studies highlight how CoPiP are perceived by headteachers to display varying additional needs within UK schools.

2.2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on the Challenges Associated with Parent/Carer Imprisonment

Different theoretical frameworks are referred to within the literature with the aim of understanding the connection between PI and adverse outcomes; this section outlines the most frequently referred to. Within the criminological literature, a sociological perspective is often taken through drawing upon strain theory and social control theory. Psychological theories have also been applied to PI, namely attachment theory, ambiguous loss theory and a bioecological perspective. Finally, stigma has been considered as a possible mechanism which may mediate the relationship between PI and adverse outcomes. See Table 2.2 for greater detail on these perspectives.

Table 2.2

Theoretical Perspectives Applied to Parent/Carer Imprisonment in Previous Research

Theoretical Perspective	Description
Strain theory (Agnew, 2006)	Strain theory posits that PI results in the loss of human, social and economic capital and opportunities. This can lead to families experiencing economic and social strain, which in turn can negatively influence children's development (Nichols & Loper, 2012). PI may introduce new strains or magnify existing stressors. Over time this may lead to children engaging in illegal activities as a way of escaping adversity (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). This theory is very much centred on trying to explain the reasons underpinning CoPiP's anti-social and offending activity.
Social control theory (Hirschi, 2015)	Social control theory assumes that breaking the law is a natural human activity and describes factors that influence abstention from criminal activities, namely parental control, supervision and monitoring. A reduction in these factors (which may occur when a parent goes into prison) is thought to lead to negative behaviour outcomes and the possibility of criminal activity. This theory centres on trying to explain CoPiP's offending behaviour and delinquency, similar to strain theory.

Theoretical Perspective	Description
Attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979)	Attachment theory posits that a secure attachment pattern forms if primary caregivers consistently provide a safe, secure base for a child to explore their environment, whereas insecure attachment forms when caregivers are not consistent with care or are neglectful (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979). PI can disrupt children's attachment organisation due to separation from the imprisoned parent who they likely have a significant attachment to, as well as altering their perception that the world is safe and predictable. These are crucial for healthy emotional development and may therefore influence behaviour and wellbeing (Nichols & Loper, 2012).
Ambiguous loss theory (Bocknek et al., 2009)	Ambiguous loss theory positions PI as a non-death loss which is unclear, confusing and lacks resolution (Boss, 2016; Harris, 2019), which can ultimately lead to grief for CoPiP. This theoretical perspective is closely tied to attachment theory as the loss involves an 'attachment rupture' and this disruption can be painful (King et al., 2024).
Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)	The bioecological model proposes that development is influenced by processes within a set of nested social contexts or 'systems', that vary in their proximity to an individual, and the interactions between the individual and these contexts. This theoretical perspective highlights how events in the home, such as PI, will impact on an individual and what is seen in other contexts. Additionally, the bioecological model is useful in highlighting the contexts in which PI unfolds and for establishing connections with other systems, social problems and institutions which may collectively impact CoPiP (Johnson & Easterling, 2012).
Stigma or labelling perspective	Stigma is *"...sticky, spreading and adhering to family members, including children of prisoners"* (Braman, 2004, p. 173, as cited in Murray & Murray, 2010). CoPiP's 'behaviour' may be a result of experiencing stigma and shame through teasing or bullying from others (Nichols & Loper, 2012). Negative outcomes may also be associated with police showing bias to and paying greater attention to these families and children (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2008b). Additionally, the social expectations, beliefs and perceptions of CoPiP as being similar to their parent may influence their behaviour, and they may take on a *"delinquent identity"* (Murray et al., 2012, p. 284).

The theoretical perspectives detailed in Table 2.2 are typically referred to when researchers are outlining the perspective that guided their research approach or when interpreting their findings. For example, Ruhland et al. (2020) speculated that the experience

of stigma and strain may have mediated the relationship they found between PI and externalising behaviours, and Johnson and Easterling (2012) posed that attachment theory offers a plausible hypothesis for why CoPiP may experience internalising difficulties. Although research has demonstrated that CoPiP can face stigma (e.g., Saunders, 2018), increased strain (e.g., Murray & Farrington, 2005), insecure attachment patterns (e.g., Byrne et al., 2010; Murray & Murray, 2010; Poehlmann, 2005), it remains unclear whether these factors mediate the associations between PI and adverse outcomes due to a lack of specific investigation (Auty et al., 2015).

Moreover, the theoretical perspectives in Table 2.2 are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, with different and multiple mechanisms likely holding true for different CoPiP and situations (Nichols et al., 2016). Hence, making predictions based on a single theoretical perspective may be unhelpful (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Instead, the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) can be a helpful framework in highlighting how PI *"…creates a ripple effect of change throughout the child's ecological system"* (Nichols et al., 2016, p. 1091). A complex interplay of factors and processes may occur within different systems which may result in the impacts observed for CoPiP.

2.3 Strengths and Resiliency of Children of Parents/Carers in Prison

A significant proportion of the PI literature focuses on the negative outcomes for CoPiP. However, some researchers speculate that PI may not be adverse for all CoPiP (e.g., Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999), with more of a child-centred and strengths-based approach being taken. Such research will be considered in this section.

Some research that has directly captured CoPiP's voices has identified positive narratives, contrasting with studies that provide a wholly negative outlook (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray and Farrington, 2005; 2008a). For example, Nesmith and Ruhland

(2008) explored the experiences of 34 CoPiP and although challenges were shared, 53% of the sample described themselves as doing *"...well"* or *"...really well"* (p. 1127). Additionally, many children spoke positively about their lives, lovingly about their families and displayed excitement about upcoming events. Furthermore, in McGinley and Jones' (2018) research, some young adults who had experienced PI during childhood shared positive updates about their lives, such as how they had graduated from university. One young adult spoke of their future aspiration to study law following their personal experience. Although participants in these studies still spoke about challenges, this highlights how PI may not be an inherently negative experience for all CoPiP.

Christmann et al. (2012) posed the question: *"Why do some children react to parental imprisonment in different ways, or more precisely, why do some children flourish despite their risk status and successfully adapt and thrive when the group as a whole does not?"* (p. 6). Resilience is defined as the maintenance or development of positive functioning in the face of significant stress or adversity (Masten et al., 1990) and was viewed to support in answering Christmann et al.'s (2012) question. Resilience involves the interaction between risk factors and protective factors, which can be personal qualities and environmental factors (Norman, 2000).

Some research has strived to identify support mechanisms and coping strategies which may act as protective factors for CoPiP and buffer against the associated risks. Within Lösel et al.'s (2012) and Weidberg's (2017) research, CoPiP were found to value support from their families, friends and community groups, especially the distraction and reassurance provided (Weidberg, 2017). This somewhat differs from Legel and Brenner's (2011) and Jones et al.'s (2013) findings, where CoPiP shared that talking to others in the same situation was helpful. Although CoPiP may have varied support preferences, there seems to be agreement that social support and connectedness assist them in navigating their circumstance

(Heinecke Thulstrup & Erklund Karlsson, 2017). This aligns with wider ACEs and resilience research, where parent and peer support have been identified as key factors that protect and build resilience (Shelemy & Knightsmith, 2018).

As well as social support from family and friends, having a trusted adult in school has been found to be important for CoPiP's wellbeing (Lösel et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2013). Other coping strategies and protective factors, aside from social support, have also been identified. Some children immerse themselves in hobbies and interests (e.g., sports and theatre) and/or turn to faith and prayer (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Such coping strategies and protective factors are perceived to be helpful due to providing a focus outside of the home, increasing confidence and creating opportunities for forming friendships (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). These may further buffer the risks and vulnerabilities attached to PI. Other CoPiP have spoken of coping strategies such as maintaining secrecy through adopting euphemistic terms, avoidance, lying or minimising the situation, although these are perceived to be less effective (Heinecke Thulstrup & Eklund Karlsson, 2017).

Although this section has focused on resilience as the answer to Christmann et al.'s (2012) question, it is worth considering and being mindful that other factors associated with PI could be at play and may interact with protective and risk factors. This could include the number of times a parent is imprisoned, the length of imprisonment/s, and the crime the parent has been imprisoned for, as well as pre-existing risk factors and disadvantages. For example, CoPiP with similar protective factors but with different circumstances (e.g., one off versus multiple imprisonments) may respond to and manage PI differently.

2.4 The Role of Schools in Supporting Children of Parents/Carers in Prison

Education settings are viewed as having a critical role in supporting the needs of CoPiP as they are likely to be in full time education (Tuite, 2016). Schools are seen as

gateways to accessing other avenues of support and as platforms for championing CoPiP, with their role extending beyond academic performance (Roberts & Loucks, 2015; Tuite, 2016). Due to this, along with the associations with school related challenges, it is important to consider how schools support and respond to CoPiP. Despite some LA policies and charity guidance (outlined in Chapter 1) offering insight into the steps that schools can take, current practice in schools has not been highlighted. This section will draw upon empirical research which has explored and considered how schools support and respond to CoPiP.

Roberts and Loucks (2015) conducted a small exploratory study investigating current school practice for supporting CoPiP in Australia and the US. The researchers visited charities and non-government organisations (NGOs) who support children and families affected by imprisonment (mainly through the school system) and they interviewed practitioners and managers within these organisations. Staff training in schools (covering potential impacts and how to talk to children about PI) was viewed to be the most helpful means of supporting CoPiP. Other ways that CoPiP were found to be supported by Australian and US schools included:

- Special educational support through academic support groups (e.g., small group literacy and numeracy support);
- Counselling or mentoring;
- Curriculum input to address issues of crime and punishment;
- Parent-teacher contact to engage imprisoned parents in their children's education;
- Advocating and providing information to carers.

In their paper, Roberts and Loucks (2015) detailed examples of interventions and initiatives taking place in the US and Australia that focused on these areas. Although

advocating for the crucial role of schools in supporting CoPiP and highlighting avenues of support, Roberts and Loucks' (2015) findings are based on discussions with professionals from charities and NGOs rather than school staff. Furthermore, their paper details examples of best practices across the US and Australia. These limitations potentially paint an inaccurate representation of what schools' responses and support look like day-to-day, and they do not provide a holistic view of what happens within individual school systems. Finally, Roberts and Loucks' (2015) research does not offer any insight into how UK schools respond to and support CoPiP.

Shaw et al. (2022) aimed to outline how UK schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs) can support CoPiP by systematically reviewing 11 papers that made relevant recommendations. Three 'levels' of support were identified: systemic, family and individual. Further details on these recommendations are provided in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

Three 'Levels' of Support Recommended in Shaw et al. (2022)

Level of Support	Recommendation	Further Detail
Systemic level	Strategic planning	Development of strategic policies to ensure appropriate and consistent support is given to CoPiP. Policies should refer to identification and monitoring, multiagency support and there should be a named person on the policy who can attend training, etc.
	Training/raising awareness	Additional training for schools to meet the needs of CoPiP and raise staff awareness, such as 'Hidden Sentence' training (National Offender Management Service, 2009). This training should increase staff's understanding of the impact of PI and reduce stigma. It should also include aspects such as the importance of contact with the imprisoned parents, and the process of visiting prisons.
	Curriculum support	Using the curriculum to reduce stigma.

Level of Support	Recommendation	Further Detail
Family level	Support for parent/carer at home	Practical and emotional support for the non-imprisoned parent/carer at home, such as having notice boards and leaflets in school to highlight a welcoming ethos. This is with the aim of making parents feel comfortable in sharing issues.
	Support for imprisoned parent	Facilitating communication with imprisoned parents and supporting engagement in their child's education by sharing school information and CoPiP's work and reports.
Individual level	Emotional and practical support	Offering emotional and practical support on an individual basis, for example supporting CoPiP to understand the situation, practical information about what happens in prison, transition support, etc.
	Support maintaining contacts/visits	CoPiP should be supported to maintain imprisoned parent-child relationships such as through authorising prison visits.
	Child's perspective	Considering CoPiP's perspective when provision planning.

The three levels of support detailed in Table 2.3 align with some of Roberts and Loucks' (2015) findings, with consistent reference to support at the systemic, family and individual levels. However, Shaw et al.'s (2022) research builds on Roberts and Loucks' (2015) work by providing valuable insight into how UK schools can support CoPiP and their families. Despite this, Shaw et al.'s (2022) findings are drawn from studies that mainly captured the views of CoPiP, imprisoned parents, other family members and prison centre staff. Although consulting with these groups is important for understanding CoPiP's experiences, it would be useful to capture the perspectives of those who work within school systems to gain more detailed insights into school support. Leeson and Morgan (2014), Morgan et al. (2013; 2014) and O'Keefe (2014) captured the perspectives of headteachers. The recommendations for supporting CoPiP in school in these three studies have been included in Shaw et al.'s (2022) review and are thus broadly captured in Table 2.3. Other suggestions from school staff on how current support could be strengthened (not explicitly

referred to in Table 2.3) include assigning a designated teacher responsible for the wellbeing of CoPiP (Morgan et al., 2014; O'Keefe, 2014) and fostering stronger connections with prison and probation services to enhance information sharing and collaboration (Morgan et al., 2014).

Shaw et al. (2022) base their findings on recommendations from reviewed papers; thus, the current practice of UK schools in supporting and responding to CoPiP remains largely unknown. Morgan et al. (2014) and O'Keefe (2014) refer to recommendations for strengthening school support in their papers (discussed above), in addition to offering some insight into current school practices. Headteachers in Morgan et al.'s (2014) study largely regarded CoPiP as a 'hidden population' in school, seemingly due to no robust tracking or monitoring system. Similarly, several headteachers in O'Keefe's (2014) study shared that they often lack knowledge of CoPiP, potentially leading to neglected needs and difficulty in offering support. Across these studies, identification was perceived to be reliant on parent or child disclosures, staff having contacts in the local community, or already established systems such as attendance monitoring, child protection or safeguarding procedures. Furthermore, there was variability in how much and how headteachers found out. Within O'Keefe's (2014) study, one headteacher felt knowledgeable about CoPiP due to strong relationships with parents who freely shared information, supported by a sense of acceptance within the local community. Conversely, other headteachers mentioned challenges with parents being less forthcoming, with the discovery of PI mainly occurring through staff members' contacts within the community. These differences in headteachers' accounts suggest that identification can vary across school contexts. However, further detail on these contexts was not given, limiting the extent to which this can be explored further.

Moving from identification to support provision, participants in Morgan et al.'s (2014) study struggled to pinpoint specific 'official' services for supporting CoPiP. Instead,

headteachers suggested that staff take their own initiative. Support across schools was reported to include the use of pastoral systems, educational welfare, mentoring, peer support, school counsellors and a parent support advisor, although little detail on these was provided. Headteachers in O'Keefe's (2014) study did not refer to their current support provision, other than their efforts to form and maintain relationships with the family. Rather than a lack of support provision, this may be due to the study's different aims and interview questions. Although providing some initial insight into current school practice for supporting CoPiP, a detailed understanding and a clear picture of support and how it is distributed in schools are lacking. Additionally, a shortcoming of the current research is its reliance on headteachers' accounts. Gathering the perspectives of those who work more closely and directly with CoPiP (e.g., teaching and pastoral staff) may offer a deeper understanding of CoPiP's needs in school and the current practices for supporting and responding.

By capturing the views of different school staff, McCrickard and Flynn (2016) generated insight into the current support and response to CoPiP in Australian schools. Participants were found to have limited knowledge about how to support CoPiP. Moreover, no participants identified specific policies, guidelines, or procedures, with more generalised ones typically being drawn upon (e.g., grief and loss programmes), and there were limited training opportunities. Additionally, staff had limited 'specific knowledge' about CoPiP. This was perceived to be due to internal communication challenges related to privacy, confidentiality, and consent, as well as a disconnect from external agencies. This resulted in a reliance on informal communication channels for identifying CoPiP (e.g., media posts, word of mouth, family disclosure). Overall, the study highlighted barriers to supporting CoPiP in school, particularly in terms of information sharing and communication challenges. Additionally, a significant finding was that school staff are more effective and capable in supporting CoPiP when they are adequately informed.

2.5 Chapter Summary

PI has received growing academic interest, with a myriad of research into the adverse outcomes for CoPiP. A significant proportion of this research is quantitative and has been conducted in the US, with a smaller proportion of qualitative studies and those which take place within Europe. There seems to be a limited focus on the potential impacts, experiences and needs of CoPiP in the UK. Nevertheless, it seems that CoPiP are vulnerable to emotional and behavioural challenges, stigmatisation, in addition to PI having the potential to disrupt education and create school-related challenges. However, adverse outcomes are not universal. Rather, CoPiP seem to be heterogeneous and the mechanisms underpinning associations remain contentious. It is unlikely that there is a clear, direct link between PI and adverse outcomes. There is also a small body of research which has adopted a child centred and strengths-based approach, drawing attention to more positive narratives about CoPiP and highlighting resiliency in this group.

Schools are positioned as playing a key role in supporting CoPiP (Roberts & Loucks, 2015; Tuite, 2016) and there is some LA and charity/NGO guidance on how schools can support this group (e.g., Evans, 2009; Families Outside, 2018). However, there is currently little research into how UK school staff currently understand and respond to CoPiP. The small body of UK research namely focuses on the perspective of headteachers (Morgan et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2014; O'Keefe, 2014), rather than school staff who perhaps work with CoPiP more directly and frequently. Other staff members may be able to shed further light on this vulnerable group.

2.6 Research Objectives

The overarching research aims of the present study were to develop a better understanding of the needs of CoPiP in school and contribute to the knowledge base pertaining to current UK school practice for supporting CoPiP.

These research aims were addressed by capturing the views and experiences of staff in an English mainstream primary school who had experience working with CoPiP, a perspective which has received limited exploration. Primary school staff were selected due to the topic of PI initially being brought to my attention by an ELSA in a primary school. I also had greater access to primary schools whilst on placement as a TEP and I wanted to capitalise on the relationships between primary school staff, CoPiP and their families. It was decided that these relationships would likely be stronger and more meaningful than those in other schools (e.g., secondary settings), which would help to gain greater knowledge of CoPiP's needs in school and current practices for supporting and responding. The research questions for the present study were:

1. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, view how children of parents/carers in prison present in school?
2. What is the current practice for responding to and supporting children of parents/carers in prison in an English mainstream primary school?
3. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, perceive that children of parents/carers in prison could be further supported?

3. Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter details the present study's research methodology. My philosophical positioning will firstly be discussed as this informed my methodological choices. The chosen research design, participants and recruitment, data collection and data analysis will also be outlined and justified, in addition to considering any ethical risks and steps taken to address them. The study's research questions have been restated below:

1. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, view how children of parents/carers in prison present in school?
2. What is the current practice for responding to and supporting children of parents/carers in prison in an English mainstream primary school?
3. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, perceive that children of parents/carers in prison could be further supported in school?

3.1 Philosophical Positioning

All researchers, whether consciously or unconsciously, hold certain beliefs and make a series of assumptions which shape their research questions, methodological choices and how findings are interpreted (Burrell & Morgan, 2016). Such assumptions include those made about reality (ontology), human knowledge (epistemology) and how influential personal values and beliefs are (axiology) (Saunders et al., 2023). Collectively, this system of beliefs and assumptions makes up one's research philosophy.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality, ultimately questioning its objectivity (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). Epistemology refers to assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it is produced, what constitutes acceptable and valid knowledge, and how it is communicated to others (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). The role of a researcher's values and ethics in the research process and their influence on decisions and actions is captured by the

term axiology (Saunders et al., 2023). In terms of axiology, research is typically considered to be ‘value-free’, ‘value-laden’ or as falling somewhere in between (Saunders et al., 2023).

This research is underpinned by a critical realist perspective, which has guided all aspects of the research process. Critical realism sits between realist and constructionist paradigms, combining both ontological realism and epistemological relativism (or constructivism) (Maxwell, 2012). Critical realism postulates that an external reality or ‘real world’ exists independent of human minds and investigation (Bhaskar et al., 2017; McAvoy & Butler, 2018). However, this ‘reality’ is multilayered and the mechanisms that produce social events are rarely visible (Danermark et al., 2001). Because of this, knowledge cannot be accessed directly through means of observation (Danermark et al., 2001), rather knowledge is socially located and bound by human practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, people’s experiences and interpretations of reality require exploration. Critical realism recognises that such knowledge does not directly reflect an objective reality, due to different people in different contexts experiencing things differently, and knowledge is viewed as incomplete and provisional (Maxwell, 2012). Finally, critical realism can be viewed as ‘value-laden’ (Saunders et al., 2023); researchers should acknowledge that their values, world views, cultural experience and upbringing can result in bias, whilst aiming to minimise the impact during the research process (Saunders et al., 2023).

I believe that PI is an external and independent ‘truth’, rather than being socially constructed or ‘in the mind’ (Bhaskar et al., 2017) (ontological realism). However, due to my belief that social events are transformed and reproduced by humans (McAvoy & Butler, 2018) (epistemological relativism), knowledge and understanding of the impacts of PI need to be gained through exploring people’s perceptions and representations, which can be done qualitatively. Therefore, this research focused on gathering individuals’ qualitative views and perceptions, specifically those of primary school staff who had experience working with

CoPiP. I believed that this approach would give rise to interpretations and contextual 'truths' about PI, which would generate increased insight into the possible impacts of such an experience and how CoPiP could be supported. I sought to investigate mechanisms and measure relationships between social events to provide evidence-based suggestions on supporting CoPiP within educational settings, which further aligns with critical realism (Fletcher, 2017).

Due to the 'value-laden' nature of critical realism (Saunders et al., 2023), it is important to explicitly acknowledge my values and beliefs and how these may impact the research process (Heron, 1996). I reflected on the values and beliefs relevant to this research; see Appendix A. Although these values and beliefs shaped the research questions and methodological choices, I strived to reduce my bias by approaching the aims of the research in an exploratory, inductive manner, and minimising the use of leading questions during interviews.

3.2 Research Design

I opted for a qualitative single case study design which is a type of naturalistic enquiry where a particular phenomenon is investigated in depth in its real-life context (Yin, 2018). Case studies have two essential features: a subject which is typically a person or place, and an object which is the 'thing' under study (Thomas, 2015). The current research investigated PI (object) through the lens of primary school staff within one mainstream primary school in the Northwest of England (subject). Justification for selecting a primary school can be found in Chapter 2. How and why the case school was chosen, in addition to contextual information about the setting, are provided in the 'recruitment' section of this chapter. Thomas (2015) synthesised various definitions of case studies, identifying four classifications which should be considered to ensure robustness (Thomas, 2015). Table 3.1 highlights how these were considered in the present study.

Table 3.1

Key Considerations of Case Study Designs, as Described by Thomas (2015)

Classification	Approach the Current Research has Taken
Subject – type of case	*Local knowledge case* – Research undertaken in the LA that I was on placement as a TEP. I had existing links with the case school due to completing some traded work there.
Purpose – case study aim	*Instrumental and exploratory* – Exploration of primary school staff's views with the aim of developing greater understanding of CoPiP's needs in school and current school practice for supporting this group.
Approach – how the research sought to meet the aim	*Illustrative* – Aimed to describe primary school staff's perceptions of how CoPiP present in school and how staff respond and support.
Process – how the case study was approached	*Single snapshot* – Explored one primary school at one point in time.

A case study design was not chosen due to the uniqueness of the 'case' or direct generalisability to other educational settings and staff, but to provide a starting point for exploring primary school staff's views and experiences and to contribute *"to the cumulative development of knowledge"* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 241). A case study would generate insight into CoPiP's needs in school and begin to build a picture of the current support available in educational settings, aligning with the research aims.

It was also thought that working in one primary school would facilitate easier access to participants and minimise inconsistencies in the systems within which they worked. It was hoped that a case study approach would generate a rich picture of current practice within this one school system and capture different perspectives from those within it, providing valuable and interesting insight into school dynamics and how responsibility and support for CoPiP is distributed. Overall, it was expected that working within one primary school would allow for rich focused data pertaining to the research objectives to be gathered.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

This research project adhered to the British Psychological Society's (2018) Code of Conduct and Ethics and was granted ethical approval by the University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee in March 2023. See Appendix B for the ethical approval confirmation. The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) were also considered throughout. Ethical considerations applicable to this research can be found in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2

Ethical Considerations and Actions Taken to Mitigate Ethical Risks

Ethical Consideration	Action Taken
Informed consent	Prior to participation, information about the research was provided through information sheets (see Appendix C). These were shared via email and hard copies were also distributed in person before the interviews took place. The information sheets provided an overview of the research aims and objectives, and outlined potential benefits and risks, participants' right to withdraw, and explained how participants' identities would be kept confidential throughout and in any research outputs. A brief verbal summary of this information was also given before individual interviews commenced, and participants had the opportunity to ask questions before deciding to participate. Once participants had verbally agreed to take part, they were invited to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix D), ensuring written informed consent had been gained. Information had also been shared and written consent gained from the school's headteacher prior to this (see Appendix E).
Right to withdraw	Participants had the right to withdraw within two weeks following their interview. This was outlined within the information sheet shared with participants and the consent form which was signed.
Confidentiality and anonymity	Participants were asked to refrain from providing identifiable information (about themselves or CoPiP) as much as possible during interviews. Any identifiable information that emerged within the interviews (e.g., individual names and school setting) was removed or replaced with a pseudonym during transcription. The interview audio recordings were deleted after transcription and transcription files were stored securely on the University of Birmingham's OneDrive and titled by participant number, for

Ethical Consideration	Action Taken
	example 'Participant one'. This gave interim storage before the files were uploaded to the Birmingham Environment for Academic Research (BEAR) data storage account for long term storage. Prior to data collection, a data management plan detailing how data will be collected, organised, managed, stored, secured, preserved, and, where applicable, shared was created (see Appendix F).
Risk to participants	Overall, the risk of harm to participants was considered minimal. Consent, confidentiality and data storage procedures (detailed above) were adhered to. Risk of emotional and psychological distress may have occurred if participants had similar experiences to the children they were discussing (e.g., experiencing PI themselves). However, being fully informed about the aims and purpose of the research from the outset, and having the option to view the interview schedule in advance was expected to minimise this risk. Participants would have been able to leave the interview if any visible distress occurred and would have been signposted to the Education Support Partnership; a UK charity that is dedicated to supporting the mental health and well-being of education staff. This charity's telephone number was also provided at the bottom of the study's information sheet.

3.4 Recruitment

3.4.1 Selection of the Case School

To select the case school, I capitalised on existing relationships and contacts from my role as a TEP within a LA EPS. I had conversations with schools where I already worked and gained further insights from colleagues within the team. This highlighted some schools that might be suitable due to having previous or current experience supporting CoPiP. I reached out via email to these schools. The case school was purposefully chosen because its staff had experience working with CoPiP who I hoped would consent to sharing their views. Additionally, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) expressed interest in the project, and the school's headteacher agreed to the research taking place. The headteacher was essentially the gatekeeper which is defined as an individual, group of individuals or

organisation who holds the power to either permit or deny access to a research population (De Laine, 2000). I worked in the case school as a TEP prior to conducting this research.

3.4.2 Case School Context

The case school was an English mainstream primary school located in Northwest England. The local authority where the school is situated has limited ethnic diversity, with the local population predominantly White British, and deprivation is a significant challenge across the borough, including the area where the case school is located. The case school is a one form entry Roman Catholic setting catering for children aged three to 11, and they have a nursery provision. The school's mission is underpinned by Catholic values, and the setting has a community ethos where they aim to create a welcoming, non-judgemental atmosphere that 'works together in peace and harmony as one school, parish and family' (as stated on the school's website). At the time of this research, the school had 222 pupils on roll and 41.4% of pupils were eligible for free school meals (FSM). Eligibility for FSM is a well-known marker of socio-economic deprivation in the UK (Ilie et al., 2017). The case school's percentage is considerably higher than the national average of 23.8%.

Within this school setting, some staff members had current and/or previous experience supporting CoPiP. At the time the research was conducted, school staff indicated that they had approximately six known CoPiP attending, as well as having supported pupils with this circumstance in the recent past. In addition to the senior leadership team, teaching staff, and supervisory staff (e.g., lunchtime staff), there is one 'learning mentor' who provides pastoral support to pupils with social and emotional needs.

The introduction of learning mentors was one strand of the 'Excellence in Cities' initiative set out by the labour government in 2002, which aimed to improve inner-city education (Bishop, 2011). At that time, the Department for Education described the role as a

person who *"Helps young people to overcome barriers to learning through one-to-one mentoring, regular contact with families/carers and encouraging positive family involvement"* (Constable & Roberts, 2003 as cited in Bishop, 2011, p. 32). This initiative originally focused on secondary schools in six inner-city conurbations, but smaller 'excellence' clusters were later set up where there were smaller pockets of disadvantage, and primary schools were included (Lepkowska, 2004 as cited in Bishop, 2011).

3.4.3 Participants: Primary School Staff

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, which is often used when working with small samples such as those within case study research (Saunders et al., 2023) and where 'information rich' participants are wanted (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method involves approaching and selecting participants that will best enable the research questions to be answered (Saunders et al., 2023). As a critical realist, I acknowledge that different people have different interpretations of reality. Additionally, children within a school system often interact with and receive support from various staff members. Because of this, I endeavoured to recruit a heterogeneous sample, with participants having diverse characteristics, namely different roles and responsibilities in the case school. This would provide a more holistic picture of CoPiP's perceived needs in school, the current support available, and what further support is felt to be needed in the context of the case school. Although heterogeneous in some respects, it is worth noting that the sample remained homogeneous in the sense that all participants were from the same school setting and were all white British.

I initially spoke with the case school's SENCo, who I knew had experience working with CoPiP, about this research. We discussed other staff members in the school setting, with varying roles, who potentially had relevant experience and might be interested in sharing their views. To facilitate the recruitment of participants who could help meet the research objectives, an inclusion criteria was devised, see Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3

Inclusion Criteria for the Current Research

	Criterion
1.	Participants will be working within the English mainstream primary school selected as the case.
2.	Participants will have a role which currently involves or has previously involved working with at least one child who has experienced PI (e.g., teaching, pastoral, other support, co-ordination/organisation roles and leadership roles).
3.	Participants will have had relatively sustained contact/involvement with at least one child from this group, which has not been merely incidental.

I approached staff members with relevant experience who might have been interested in taking part, as guided by the SENCo. I checked that they met the inclusion criteria and shared information about the study. Following this, five staff members gave their written consent to participate. Although Clarke et al. (2013) recommend a minimum sample size of six for professional doctorate research projects, when considering the exploratory, inductive nature of this study, the use of a case study design, practical constraints, and pragmatic requirements, five participants were deemed sufficient. Information on the recruited participants can be found in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Further Participant Information

Participant	Role	Gender
Participant 1 (P1)	Teacher	Male
Participant 2 (P2)	Learning mentor	Male
Participant 3 (P3)	SENCo	Female
Participant 4 (P4)	Teaching Assistant	Female
Participant 5 (P5)	Teaching Assistant	Female

3.5 Data Collection

The present study utilised individual interviews as the data collection method. Interviews vary in their level of structure but can be defined as purposeful conversations between two or more people, whereby knowledge is generated through discussing their interpretations of the world and views on certain situations (Cohen et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2023). Individual interviews were selected due to the belief that this would be the most suitable method for extracting data from participants who are witnesses to a reality that exists independently from them, aligning with a critical realist standpoint (Saunders et al., 2023). Through interviews, primary school staff's firsthand accounts and rich, qualitative data about their views and experiences of working with CoPiP would be captured. It was acknowledged that the qualitative data gathered would not be a direct reflection of reality, rather participants' perceptions of their reality (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Willig, 2013).

Individual interviews were chosen over questionnaires because they allow for more in-depth exploration of the topic, provide insight into why ideas are framed in certain ways, and help to identify connections between ideas, values, events, opinions, and behaviours (Hochschild, 2009, as cited in Cohen et al., 2018). Individual interviews were also selected over focus groups as I wanted to examine the unique 'situated realities' of primary school staff in different roles, rather than attempting to generate and understand shared meaning. Individual interviews allow for possible variation in views and experiences to be captured, whereas focus groups may lead to agreement and similarity where there may not have naturally be any.

The individual interviews took place face-to-face in the case school because this was believed to provide greater opportunity to build rapport with interviewees, ease any concerns and offer reassurance, and gain more insight into visual cues, as well as verbal and paralinguistic signals (Saunders et al., 2023). All interviews were conducted in a quiet space

with no one else present (other than the interviewee and me). This aligned with suggestions that interviews should be held in private environments where participants feel safe and comfortable (Doody & Noonan, 2013). It was hoped that this would allow participants to be open and honest in their responses. The individual interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and were audio recorded on a Dictaphone. I manually transcribed the interviews ahead of analysis.

The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a set of concise and unambiguous open questions whilst allowing space for spontaneity and flexibility (Cohen et al., 2018). This type of interview provides the opportunity to explore interviewees' responses further through probing and enables new and unexpected, but relevant, lines of enquiry to be followed should they arise (Saunders et al., 2023). Probing by interviewers can increase the chance of bias and possibly provoke resentment (Fowler, 2013; Wellington, 2015), therefore I was mindful not to over probe. I mainly asked for clarification or prompted participants to expand if initial answers were short or narrow, and I did not continuously probe in specific areas. Semi-structured interviews were chosen over other interview types (i.e., unstructured or structured) as they made data collection somewhat systematic and ensured consistency across the interviews in terms of topic areas covered (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, semi-structured interviews increased my confidence that the data collected would help in answering the research questions and ensured that I was prepared and competent ahead of the interviews. Using unstructured interviews with no predetermined questions (Saunders et al., 2023) could have been challenging to navigate, especially without any prior practice. Additionally, structured interviews, which are 'standardised' with questions fully predetermined (Saunders et al., 2023), would have offered little opportunity for rapport building and would not have aligned with the nature of this research, which was intended to be exploratory and inductive.

The interviews were guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix G) which contained a set of pre-prepared questions driven by the research objectives. Questions included those pertaining to how CoPiP present in school, support currently available and what further support may be helpful. The sequencing of these questions was guided by Robson's (2002) guidelines, which advise the following structure: introduction, warm up, main body, cool off and closure. The interview schedule helped me to support participants to explore their experiences and views in a structured but flexible manner. Doody and Noonan (2013) and Smith et al. (2009) advise that researchers should remain impartial during interviews and questions should not be leading or make assumptions about participants' experiences. Therefore, open ended questions were predominantly used within the interview schedule. Participants had the option of viewing the interview schedule ahead of their interview, which most participants opted for.

3.6 Pilot Study

Prior to commencing data collection with the five recruited participants, I conducted a pilot interview. Pilot testing is recommended to ensure that problems are not encountered for participants answering the questions or in recording the data (Saunders et al., 2023). My interview schedule was piloted with a learning mentor from a different primary school but in the same LA as the case school. Although not from the case school, the participant otherwise met the inclusion criteria, and similarities between the schools were present. This included having a similar number of pupils on roll and a small proportion of CoPiP attending. Additionally, both schools were one form entry and located in deprived areas. The staff member who completed the pilot interview was recruited through initial leads and connections made during the recruitment process and was directly approached in a purposeful way, like the study's main participants. This pilot interview was conducted to clarify whether

the interview schedule flowed sequentially, that the questions were clear, and that the questions elicited information relevant to answering the research questions.

The information gained through the pilot interview was deemed relevant to the research aims and questions. The interviewee was also asked for their opinion on the clarity of the questions, and positive feedback was achieved. Because of this, no notable changes were made to the interview schedule. The pilot interview was not included in data analysis as the staff member worked outside of the case school.

3.7 Data Analysis

RTA was used to analyse the interview data. This analysis method encompasses a six-stage process to make sense of and interpret patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022), although the process can be recursive. RTA is theoretically flexible and can be used in a wide variety of ways; it is not tied to specific theoretical assumptions or a single philosophical standpoint (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Instead, RTA is a set of theoretically independent tools for analysing qualitative data and is considered a 'method' rather than a 'methodology' (Clarke et al., 2013). The six-stage process of RTA is guided by a researcher's philosophy and theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2022). See Table 3.5 for an outline of RTA's six-step process and how each step was undertaken in the current research. Examples of coded transcripts can be found in Appendix H, and an example of how themes were generated in Appendix I.

Table 3.5

Description of RTA Stages (Braun and Clarke, 2019) and the Process Undertaken

Stage of RTA	Process Undertaken
1. Familiarisation with the data	I transcribed the five audio recorded interviews before re-reading each transcript to further familiarise myself.
2.Generation of initial codes	I coded each transcript manually on Microsoft Word by highlighting text and then noting the code in the same colour.

Stage of RTA	Process Undertaken
	The codes provided a summary of what had been explicitly said, hence being data derived. I repeated this coding process for each transcript, although I aimed to code each transcript on a separate day to minimise the impact of previous coding (e.g., automatically using the same codes). After coding each transcript, I reviewed the initial codes to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and contained enough detail to be understood when separated from the corresponding text/data.
3.Search for themes	I transferred the codes from each transcript to one Microsoft Excel document. I arranged these codes into separate tabs (one tab for each transcript) and into sections corresponding to the research questions. I condensed codes where appropriate, omitted codes which I viewed as being redundant and/or not relevant to the research questions, and sorted codes into similar categories. I then combined the codes from each transcript and began to search for common themes within each research question, paying attention to the universality of codes to ensure that emerging themes did not reflect the views of only one participant.
4.Review of themes	I continued to rearrange codes throughout the RTA process until I had decided on, reviewed, and named my final themes and sub-themes.
5.Defining and naming themes	I strived to ensure that theme names captured all the codes within them and that they were not merely descriptive categories.
6.Reporting findings	See findings section of this paper.

Despite having flexibility as its hallmark, RTA is surrounded by a set of practices that researchers should adopt and draw upon (Braun & Clarke, 2022), including qualitative sensitivity, researcher subjectivity and themes being analytic outputs which are built from codes rather than being predetermined (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexivity is also a key aspect of RTA; researchers should actively and critically engage in reflexivity throughout the research process, considering the influence of their assumptions, experiences and values (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In light of this, I documented my reflections during the research process in a reflexive diary; extracts are provided in Appendix J.

Analysis was partly shaped and guided by the study's aims and research questions, as these created a 'lens' through which the data was read and organised. However, I strived to

ensure that the codes and themes remained grounded in the data; thus, an inductive approach to analysis was predominantly taken.

Due to RTA's flexibility and ability to capture individual views and experiences as well as common themes across these experiences, it was considered an appropriate choice for data analysis. It was hoped that this analysis method would provide a coherent and compelling interpretation of participants' situated realities, which is the goal of critical realist RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Early in my research journey, I contemplated the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) due to wanting to explore primary school staff's experiences of working with CoPiP. However, as my research planning progressed, I explored my philosophical beliefs and positioning more closely, and my research aims and questions evolved. I shifted from solely wanting to explore primary school staff's lived experience to wanting to find out more specifically their views on how CoPiP present in school, the support currently available and what further support may be helpful. I also realised that I did not want to identify the collective experience of primary school staff but rather gain a range of views from those in different roles, allowing for any differences in views and experiences to be highlighted. Thus, RTA was chosen over IPA.

3.8 Trustworthiness

When evaluating psychological research, there has traditionally been a focus on validity, reliability, objectivity and representativeness, with research which meets these criteria being considered trustworthy and of high quality (Cohen et al., 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider trustworthiness to be whether research findings are *"…worth taking account of"* (p. 290). Although quality assurance remains important during qualitative research, validity, reliability and representativeness assess positivist research and are largely incompatible with philosophical paradigms which typically underpin qualitative research (Reicher, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) argued that the quality and

trustworthiness of qualitative research should be evaluated against four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. These criteria were used to establish trustworthiness within the current study, and the steps that were taken are outlined in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Criteria to Evaluate Trustworthiness of the Current Study Based on Guba and Lincoln (1994)

Criteria	Steps Taken in the Current Study
1.Credibility Do the findings accurately represent the realities of participants?	• Use of research methods that are well established – semi-structured interviews and RTA. • I was familiar with most staff in the primary school setting selected as the 'case' due to completing work there whilst on placement as a TEP. Therefore, I had existing knowledge of the culture within the setting and participants will have hopefully felt safe in sharing their views with me. • Additional steps taken to ensure participants felt safe in sharing their views – prior sharing of the interview schedule if requested, reassurance throughout the interviews and emphasising that they could discuss their views honestly. • Repeating and summarising key information shared at the end of the interview to check that I had correctly understood participants' views, in addition to asking if there was anything else they wanted to add – form of 'member checking' which Guba & Lincoln (1985) considered to be extremely important for establishing credibility. • Debriefing regularly occurred with peers and my research supervisor allowing for peer and professional scrutiny of the findings and research process. • Use of a reflexive research journal to record reflections throughout the research process.
2.Transferability Can the findings be applied to other contexts?	• The aim of the research was not to make generalisations; however, the research findings may be transferrable to similar contexts. For example, other one form entry primary school settings in relatively deprived areas where there is a small proportion of CoPiP. • Case studies can be used to develop theoretical or analytical generalisations (Robson, 2002; Yin, 2018). • The research context (the primary school setting selected as the 'case') was clearly outlined, along with participant information (number of participants, inclusion and

Criteria	Steps Taken in the Current Study
	exclusion criteria), and the data collection methods have been detailed (semi-structured interviews).
3.Dependability Are the findings stable, accurate and consistent?	• Interview schedule devised and used to guide the interviews and increase their consistency. • The research process was carefully planned, with ongoing reflection throughout using a reflexive research journal. • Clear data analysis steps were followed, with each interview being coded thoroughly and the codes reviewed on a separate occasion to ensure they accurately captured what participants had shared. • Processes within the study reported in detail to enable future researchers to repeat the work.
4.Confirmability Is the data confirmable to participant's views and not researcher bias?	• My positioning as the researcher and the influence I may have had on the research process have been commented on and acknowledged. • My positionality and potential bias were also reflected upon throughout – during supervision and within my reflexive research journal. • Thorough process of reviewing and refining my codes and themes during analysis. • During the interviews, I aimed to adopt a neutral approach and ask predominantly open questions.

3.9 Chapter Summary

The current research is underpinned by critical realism which guided the research approach and methodological choices. A qualitative approach and a single case study design were used to conduct an in-depth exploration of primary school staff's views and experiences of working with CoPiP, with the case school located in the Northwest of England. The views of five primary school staff in varying roles were obtained through semi-structured interviews which were analysed using RTA. The findings from this analysis will now be outlined.

4. Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with the staff members involved in this research. The raw data from these interviews was analysed using RTA, as described in Chapter 3. 11 themes and two sub-themes emerged, which can be viewed in Figure 4.1, along with details of which participants contributed to each theme. In this chapter, themes are organised underneath the corresponding research question, and relevant quotes from participants are included throughout. Participants are referred to by number in this chapter, with further participant information available in Table 3.4 in Chapter 3.

4.1 Research Question 1: How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, view how children of parents/carers in prison present in school?

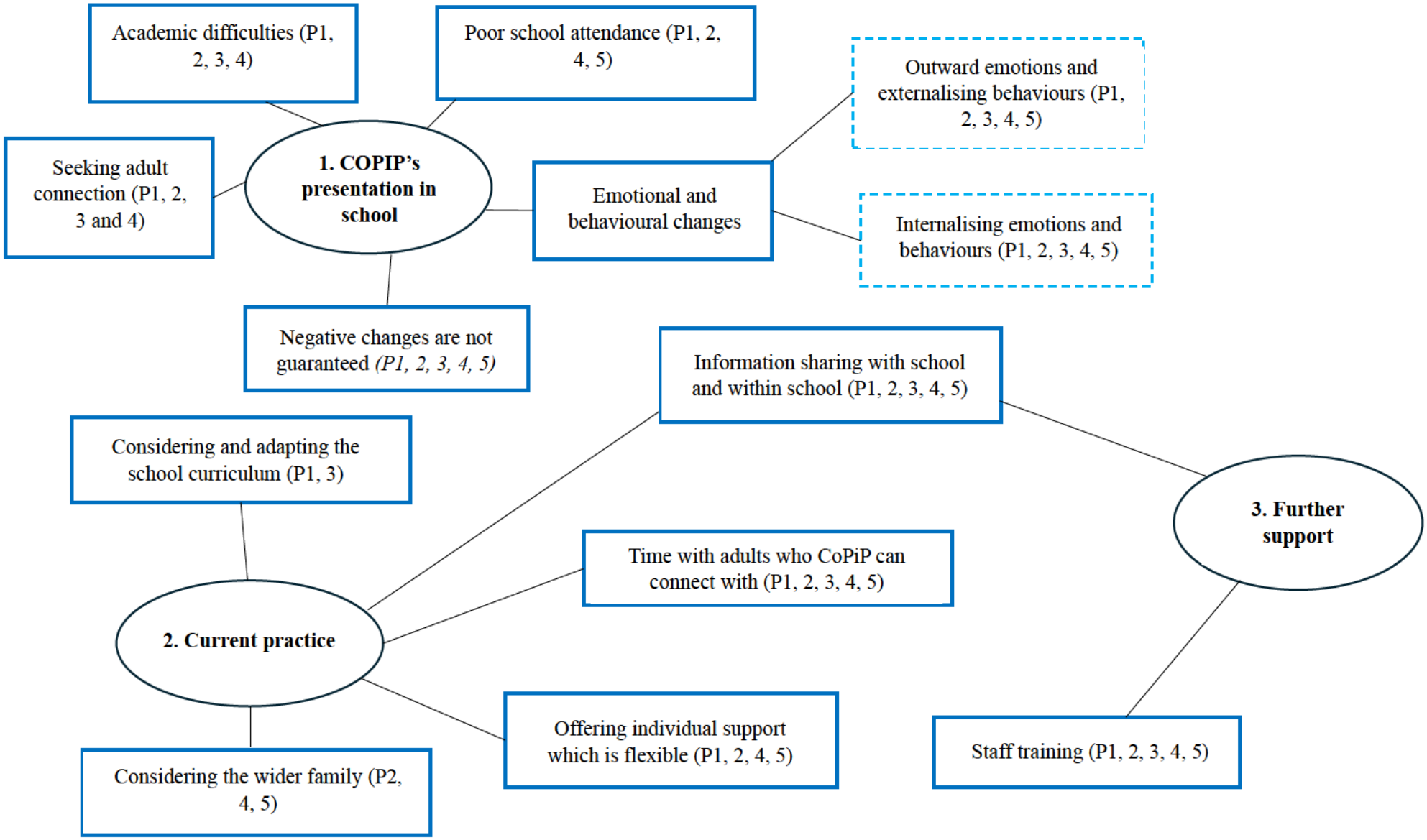
4.1.1 Theme 1: Academic Difficulties

The academic performance of CoPiP was discussed by four participants when asked about how they view these children to present in school. Three participants shared that some CoPiP are working below age-related expectations (ARE) and struggling to progress in academic areas. When speaking about one child, one participant said, *"... her level of learning…it's below where most of the children are, she's working towards* [ARE] *in all areas*" (P2). Two other participants referred to the academic struggles of CoPiP more generally, for example, *"…if I'm generalising what I tend to see is the children whose parents who have gone to jail are usually rather unacademic..."* (P1). Additionally, two participants mentioned how some CoPiP do not appear engaged in their learning.

One participant spoke of CoPiP having existing academic difficulties prior to PI which then continue, in addition to academic struggles viewed as directly linked to the experience of PI. In terms of existing academic difficulties, CoPiP were generally viewed by P1 to be *"…not working at expected standard before the parents go into jail…"*

Figure 4.1

Thematic Map of Themes and Subthemes for the Three Research Questions



This highlights how academic difficulties may be present prior to PI and therefore may be unrelated to this experience. P1 also alluded to CoPiP's academic difficulties being enduring with these extending beyond the parent's release from prison. In terms of academic impacts directly linked to PI, this same participant spoke of there being a negative shift in academic work for CoPiP in one family when PI occurred. This included a *"...little less homework"* (P1) being completed which impacted academic performance in school. They speculated that this may be due to changes in family dynamics, because of PI, for example only one parent being at home to support with homework.

Uncertainty about the link between PI and academic difficulties was explicitly mentioned by one participant who stated that although they perceive some CoPiP to struggle academically they *"...don't know the direct links"* (P2). This uncertainty was reported to be due to differences in academic performance between one child and their older sibling. However, the context around the older sibling (e.g., if PI had yet occurred when the older sibling was in school) was not elaborated on.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Poor School Attendance

The school attendance of CoPiP was discussed by four participants, with this group of children primarily being viewed as having "…*patterns of poor school attendance*" (P2). Participants comments indicated that poor school attendance may be present for individual CoPiP and within families, with siblings affected by PI having similar days off school. It was reported that some CoPiP occasionally leave school to visit their parent in prison, which accounts for some absences. These are authorised if the family have informed the school in advance. Moreover, CoPiP were stated by P5 to *"...always be late,"* and P4 shared that *"...certain ones don't show."* P5 speculated that this may be due to events outside of school and circumstances associated with PI (e.g., police visiting the family home at night), and P4 wondered if poor attendance was due to the strain experienced by the non-imprisoned parent

at home, which could lead to difficulty getting the children ready and taking them to school. Moreover, two participants noted that school attendance does not necessarily increase when the imprisoned parent is released from prison, with patterns of poor school attendance continuing: *"...so dad's home, it doesn't particularly make a difference…that's the pattern they're in now having done that for so many years"* (P2).

Although one participant shared that they were unsure on the links between PI and attendance due to this already being poor for some CoPiP, they intimated that they have seen attendance drop further following PI: *"...but since that happened* [PI] *there's been times where you think well where are they? Because we'd at least get them a couple of days…"* (P4).

4.1.3 Theme 3: Seeking Adult Connection

When discussing how CoPiP present in school, four participants spoke of changes in their interactions with adults in the setting. Some CoPiP were viewed by participants as wanting to talk about and share their situation with staff, while others were said to seek positive attention and to *"...please adults"* (P2). There was also reference to how these children need to know that *"...they are liked and loved and wanted*" (P1) and they require comfort and reassurance from adults in school: *"...some of them are very like sad and they need that like don't worry it won't be for long, they still love you, we can do this"* (P4). Speaking of this need for comfort and reassurance led one participant to outline the challenges this can bring in terms of maintaining professional boundaries: *"Er and it's hard because you have to, you have to be professional, but you also have to be caring…"* (P1).

Three participants explicitly spoke about children whose fathers are in prison and how they often gravitate more towards male staff members and seek to gain their attention. This may suggest a tentative link between which parent is in prison and whom CoPiP may seek connection from in school. P2 said:

"One of the children in particular, erm, their dad is in prison erm. They really really look for I think male figures to kind of cling to, and whether or not this is erm in relation specifically to to dad being unavailable for much of the time, but yeah, she does she looks for male members of staff she likes to spend time with them. She says a lot and does a lot of things to try, and I think to please them…to try and build in her eyes what she sees as a positive relationship with them…although she likes the attention of all adults, it is clear there's definitely a preference towards the males…"

4.1.4 Theme 4: Emotional and Behavioural Changes

Changes in CoPiP's emotions and behaviours during PI were discussed by all participants. This theme comprises two subthemes that highlight how PI can be an emotional experience which may manifest itself in different ways, outwardly or inwardly. One participant explicitly noted these contrasting presentations, *"…it's just more of the subdued or the-they have these outbursts"* (P5). However, P2 shared that one child sometimes presents as *"…quite downhearted"* but other times *"…abrasive,"* highlighting that different presentations may be seen at different times by the same child.

4.1.4.1 Sub-Theme: Outward Emotions and Externalising Behaviours.

All participants spoke of how some CoPiP have displayed observable emotional reactions and outward behaviours in school during PI. Some CoPiP are perceived to become visibly upset and *"...quick to tears"* (P2) in school, and P4 shared that when one child was asked why they were upset they stated, *"…it's just because I miss my dad, my dad's in jail…"* Participants also discussed how some CoPiP appear angry in school which is seen through *"…outbursts"* (P5 and P3) or *"…lashing out"* (P4), and this anger can sometimes be directed at other pupils in school. Two participants viewed this observable anger to be linked to PI, for example:

"...Erm, definitely arose as dad went in to prison, so dads in and out [of prison] *and there's a definite difference when dad is out and back at home with the children. When dads in I think he's* [the child] *quite angry about the whole situation and can sometimes take it out on children in the playground..."* (P2).

Moreover, another participant inferred that the sudden absence/loss of a parent may confuse CoPiP and may result in the anger seen: *"...some have lashed out, some get angry, and understandably. They don't get it, they've had this parent and then all of a sudden they are taken away..."* (P4).

Finally, one participant spoke of noticing a shift in one child's behaviour as they transitioned into Year 6, going from quiet to outspoken and becoming involved in conflicts with other children. This was speculated to be due to the approaching transition to secondary school and a pressure to *"...toughen up"* (P5), and hence not necessarily directly linked to PI.

4.1.4.2 Sub-Theme: Internalising Emotions and Behaviours.

As well as outward emotions and behaviours being discussed, some participants referred to how some CoPiP withdraw, appear quiet, and *"...go into their shells"* (P1). P5 spoke of how one child withdrew when his family went to visit the imprisoned parent without him, and P3 described how a different child *"...lost a bit of her spark,"* and became *"...just like a shadow of herself"* during PI. P3 felt that this might be due to this child experiencing unmet promises about seeing their imprisoned parent and their release. Finally, two participants spoke of how some CoPiP do not want to talk and share their experiences with adults in school unless it is necessary, such as when they need to leave school early to visit their parent in prison. This suggests that some CoPiP are less forthcoming in sharing their experiences and may keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Negative Changes are Not Guaranteed

Across the interviews, there was the sense that although PI may result in negative impacts or changes, some aspects of school life might be less affected, and for some CoPiP, there are fewer visible negative changes. Some CoPiP were described by participants as appearing unphased, unaffected, and *"...you wouldn't know any different or that anything had changed"* (P3). For one child, the minimal visible impact in school was thought to be due to the family being very open and transparent about the situation, with the child knowing about their imprisoned parent's whereabouts, the reasons for this, and when they will visit them.

Furthermore, some CoPiP were described as *"...bright and bubbly"* (P1), *"...calm and mild mannered"* (P2), and *"...happy and chatty"* (P5). Across three interviews, there was the sense that this absence of visible, negative changes for some CoPiP might be due to the perceived normality of the situation. They are possibly *"...used to it happening"* (P5), and this experience *"...becomes part of their normal life"* (P5), such that they *"...just get on with it"* (P4). In addition to PI being perceived as 'normal' for individual children, PI was also referred to as a relatively common and 'normal' situation in the case school. This was perceived to possibly buffer the impact of PI on CoPiP's educational experiences:

"...and I think three other children were like 'oh my dad's in jail too' 'my dad's in jail too' 'oh my dad's in jail too' and then it was a bit like oh well I'm [the child] *not unique and special in that regard and just carried back on...you know it wasn't it wasn't like they weren't the odd one out in that class, erm so yeah...I think they just got on with it"* (P1).

Most participants spoke about there being few, if any, negative impacts on peer relationships. Across three interviews, CoPiP were perceived to maintain their existing friendships in school, and they continued to engage in games and sports with other children. Additionally, PI was said to *"...never really be used as a taunt"* (P1) by peers, and peers

were generally viewed as being understanding of CoPiP's circumstances. This may account for the minimal social impact and suggests that bullying is not an issue in the case school.

In addition to the absence of visible negative changes for some CoPiP and in some areas (e.g., socially), several positive changes and impacts were discussed by three participants. P1 shared that, for one child, there was *"…more emphasis on academia, you know and a bit more like well you know were going to try and get her where she needs to be…"* when the parent was in prison. Another child appeared to attend school more regularly during PI. These experiences pertained to individual children. Furthermore, three participants spoke positively about CoPiP showing increased responsibility and care towards others, including peers, staff and family members. For example, P2 described one child as *"…quite nurturing of other children…we've got play leaders…so our juniors will go out and help on the yard and help with the younger ones, he goes out and gets involved with that…"* P4 elaborated on how another child with this circumstance showed increased care towards their younger sibling, *"…he toughened he grew in the sense that he then took care of his brother, and he became like a second dad if that makes sense…"* (P4). Another participant spoke of how one child started to stand up for herself more. This highlights that some CoPiP are viewed by school staff as 'stepping up.'

4.2 Research Question 2: What is the current practice for responding to and supporting children of parents/carers in prison in an English mainstream primary school?

4.2.1 Theme 1: Considering and Adapting the School Curriculum

In order to support CoPiP in school, the participating teachers spoke of considering and adapting the teaching input/lesson content as needed, such as omitting topics with a heavy prison theme and approaching other topics sensitively: "…*when you're talking* about *you know like Father's Day or the relationship of parents, as a class teacher you'd maybe broach that in*

a different way" (P3). Although taking care when broaching learning topics, P1 shared that they aim to provide a balanced view of *"...what life is like for others,"* and they do not shy away from talking about different family compositions and dynamics. They view these discussions as important and helpful for pupils, including CoPiP. This same participant also shared that they try to subtly promote a positive view of the police within class discussions and work due to many children, including CoPiP, viewing them negatively.

P1 made explicit reference to how religious practices within the school setting, specifically collective worships, can be tailored to the specific situation of PI which gives CoPiP the opportunity to say a prayer for their parent:

"*I just want the class to say a prayer to God to look after my dad* [quote from child] *and we'll say okay, and it's not that we'll say to the children this child's parents in jail…it's just the bit where we go…let's say a little prayer for them when we're doing our collective worship"* (P1).

This was viewed as a helpful means of support by this same participant; prayer and worship were perceived to grant CoPiP an element of control: *"I think they want that…element of control over what is happening to their dad… that little, tiny element of control of I said a prayer and he's happy, I think it makes a big difference for them"* (P1).

4.2.2 Theme 2: Considering the Wider Family

When discussing current practice for responding to and supporting CoPiP in the case school, three participants mentioned that support is not only given to CoPiP but also extended to the wider family. Parents are *"...welcome into school"* (P4) to off load and talk, namely to the school's learning mentor who takes on this role. School staff also reach out to parents, especially on occasions where children are absent for unknown reasons: *"erm school might erm might phone them up do you know just to text er a little text saying is everything okay, erm*

if you need to chat, you know just let us know" (P5). Moreover, two participants spoke about team around the family (TAF) meetings as a means of supporting the family, with the learning mentor and SENCo often being involved in these.

Despite extending support to the wider family, one participant spoke of the challenges in communicating and liaising with non-imprisoned parents, stating that "…*some parents are absolutely knackered because they're doing it on their own, and these kids are never just single kids they've all got siblings and they've still got to work…"* (P4). Due to being aware of these possible stressors and strains on the non-imprisoned parent, P4 shared that they aim to adopt a sensitive communication approach that conveys empathy and understanding.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Time With Adults Who CoPiP Can Connect With

The opportunity to spend time with adults in the school setting was mentioned as a means of current support for CoPiP by all participants, with the importance of CoPiP having someone to talk to being emphasised: *"...they need to know someone is there to look after them…if they've got a problem they can come and talk to someone"* (P5). Time with the school's learning mentor was especially prominent across four interviews, for example P5 stated, *"...we've got a learning mentor now, so he takes on a lot of that role."* The learning mentor was said to provide CoPiP with the space to talk things through and have one-to-one therapeutic conversations. The learning mentor referred to these as *"...counselling-like sessions"* (P2), although he noted that this is not within the same parameters as counselling. In addition to talking with the learning mentor, CoPiP were also said to sometimes engage in drawing and creative activities, games, and other structured activities (with the learning mentor) that help to formalise their thinking. This direct involvement and time with the learning mentor were viewed as beneficial, with CoPiP being perceived to respond positively: *"...they love it…to them it's a treat"* (P4). Furthermore, the learning mentor shared that CoPiP seem to feel heard during these sessions, and they enjoy the attention received: *"...sometimes just that*

I got a bit of attention, which is again it's something that some of the children seem to particularly crave" (P2).

Interestingly, although one participant mentioned the availability of the learning mentor when asked about current practice for supporting CoPiP, they shared the following: *"...if I'm completely honest it's not always directed to those children who have parents in prison, it's more directed towards anyone who is displaying a need..."* (P3). Additionally, the learning mentor directly shared that he is sometimes already involved with CoPiP when he learns that they have a parent or carer in prison.

The role of other adults in the school setting (not just the learning mentor) who CoPiP can connect and talk with was also discussed when reviewing current practice. CoPiP were said to be *"...always welcome to chat with anyone"* (P4), including class teachers and teaching assistants who they can regularly check in with. One participating TA spoke about how she tries to be a nurturing, warm, and motherly type figure to these children and she shared that she is rarely absent from the classroom, even during breaktimes. She mentioned that she reminds CoPiP of her availability and prompts them to utilise this support and space should they need it.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Offering Individual Support Which is Flexible

Across four interviews, there was a sense that the current support available to CoPiP is adaptable and flexible. The role of the learning mentor is varied and can be individualised to CoPiP, and different participants spoke about specific strategies or activities that have been used with different CoPiP. In terms of learning mentor support, *"...sometimes it is scheduled, sometimes it is as and when..."* (P2) and it can range from being *"...a check in every so often"* (P1) to more *"...intensive support"* (P1). Overall, learning mentor support seems to be tailored to the individual child:

"…so the learning mentor will have that initial chat with them and talk with them and then we'll see…after a period of time whether we think it's something that needs to continue… some of them need that extra time to talk and just figure out…where their up to, but others don't need it" (P1).

Additionally, learning mentor support was found to sometimes involve small group work with children in similar circumstances, wider whole-class emotional support, and access to a worry box.

Furthermore, the two participating TAs spoke about specific strategies they have used to support CoPiP. These strategies included ensuring that CoPiP's basic needs are met by providing them with breakfast at the start of the school day, tidying up their appearance if needed, giving pupils break or time away, and implementing physical or creative activities to help CoPiP manage their feelings. One participating TA said that she was a *"…big fan of jotting it down, even if you read it and then you get rid of it, let it go. Erm, so whatever gets the feelings out…"* (P4). Hence, this TA encouraged one child to document her thoughts and feelings in a diary and write letters that could be sent to her imprisoned parent if appropriate, kept, or ripped up by the child. The TA perceived this strategy as helpful for both the child and their non-imprisoned parent:

"…the impression I got; she felt a bit better cause she was able to say stuff to him she couldn't speak obviously to her dad to his face. Erm and the mam seemed a bit better, cause she kind of knew, she got an insight into what her daughters going through" (P4).

Physical activities (e.g., a short break to run around) were perceived as helpful for supporting CoPiP's emotional needs: *"…they always come back to class calm"* (P4). In terms of supplying breakfast, P5 shared how some CoPiP arrive at school having not eaten. She will

subtly and quietly ask them about this, provide food if needed, and also brush their hair and tidy their appearance if they appear *"…dishevelled"* (P5).

4.2.5 Theme 5: Sharing Information With and Within School

Sharing information with the school was referred to as a means of supporting CoPiP by three participants, seemingly due to its importance for identifying CoPiP and enabling staff to offer support. The participating learning mentor shared that *"…schools are kept relatively informed*" (P2) through operation encompass alerts and updates from the LA or Social Care. Despite this, the predominant methods for identifying CoPiP in the case school were child or parent disclosures and community links. Knowledge of some CoPiP was gained from staff having connections with the local community and/or other parents sharing this information. Throughout one of the participating TA's interviews, it became apparent that, due to living in the local area, working in the setting for over 20 years, and having supported different generations of families (i.e., CoPiP's parents), she was very knowledgeable about family circumstances and which children were experiencing PI. She explicitly referred to sharing this information with the school as part of her role in supporting CoPiP:

"…because I think if I know it, school's need to know. Just to be aware of you know they'll kick off… and that child might need erm, bit more support, well which they will…because they're seeing an awful lot" (P5).

Although these methods of information sharing and identification were discussed, two participants acknowledged that there could be instances where information about PI might not be shared with the school, such as when children or parents choose not to disclose it or if a parent is already in prison when the child joins the setting.

Information sharing within the school, among staff members, was also referred to as a means of supporting and responding to CoPiP. In the case school, information sharing took the

form of TAF meetings involving the SENCo and/or the learning mentor, use of the Child Protection Online Monitoring System (CPOMS) to keep staff informed about important events involving CoPiP, and office staff informing classroom staff when CoPiP have arrived in school so they can be collected and support can be implemented (e.g., breakfast provided). A couple of participants suggested that this information sharing helps to tailor and implement appropriate support for CoPiP:

"…with the little boy that I've got at the minute, everybody's on the same page, like literally the whole community, the whole school, know exactly what's happened, and I think because of that, it is a little bit easier to tailor his support…" (P3).

It was also inferred that shared knowledge among school staff may limit the impacts of PI on CoPiP. However, within the interviews it was also apparent that information may not always be shared between staff within school, which can be a barrier to responding and offering support. It seems that the learning mentor holds much of the information about CoPiP, which may not always be passed on, *"…it would have gone through the learning mentor, which maybe isn't always communicated"* (P3). Because of this, teachers may not always be privy to information about these pupils:

"*Obviously, there's like team around the family meetings and strategy meetings and things but from a SENCo side, <u>sometimes</u> I'm involved in those, but from a class teacher side, the class teachers wouldn't be involved in those. Erm, so I think that's the gap maybe where supports missing, and how best to support that child through the journey, because we don't, we don't <u>always</u> know the situation that we need to support"* (P3).

4.3 Research Question 3: How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, perceive that children of parents/carers in prison could be further supported in school?

Participants' responses to being asked what would further support CoPiP in school focused on better equipping staff through sharing information and staff training, giving rise to two themes.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Sharing Information With School and Within School

Current knowledge about CoPiP and prison processes was described by one participant as being *"...surface level"* with lots of *"...grey areas"* (P2). In three interviews, it was noted that school needs access to more detailed information to better support CoPiP, including greater information about CoPiP's individual circumstances and more knowledge about prison processes (e.g., visitation, bail and day release). In terms of having access to more detailed information about CoPiP's individual circumstances, one participant shared that knowing the reason for their parent's imprisonment would be helpful, as different reasons and circumstances may affect children differently (e.g., possession of drugs versus physical assault). However, they acknowledged that this information is sensitive. Furthermore, another participant spoke of how CoPiP may experience confusion about their parent's temporary reappearance if they are on day release or bail. Therefore, having knowledge of key dates and the conditions around this would allow school to be better prepared and able to answer any questions CoPiP may have.

Across three of the interviews, there was reference to staff being uncertain about what prison processes 'look like', such as the visiting process. Staff indicated that this uncertainty makes it difficult to understand CoPiP's experiences, answer their questions, and ultimately support them in school. They felt that they would benefit from having more information on a

variety of prison processes (prison visits, prison release, etc), so that they can understand and visualise these better. It was suggested by two participants that working with the prison and parole services or the police may support with this.

"*…when they come back to school, you know they've literally been to visit and coming back in here, you just think right now we're going to teach maths, you know what must be going on, what what've they witnessed, what have they seen, what's the feel of things been like for them. I think we don't know that and because of that I don't think we know how to support them fully"* (P3).

Two participants also discussed how information sharing within the school was not always effective. Information does not always get shared with those who need it, namely teachers, or there is a delay with this information sharing:

"I think probably the barrier is, sharing the information, I understand that it's sensitive information, but, like class teachers need to know, it can't just be something with a learning mentor or possibly like a senior leadership team. Th- the class teacher needs to know the situation…" (P3).

It was also mentioned that class teachers do not usually attend TAF or strategy meetings, which further limits the information they receive. It was felt that if the process for disclosing information to the people who need to know (i.e., teachers) was more robust, and if they were *"informed throughout the stages…"* (P1), staff might be quicker and more able to implement support, such as by making adaptations to the teaching content. It is interesting to note that both participants who discussed this were class teachers, whereas the participating TAs and learning mentor did not mention information sharing within the school as an area for further support and development. This could possibly be due to TAs' knowledge of CoPiP through their community links and the learning mentor's key role in supporting this group.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Staff Training

Within the interviews, it was highlighted that the participating staff members learn about CoPiP and how to support them through ongoing experience and they had not received any specific training:

"Erm, I've never really had training, erm it's just more part of the job…experience as you go, and you kind of learn well the diary ain't going to work for such and such, or him or her, let's try if I don't know hitting pillows is good for them or…" (P4).

One participant spoke about how training is available on trauma, loss and bereavement, which may link to PI due to involving parental separation. However, PI is a unique and distinct situation, and there is no training that directly addresses this. All participants expressed an interest in receiving more specific training related to CoPiP, which would outline *"...how it can affect…and what you can do to minimise the effect"* (P1) and *"...strategies to manage the situation should it come up in class*" (P3). Staff indicated that specific training would provide them with reassurance and greater knowledge, thereby better equipping them to support CoPiP:

"...cause I don't know what I'm doing right or wrong, and it'd be nice to know so I've got a bit of support as well, not just me supporting the child you know. Am I doing the right thing, am I saying it right, am I you know have I got the language right, you know" (P5).

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the thematic findings from the interviews with primary school staff in relation to each of the three research questions. In terms of research question one, primary school staff viewed CoPiP to experience challenges in school, namely academic difficulties, poor attendance, and emotional and behavioural changes. There was some inconsistency in how closely these were perceived to be associated with PI. CoPiP were also viewed to seek increased adult connection in school, and it was apparent that negative changes

did not always occur. Some CoPiP did not display visible challenges and certain aspects of school appeared unaffected (i.e., friendships). For research question two, current practice for responding to and supporting this group involved considering and adapting the curriculum, CoPiP having the opportunity to spend time with adults, information sharing, supporting the family, and implementing support which is individualised and flexible. Finally, findings related to research question three predominantly focused on equipping staff to further support CoPiP, through enhanced information sharing and access to training. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings in greater detail.

5. Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will summarise the study's findings in relation to the three research questions, before discussing them in more detail by drawing links to relevant theory and literature. Strengths and limitations of the research, along with implications for future practice and research, will then be considered. The study's research questions were:

1. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, view how children of parents/carers in prison present in school?
2. What is the current practice for supporting and responding to children of parents/carers in prison in an English mainstream primary school?
3. How do school staff, who work within an English mainstream primary school, perceive that children of parents/carers in prison could be further supported in school?

5.1 Summary of the Findings in Relation to Research Questions

In relation to research question one, participants generally viewed CoPiP to experience challenges in the case school, including academic difficulties, poor attendance, and observed emotional or behavioural changes. However, there was some inconsistency in the extent to which these challenges were viewed as directly impacted by PI or whether they were present prior to this circumstance. Participants also perceived CoPiP to seek increased adult connection in school, and a potential link between which parent is imprisoned and who the child seeks connection from was identified (e.g., having an imprisoned father and seeking connection from male staff members). Overall, there was the sense that school staff perceived CoPiP to display some additional needs in school. However, negative changes or outcomes due to PI were found to not always be guaranteed.

With regard to research questions two and three, current practice for supporting and responding to CoPiP in the case school involved targeted support at an individual level (e.g.,

spending time with adults who CoPiP can talk and connect with, and individualised strategies/approaches). Moreover, aspects of the school curriculum were reported to be considered and adapted along with offering support to the wider family. Information sharing was perceived to be a current means of responding to CoPiP in the case school, aiding in the implementation of appropriate support. However, information sharing was also an area where further development was felt to be needed, along with training for school staff.

5.2 The Needs of Children of Parents/Carers in Prison in School

The current findings, specifically the themes 'poor school attendance', 'academic difficulties', 'emotional and behavioural changes', and 'seeking adult connection', suggest that some CoPiP may display additional needs in school. This is not surprising considering the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) which emphasises the interconnectedness of contexts within the microsystem, such as home and school (mesosystem). Changes and disruptions in one context are likely to impact a child's presentation in the other. Table 5.1 summarises the studies discussed in Chapter 2 that found CoPiP to display needs in school which are similar to those identified in the current study. The current findings, gained through exploring the perspectives of primary school staff who work with CoPiP, build on the shortcomings of these studies and support in developing a better understanding of the needs of CoPiP in UK schools.

Table 5.1

Previous Research Where CoPiP's Perceived Needs Have Been Found to be Similar to the Current Findings

Themes From the Current Study	Research Which has Found Similar Needs in School
Academic difficulties	• Quantitative research: Bell et al. (2023), Hagan & Foster (2012) • Qualitative research with education staff: McCrickard and Flynn (2016)

Themes From the Current Study	Research Which has Found Similar Needs in School
	• Research which has gathered CoPiP's views: Yau & Chung (2014)
Poor school attendance	• Quantitative research: Trice & Brewster (2004) • Qualitative Research with education staff: McCrickard & Flynn (2016), Morgan et al. (2014), O'Keefe (2014) • Research which has gathered CoPiP's views: Kahya & Ekinci (2018)
Emotional and behavioural challenges	• Quantitative research: McCauley (2020) • Qualitative research with education staff: Dallaire et al. (2010), McCrickard & Flynn (2016), O'Keefe (2014)
Seeking adult connection in school	• Not spoken about within previous research.

Although contributing to the understanding of CoPiP's needs in UK schools, the extent to which CoPiP's additional needs identified within the current study were viewed to be directly associated with PI varied; more direct links were drawn for certain needs. For example, school attendance was speculated to be impacted by absences and lateness for reasons associated with PI, such as visiting the imprisoned parent and police visiting the home at night. This highlights a fairly direct link between PI and poor school attendance. Research which has directly captured CoPiP's views would also support this link. For example, CoPiP in Kahya and Ekinci's (2018) study reported an association between absenteeism and feelings of sadness and depression pertaining to PI. The reference to the police visiting the family home at night in the current study highlights how CoPiP may witness potentially traumatic events that are likely to impact their wellbeing (Arditti, 2012; Murray & Murray, 2010; Turney & Goodsell, 2018), and consequently, affect CoPiP's perceived needs in school. However, these events may be related to parental criminality rather than being directly related to PI. Additionally, some CoPiP were perceived to display emotional and behavioural changes in school during PI (internalising and externalising

behaviours), which was suggested to be linked with the sudden nature of PI and associated confusion over the absence/loss of the imprisoned parent. This seems to link with ambiguous loss theory (Bocknek et al., 2009), which conceptualises PI as a non-death loss which is unclear, confusing and lacking resolution. This theory highlights how PI may generate a sense of grief that could contribute to emotional and behavioural challenges in school, as well as potentially other needs.

On the other hand, within the current study, it seemed that there was difficulty ascertaining whether academic difficulties are a consequence of PI. Some research that has directly gathered CoPiP's firsthand account has found some CoPiP to report a decline in academic achievement during PI due to factors such as concentration difficulties, reduced academic motivation, and due to the imprisoned parent not being able to assist with academic work (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; Yau & Chung, 2014). This previous research suggests that PI may reduce CoPiP's ability to fully engage in their learning, which could help explain the academic difficulties observed in the current study. However, in the current study it was suggested that academic difficulties may have been present prior to PI. Existing learning needs may explain this finding, or pre-existing risks/ disadvantages may be present prior to PI which could impact academic performance. This is supported by previous research which has identified other risk factors such as household income, parental education, and parental mental health, which may account for associations between PI and academic difficulties (e.g., McCauley, 2020). The case school was in a relatively economically deprived area with a high proportion of pupils eligible for FSM (over 41%). This marker of socio-economic deprivation is above the national average; hence variables such as poverty and inequality may be at play in explaining some of CoPiP's perceived challenges (e.g., academic difficulties) in the case school. This is supported by research which has found CoPiP to often be exposed to pre-existing socio-economic disadvantage (e.g., Arditti et al., 2003) and that strong relationships

exist between SES and academic achievement (e.g., Sirin, 2005; Suna et al., 2020). However, this suggestion remains tentative as it cannot be assumed that all CoPiP are from families where there are such risk factors (e.g., low SES) (Rubenstein et al., 2021). Also, this study did not explore the broader contexts which surrounded CoPiP within the case school. Other school contexts (e.g., those in more affluent and middle-class areas) require further research, with the aim of elucidating if and how school contexts and possible pre-existing risks/disadvantages contribute to CoPiP's presentations in school.

A new and novel finding is that CoPiP are perceived to seek increased connection from adults during PI. School staff did not describe this in a particularly negative or positive light, except for one teacher who alluded to the need for caution in showing care whilst maintaining boundaries and professionalism and mitigating safeguarding risks. An attachment lens, which has previously been drawn upon within the literature surrounding PI and CoPiP (Murray & Murray, 2010; Poehlmann, 2005), may support in interpreting this finding. In situations where a child's secure attachment and secure base with a primary caregiver has been disrupted, they are thought to fill this void elsewhere (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Hence, the finding that CoPiP seek increased adult connection in school could be a result of their attempt to fill the void left by their imprisoned parent's absence and to develop a secure and consistent base within the school. Although Ainsworth (1978) and Bowlby (1979) theorised about attachment over four decades ago, they are pioneers in the field, and their work is widely cited within educational psychology today (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Slater, 2007; Thompson et al., 2022). Hence, attachment theory is well-established and continues to be relevant, making it helpful and useful for understanding this finding.

When considering PI and the perceived needs of CoPiP in the case school (academic difficulties, poor school attendance, emotional and behavioural changes, and seeking adult connection), it may be possible that school staff held preconceived expectations or biases

about CoPiP, underpinned by stigma. This may have impacted their perceptions of this group of children. Whilst this was not the focus of the current study, previous research has found teachers to view CoPiP with lower expectations and as less competent than their peers academically, socially and behaviourally (Dallaire et al., 2010; Wildeman et al., 2017). In the present study, it may be that due to their known status as a CoPiP, teachers held stigmatised beliefs and biases about their capabilities. This may have contributed to their perceptions of CoPiP struggling academically, and the emotional and behavioural challenges spoken about. In the current study, reference to CoPiP 'generally' having low academic abilities could highlight such expectations, specifically in terms of academic competence, although this requires further exploration. Therefore, school staff's expectations of CoPiP's competence in various areas could be an avenue for further consideration and research in the UK.

5.3 Heterogeneity of Children of Parents/Carers in Prison

Although the findings suggest some similarities in CoPiP's perceived needs in the case school, contrasts and differences were evident. Although the theme 'emotional and behavioural changes' was identified, participants noted that different CoPiP showed different emotions and behaviours, and individual children sometimes displayed internalising and externalising behaviours at different times. These findings align with previous research (Murray & Farrington, 2008a; O'Keefe, 2014). Furthermore, the theme 'negative changes are not guaranteed' emerged in the current research, indicating that not all aspects of school or all CoPiP were perceived to be negatively impacted by PI. This contradicts research which has viewed CoPiP with a wholly negative lens and has solely focused on a myriad of adverse outcomes (e.g., Dallaire et al., 2010; McCrickard & Flynn, 2016). It aligns more with other studies that have highlighted more positive narratives around CoPiP (e.g., McGinley & Jones, 2018; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Overall, these current findings accentuate the heterogeneity of CoPiP's needs and that school staff should not take an oversimplified view,

make assumptions or pathologize (Condry, 2012; Knudsen, 2016). It should not be assumed that all children in this position will respond to PI in the same way, have similar presenting needs, or benefit from the same support. Instead, CoPiP are likely to have different support needs in school, and it may be that some CoPiP do not require any targeted intervention, although monitoring may still be needed.

5.4 Protective Factors and Resiliency

CoPiP in the case school were not always viewed to incur negative challenges highlighted through the theme 'negative changes are not guaranteed.' This may be due to the presence of protective factors that buffer against the vulnerabilities and risks associated with PI. Protective factors can be personal qualities or environmental factors (Norman, 2000) and some of those outlined in previous research include distraction, friendships, community groups, hobbies, faith and prayer (Lösel et al., 2012; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Weidberg, 2017). Despite limited knowledge about CoPiP's personal qualities in the case school, some environmental factors from previous research may be relevant to the current findings. School staff in the current study perceived CoPiP to maintain friendships in school, which suggests that they have some social support from friends. Peer support has been found to build resiliency in previous research on ACEs and PI (Jones et al., 2013; Shelemy & Knightsbridge, 2018; Weidberg, 2017). Additionally, the case school is a Roman Catholic setting where faith is embedded into the school day through assemblies, collective worships and religious education. This focus on faith in the case school may have acted as a protective factor for some CoPiP, with tailored worships and prayer providing support and being perceived as helpful. Overall, this suggests that faith and peer support/friendships may be beneficial to some CoPiP and may help to buffer the risks associated with PI. However, CoPiP's protective factors and support preferences are likely to differ, and their voices would need to be captured to confirm this.

Participant data and quotes pertaining to the theme ‘negative changes are not guaranteed’ suggested that PI was a relatively normal situation within the case school and CoPiP were not the ‘odd ones out.’ This may have built resiliency against the risks and vulnerabilities associated with PI and may have mitigated adverse outcomes for some CoPiP in the case school. The presence of other CoPiP in the case school may have created a sense of normalcy, with CoPiP not feeling alone in their circumstance and possibly feeling accepted and included. This may have increased their school connectedness, which Goodenow (1993) defines as *“…the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment”* (p. 80). Research has found school connectedness to be associated with preventing delinquent behaviour, increasing school motivation and achievement, and overall positive psychosocial outcomes in children and young people generally (Maddox & Prinz, 2003; Shochet et al., 2006). School connectedness has also been identified as a particularly salient protective factor for CoPiP when there is the absence of strong family and parent support (Nichols et al., 2016). Moreover, CoPiP with low ‘behavioural problems’ in school have been found to have significantly higher school connectedness compared to CoPiP who displayed frequent externalising behaviours and loneliness or depression (Kremer et al., 2020). Therefore, school connectedness may have buffered against the vulnerability attached to PI in the case school and led to some CoPiP being perceived as less negatively affected. However, no research has been conducted which has drawn direct links between the number of CoPiP in educational settings and the presence of school connectedness, nor has the case school been compared to different settings (e.g., those where there are few known pupils experiencing PI). Hence, this is a tentative hypothesis and requires further research.

Moreover, further participant data and quotes related to the finding ‘negative changes are not guaranteed’ suggest that adverse impacts or changes in school may be mitigated when

families are honest and open about PI, both with the child (e.g., providing awareness of their imprisoned parent's whereabouts and when they will be seeing them), and with school staff. The need for honesty with CoPiP about PI has been emphasised and recommended in research (Lockwood & Raikes, 2016; Manby et al., 2015) and by NGOs and charities (e.g., Families Outside, 2018). This is to prevent CoPiP from learning about PI through other means (e.g., the internet, television or 'playground gossip') (Families Outside, 2018). Previous research has found that CoPiP can experience worry due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about PI, which is sometimes due to parents giving alternative explanations for the imprisoned parent's absence (Dallaire, 2007). Additionally, the importance of school staff having knowledge of CoPiP's circumstances is well documented within the literature, particularly in terms of being able to offer appropriate support to CoPiP in school (O'Keefe, 2014; Morgan et al., 2013; 2014). This was echoed within the current study. It may also be that when there is honesty and an open dialogue between the family and school staff, CoPiP do not feel the need to withhold information and keep secrets at school, which is common among this group (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; McGinley & Jones, 2018; Weidberg, 2017). This could be due to them knowing that others (e.g., school staff) are aware of their circumstance and may result in CoPiP feeling less shame and more accepted. This could lead to positive outcomes in school and reduce the perceived challenges. The case school's stated commitment to a community ethos and their aim to create a welcoming, non-judgemental atmosphere (as per their website) may support such honesty and openness. However, openness and transparency across the school were not widely mentioned by participants; they mainly seemed to be discussed in relation to one child and may therefore not have been a common experience for CoPiP in the case school. Nevertheless, it may be beneficial for educational settings to work closely with families in this position to create and maintain an open, honest dialogue and to promote an ethos that encourages families to feel comfortable

sharing their circumstances. For this to be successful, staff may need to undertake open and honest reflections on their own biases and beliefs, in addition to challenging the stigma and shame attached to PI.

5.5 Supporting the Needs of Children of Parents/Carers in Prison in School

5.5.1 Individual Support

The current findings suggest that CoPiP may have some additional needs in school which staff associate with PI, namely academic difficulties, poor school attendance, emotional and behavioural changes, and seeking adult connection. However, some of these needs may not initially require an approach to support that is different to or more than pupils with similar needs but for other reasons (e.g., pupils with learning difficulties, young carers, those affected by poor parental mental health, etc). For example, if a child affected by PI is found to be struggling academically, reasonable adjustments around learning considered 'universal support' (e.g., differentiated learning, breaking tasks down, and alternative ways of recording work) may be sufficient, along with following a graduated approach. The graduated approach encompasses four stages (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015) and is outlined in Appendix K. Additionally, regarding low/reduced attendance, school staff's response is unlikely to be notably different to other children with low attendance due to national legal frameworks that schools are required to follow (Department for Education, 2024b). This may reduce staff's worries and increase their confidence when supporting CoPiP as they can rely on existing knowledge, guidance and frameworks. However, although the approach may not differ, it is important to emphasise that the support itself will need to be person centred and adapted to suit individual children. Having knowledge of the possible contributing factor of PI will help school staff provide this tailored, individualised support. It will also contribute to staff's understanding of CoPiP, increase empathy, and move away from

a ‘within child’ narrative. Additionally, it may help education staff be mindful of their language and adopt a sensitive approach to these issues.

Interestingly, it was suggested that poor school attendance continued for some CoPiP when parents were released from prison, as these children wanted to spend more time with their reunited parent. Similarly, academic difficulties were also viewed to continue after the imprisoned parent’s release. Although this continuation of attendance and academic difficulties has not been explicitly mentioned in the existing body of literature, headteachers in O’Keefe’s (2014) study did refer to school-related difficulties not necessarily ceasing when parents are released from prison. Additionally, these current findings align with other research that acknowledges that families have challenges to overcome even after a parent’s release from prison (Beatty, 1997; Naser & Visher, 2006). One hypothesis is that these ongoing challenges may be a result of pre-existing risks/difficulties which may continue after a parent’s release, such as poverty and inequality which were spoken about earlier in this chapter. This suggests that some CoPiP may be vulnerable to ongoing challenges in school, even after a parent is released from prison, and monitoring and support may need to continue.

Some of the current practice for responding to and supporting CoPiP in the case school appeared to involve direct, targeted work based on CoPiP’s individual needs. This was highlighted by the themes ‘offering individual support which is flexible’ and ‘time with adults who CoPiP can connect with.’ This included one-to-one or small group work with the school’s learning mentor, which involved talking with CoPiP, giving them the space to share their worries (e.g., through ‘therapeutic conversations’), and completing structured games and activities to explore their thoughts and feelings. Other strategies, approaches and interventions that seem more ‘specific’ to CoPiP were also mentioned, such as providing breakfast if needed and encouraging CoPiP to use diaries or write letters. These more targeted ways of supporting CoPiP align with Shaw et al.’s (2022) systematic review of how UK

schools can support CoPiP and some of the identified support in Roberts and Loucks' (2015) research. The finding that CoPiP seek increased adult connection in school also underscores the need for CoPiP to have opportunities to spend time with trusted adults, especially when considering that this is an important protective factor for CoPiP (Lösel et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2013). This is something the case school seem to have implemented, with CoPiP typically spending time with the learning mentor, in addition to other adults in the setting who adopt a caring, nurturing approach.

Within the case school there was flexibility in the type, amount, and frequency of individual support, demonstrated by the theme 'offering individual support which is flexible.' For example, learning mentor support took place individually or in a group, was ad hoc or on a regular timetabled basis, and various strategies, approaches and interventions were implemented in line with CoPiP's individual needs as previously mentioned. These findings suggest that a 'one size fits all' approach cannot be taken, rather each child's presentation and circumstances require individual consideration. Furthermore, given participants' references to providing some CoPiP with breakfast and CoPiP seeking connection from adults in school, Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs may serve as a useful reference point for school staff when considering what support CoPiP may require at an individual level. This is because providing breakfast suggests that some CoPiP's basic physiological needs may not be met, while seeking adult connection alludes to their need for love and belonging (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Maslow, 1987). However, an excessive focus on this hierarchy may lead to an oversimplified view of CoPiP, which school staff should remain mindful of.

5.5.2 Considering and Adapting the Curriculum

The case school's current response and support for CoPiP involved considering and adapting aspects of the school's curriculum. This included considering the appropriateness of and showing sensitivity towards teaching content and topics and tailoring the school's

collective worships to the experience of PI, both of which have not been mentioned in previous research. Collective worships appear to be a key element of the case school's culture and could be positioned as a cultural artefact due to being clearly visible (Schein, 2004). For example, the school's website details a 'collective worship policy'. This culture may underpin aspects of the case school's response to and support for CoPiP, in addition to possibly explaining why worship and prayer have not been mentioned as a means of school support in previous literature. Other studies may not have explored settings with as much focus on faith and religion. It is worth considering that the effectiveness and benefit of such support (e.g., collective worships) is likely to be dependent on the religious beliefs of CoPiP and their families and whether faith serves as a protective factor for them.

In relation to teaching content, topics which may relate to PI are approached sensitively and adapted or omitted if needed in the case school. This somewhat aligns with the recommendations from Roberts and Loucks (2015) and Shaw et al. (2022) for supporting CoPiP, however these previous studies focused more on using the curriculum to challenge stigma and to educate about and address issues such as crime and punishment. The current literature around how school staff can support CoPiP has thus far not mentioned making adaptations to lesson or curriculum content, possibly due to the limited exploration of the views of teaching staff - a gap in the literature that this research has endeavoured to begin to address. This current finding is important as it highlights how school staff could be mindful of their lesson content and the language they use, and how they should use professional autonomy and judgement when supporting CoPiP in the classroom.

5.5.3 Designated Named Person

Current findings highlight that the learning mentor in the case school plays a central role in supporting and responding to CoPiP. Although not directly reflected by a theme, there was reference to the learning mentor's role within the two themes: 'offering individual

support which is flexible' and 'time with adults who CoPiP can connect with.' In the case school, the learning mentor was a key contact for the family and non-imprisoned parent. They were also involved in, and typically led, TAF meetings and provided direct, targeted intervention for CoPiP on both a scheduled and ad hoc basis. These duties of the learning mentor appear to largely align with the Department for Education's description of the learning mentor role (Constable & Roberts, 2003 as cited in Bishop, 2011), as well as with research where learning mentors directly outlined their key responsibilities (Bishop, 2011). However, neither the description nor the research references a specific role for learning mentors in supporting CoPiP. Instead, concerns which are cited to result in learning mentor involvement include, but are not limited to, bereavement, bullying, low self-esteem, anger, 'disruptive' behaviour, self-harming and poor attendance (Bishop, 2011). Some of these concerns overlap with CoPiP's perceived needs in the case school, suggesting that the learning mentor is involved with CoPiP due to their presenting needs rather than the standalone reason of PI. This is supported by the participating SENCo, who stated that learning mentor support is not always specifically targeted at CoPiP. Because of this, CoPiP who are not showing noticeable outward behaviours or visible difficulties, but who may be struggling in more subtle ways may go under the radar in school and not get the support they need.

Despite no research or guidance outlining the key role of the learning mentor for CoPiP, there are recommendations for schools to have a designated and named adult who takes on most of the responsibility for CoPiP and coordinates their support (Morgan et al., 2013; O'Keefe, 2014). In the case school, the learning mentor most closely fits this role, and their work with CoPiP was viewed as beneficial, especially the direct intervention and time spent with CoPiP. However, as mentioned, the learning mentor's support and role are needs-based; they are not explicitly named as the key adult or person for CoPiP, which could

account for why they may not be involved with all CoPiP, but only those with visible social and emotional needs. As this might result in some CoPiP going under the radar, it may be helpful for educational settings to explicitly designate and name a specific person to hold this role. This designated person could then monitor the needs of all CoPiP, oversee and coordinate their support, share information with key staff, and be available in school to complete more direct, targeted work with CoPiP as needed. However, this role needs to be approached carefully, especially when thinking about the potential impact if this designated/named person is absent.

5.6 Considering the Family System

The current findings also draw attention to the family system, with perceived stressors and strains for the non-imprisoned parent being mentioned by participants. This suggests that the impacts of PI extend beyond the individual child, which may contribute to what school staff observe (e.g., CoPiP's poor attendance, academic difficulties, needing breakfast and untidy appearance). This also indicates that support may be needed at this wider, family level. The potential impact of PI on the non-imprisoned parent, and the knock-on effect this may have for CoPiP, largely aligns with a sociological perspective, namely strain theory. Strain theory hypothesises that PI can create strain in the family (economic, social and caregiving) and that this negatively impacts CoPiP (Agnew, 2006). However, strain theory is usually applied to explaining reasons underpinning CoPiP's anti-social and offending activity. Hence, it may not be appropriate to draw upon this theoretical perspective when thinking about and seeking to understand the diverse needs of CoPiP in school. Perhaps a more helpful theory to consider here is Arditti's (2016) family stress-proximal process model which looks at how PI affects the non-imprisoned parent and CoPiP. This model posits that the non-imprisoned parent is likely to experience a sense of loss and parenting stress as a result of PI. They may be physically, emotionally, and financially overwhelmed which may impede caregiving

responsibilities and impact on a child's adjustment. However, Arditti's (2016) model does not assume that this one mechanism explains child adjustment; other factors such as contact, visiting experiences, resilience and contextual variables are also part of their model. Nevertheless, understanding that non-imprisoned parents may experience stressors and strains because of PI (Agnew, 2006; Arditti, 2016), in addition to knowledge of the interacting systems of school and home (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), highlights the merits of extending support to the family system.

In the case school, current practice for supporting and responding to CoPiP was found to extend to this family level, highlighted through the theme 'considering the wider family.' Within the case school, non-imprisoned parents are provided with the space and opportunity to talk and offload, in addition to TAF meetings being held. This is consistent with previous research where support for the family has been encouraged (O'Keefe, 2014; Roberts and Loucks, 2015; Shaw et al., 2022). However, Shaw et al. (2022) and O'Keefe (2014) discuss support for both the imprisoned and non-imprisoned parent, which contrasts with the lack of mention of the imprisoned parent in the current study. This suggests that participants may not perceive this aspect of support as part of their responsibility or within their remit. However, this omission may be due to the absence of specific questions or prompts about support for parents in the interview schedule.

5.7 Information Sharing

'Information sharing with school and within school' was identified as a key theme, spanning research questions two and three, and will be discussed in this section. The current findings suggest that information about PI was generally shared with the case school and CoPiP were therefore identified. As a result, CoPiP were not positioned as a 'hidden population' within the case school, as discussed in prior research (Morgan et al., 2014). This identification enabled support to be implemented, such as adaptations to lesson content,

tailoring collective worships, targeted intervention with the learning mentor for apparent social and emotional needs, and other specific strategies such as writing letters and diaries. It was found that this information sharing with school and consequent identification generally resulted from disclosures from the non-imprisoned parent or the children themselves, as well as staff connections with the local community. These avenues of identification echo those spoken about by some education staff in O'Keefe's (2014) and McCrickard and Flynn's (2016) studies. Within the case school, one staff member lived in the local area and was very much 'in the know' about children and families with this circumstance. She would often share this information with the school's headteacher. This highlights the potential role of the community, as well as the importance of school's promoting an accepting and non-judgemental atmosphere, such that families feel able to disclose their circumstances. Within the case school, the relative normalcy of PI and the school's proposed community ethos and values may have encouraged children and parents to share their situation.

Information sharing within the case school, between staff members, appeared to be less successful and acted as a barrier to supporting CoPiP. These findings echo internal communication challenges referred to by education staff within McCrickard and Flynn's (2016) study. The current findings highlight how the case school's learning mentor held most of the information on CoPiP, which did not always reach staff members who needed to know about these circumstances to make decisions about supporting CoPiP (e.g., teachers). Additionally, aside from references to the role of the learning mentor, there was found to be minimal overlap in participant's responses when asked about the current practice for responding to and supporting CoPiP in the case school. Instead, school staff seemed to take their own initiative and judge what might be most beneficial for each individual child they worked with. This is similar to Morgan et al. (2014) who found that school staff implemented support for CoPiP 'off their own bat.' Overall, the current findings suggest that practice and

knowledge are not necessarily shared among staff within the case school and there may not be a joined-up picture of support. Instead, different staff members may be working in silos which could lead to inconsistencies in the approaches to support.

The current finding that information was not always shared among staff within the case school could be linked to school's systems of information sharing, which will be underpinned by the UK's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act (2018). However, government guidance on information sharing (Department for Education, 2024a) states that data protection legislation does not prevent the sharing of information for the purpose of safeguarding children. Sharing information about CoPiP could be classed as safeguarding due to there being established risks and the need to support their wellbeing. Therefore, careful consideration needs to be given to how relevant information is cascaded through schools in an appropriate, safe, and sensitive way to ensure CoPiP's needs are met and those who are not showing visible needs can also be monitored.

School staff in the case school felt that greater information sharing was needed to further support CoPiP. This includes having access to more information about children's individual circumstances (e.g., parent's crime and visit dates) and prison processes (e.g., prison visits and bail), and increased information sharing within school. Having limited information and knowledge may potentially make staff feel disempowered, unvalued, and lacking the self-efficacy and confidence to effectively support CoPiP (Collinson, 2004; Steyn, 2001). Improved collaboration and information sharing could be facilitated by stronger partnerships between schools and prison/probation services, as suggested by Morgan et al. (2014). Designating a specific individual to oversee and coordinate support for CoPiP, while ensuring efficient information sharing, is also recommended. However, while information sharing is important for safeguarding CoPiP and ensuring their needs are met, school staff's expectations and aspirations of CoPiP may diminish upon learning about their circumstances,

as indicated by Dallaire et al. (2010) and Wildeman et al. (2017). Although this requires further exploration, it highlights that if greater information is to be shared within school, staff must also develop awareness of their own unconscious biases.

5.8 Staff Training

Within Roberts and Loucks' (2015) study, teacher training was viewed as the most important and helpful way that schools can support CoPiP. Similarly, participants in Morgan et al.'s (2014) study viewed training as a way of strengthening school support. However, in the current study, participants had not received relevant training, aligning with McCrickard and Flynn's (2016) research where participating teachers had limited awareness of appropriate and relevant training opportunities. Participants reported that they tend to learn about CoPiP and how to support them through experience, although a desire for specific training around the possible impacts PI and how to support this group of children in school was expressed. This is highlighted by the theme 'staff training' under research question three.

5.9 Strengths and Limitations of the Current Research

This study has researched a relatively unexplored area in the UK and has provided new, qualitative and detailed insight into primary school staff's views on how CoPiP present in school, as well as current practice for responding to and supporting this group in one mainstream primary school setting. This builds on previous research which has predominantly focused on the quantitative investigation of CoPiP's educational experiences through measuring school-related outcomes, and the qualitative exploration of the views of school staff outside of the UK and the views of headteachers in the UK.

The use of a case study design, with the research taking place in one primary school setting, allowed for the views of staff with differing roles to be explored and a detailed, holistic picture of current practice in this one school system to be built. This has highlighted

how different staff members fit into the school's response to supporting CoPiP and provides useful considerations and implications for practice, both at a systemic level within schools as well as at an individual level, while also contributing to the knowledge base. I had completed prior work in the case school whilst on placement as a TEP, hence I could be classed as an 'insider.' This insider position was beneficial as I had already built a level of familiarity, rapport, and trust with some school staff in the setting. This made gaining access to the setting, and willing and consenting participants who acknowledged and understood the research objectives easier, in addition to them adhering to the set interview dates and times.

Despite the strengths associated with being an insider, this position can also bring methodological and ethical challenges. For example, Greene (2014) noted that insider research can be less objectively critical and have greater bias (Greene, 2014). On reflection, I did not always question, challenge, or follow up on points due to my familiarity with this school system. This could have led to some useful, important insight being missed. Furthermore, there are potential risks and challenges associated with recruitment when a researcher is an 'insider' in an organisation or system, or is familiar with participants. Researchers need to be mindful of coercion and compliance, and academics have cautioned that participants could feel obligated to participate (Aburn et al., 2021; Smyth & Holian, 2008). Within the current study there are several factors and steps I took during recruitment that I believe mitigated such risks. Firstly, although having previously worked in the case school as a TEP, I was not a constant presence in the school nor a permanent employee and the time I spent there was fairly intermittent (e.g., termly contact). This meant that I was not enmeshed in the school system, and I did not have existing working relationships with four of the participants. I had only previously directly worked with one participant, the school's SENCo. It was this staff member who initially expressed an interest in the study, via email, when I reached out to several primary school settings who may be suitable for the research,

which suggests an absence of obligation. Furthermore, during recruitment, information was shared prior to gaining written consent and conducting the interviews, giving participants time to digest the information and decide whether to participate. Informed consent was also gained, and the voluntary nature of participation was emphasised.

The sample in this study is small, with only five participants from the 'case' school being interviewed. Other staff members in this setting may have had different views, and staff from different schools might experience and view things differently as well. Additionally, as discussed in this chapter, the findings from the current study may have been shaped by the context of the case school, including the school's ethos and values, religious focus, prioritisation of pastoral needs, demographics in the surrounding area, and staffing (e.g., having a learning mentor). Hence, the findings cannot be directly generalised to other primary school staff and other schools, such as those in different areas and with different contexts to the case school. Despite this limitation, this research is informed by critical realism which recognises that knowledge is socially located and different people in different contexts experience and view things differently (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, this research does not aim to generalise but rather provides a starting point for understanding CoPiP's needs in school and the current practice for responding and supporting them in educational settings.

On reflection, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed staff to talk relatively freely and flexibly about their views on CoPiP and enabled data to be collected in a fairly consistent and systematic way (Cohen et al., 2018). Despite this, interviews are an artificial and set up situation and the interview schedule, which was shared beforehand, may have drawn participants' attention to aspects they might not have considered outside of the interview space. Additionally, interviewees potentially came to the interviews with predetermined thoughts, ideas and answers due to having prior access to the interview

schedule. It would have been interesting to explore primary school staff's views of CoPiP and current practice within naturally occurring situations and conversation in school, such as through ethnographic research. However, this may have been difficult due to practical and time constraints and would have posed ethical dilemmas as children may have been within ear shot. It is also felt that semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate data collection method for achieving the research objectives, given that the interview schedule was prepared in advance, guided by the research questions.

5.10 Implications

5.10.1 Implications for School Staff

School staff should be mindful that although some CoPiP may display similar needs in school, this group of children is heterogeneous, with their specific circumstances and reactions to PI likely differing. Therefore, while being mindful of the potential challenges associated with PI, school staff should avoid over pathologizing and should not assume that adverse outcomes will occur for all CoPiP. CoPiP are likely to have different support needs in school, which may extend beyond PI (i.e., after release), and some CoPiP may not require targeted intervention. However, these children should be closely monitored, and staff should remain mindful of their circumstances and associated vulnerabilities. It may be helpful for staff to draw on their knowledge of the graduated approach to support, national frameworks for some of these needs (e.g., academic difficulties and low attendance), and theoretical frameworks such as Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs may be a helpful reference point for school staff when considering what support may be needed for individual children. Additionally, school staff should approach lesson content/topics related to PI sensitively, along with being mindful of the language they use. However, a 'one size fits all' approach should not be taken when responding to and supporting CoPiP. Instead, support needs to be flexible, adaptable and person-centred.

Information sharing within the case school did not always appear effective, with pertinent information about CoPiP not necessarily reaching those who may need it (e.g., teachers), which created barriers to supporting some CoPiP. Therefore, school systems should consider how key information pertaining to CoPiP, which is necessary for safeguarding them, monitoring their needs and ensuring adequate support is in place, can be shared with key staff. The sensitivity of this information will need to be considered, along with obtaining parent consent/agreement. Another implication for schools is to work to promote a non-judgemental, accepting and open ethos, such that families may feel comfortable in sharing their circumstances and to support in creating an open, honest dialogue between home and school, which will allow for CoPiP to be better supported. Staff should also remain mindful about the stressors and strains on the non-imprisoned parent during PI and consider how they can potentially alleviate this and extend their support.

Within the current study, the case school's learning mentor played a key role in responding to and supporting CoPiP, although this support appeared to be needs-based rather than due to their known experience of PI. The learning mentor was also not explicitly positioned as the designated/named person for CoPiP, as recommended by some charities and LA policies (e.g., Evans, 2009; Weidberg, 2017). Having a clear designated person in school settings with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities may be more effective and helpful in overcoming barriers in terms of information sharing and increasing collaborative, joined up working. These responsibilities could include coordinating CoPiP's support, sharing information with key staff, monitoring those who may not be displaying visible difficulties, and delivering targeted intervention as needed. However, the supportive role of other staff members should not be disregarded, as they may offer valuable ideas and strategies that the designated person has not considered, and they may be better positioned to form trusting relationships with CoPiP.

Finally, due to limited knowledge on what prison processes look like (e.g., visitation), schools may wish to reach out to external agencies (e.g., the prison service) to better understand what CoPiP may experience. This may go on to inform their approach to support.

5.10.2 Implications for Educational Psychologists

Consultation is a key aspect of the EP role (Scottish Executive, 2002) and could be used to encourage school staff to take an ecological perspective in understanding the presentation of CoPiP in school (e.g., sensitively considering what changes may have occurred in the home setting because of PI and the impact of interacting systems). Moreover, it will be important for EPs to encourage school staff to view 'behaviour as communication', especially considering the emotional and behavioural changes which were perceived to occur in the current study. Additionally, considering that negative changes were found to not be guaranteed for CoPiP in the case school, EPs should draw attention and awareness to the heterogeneity of CoPiP and support school staff in adopting a strengths-based approach. A risk and resilience framework could also be used by EPs to encourage school staff to conside existing risk and protective factors, and how potential protective factors (e.g., school connectedness) could be further increased and strengthened.

In the current study, some CoPiP were perceived to experience challenges including poor school attendance. Within the literature surrounding EP practice, EPs are asserted as having an important and unique role in supporting children and young people who are experiencing difficulties with school attendance (Goldstein et al., 2003; Goodman & Scott, 2012). Additionally, there are a growing number of EPSs publishing guidance and 'pathways' to support school attendance (e.g., Derbyshire EPS, n.d.; West Sussex EPS, 2022). With this in mind, EPs may be well positioned to support CoPiP who have poor attendance. This could be achieved through working at different levels, as outlined by Pellegrini (2007). Pellegrini (2007) states that EPs can support difficulties with attendance through supporting the pupil

(e.g., assessing presenting needs, implementing interventions and therapeutic approaches), the family (e.g., training and modelling good practice) and school (e.g., training on non-attendance and acting as a mediator between school and families). Moreover, EPs could support the attendance of CoPiP by working collaboratively with pupils, school staff and their families to unpick and understand the 'function' of the poor or non-attendance, identify 'push and 'pull' factors which may be contributing to the situation, and devise ways forward and next steps.

Within the current study, participants alluded to the possible stressors and strains of PI on the non-imprisoned parent/carer. Although this was speculative, it highlights how the impacts of PI may understandably extend across the family system and how this requires consideration when supporting the needs of CoPiP due to connections between home and school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This is something that the case school seems to be addressing to some extent, with the theme 'considering the wider family' emerging. EPs could support both the family and school through a joint systems approach whereby eco-systemic consultations are facilitated. Such consultations would bring school staff and the family together, support each system to develop an increased and accurate understanding of what is happening in the other and how they interact, provide both parties with the space to feel heard, and promote collaboration in supporting the CoPiP. Within such consultations circular questioning, which aims to *"draw connections and distinctions between members of systems"* (Pelligrini, 2009, p. 274), will be important to minimise judgement and blame. Use of person-centred planning approaches and tools, such as 'planning alternative tomorrows with hope' (PATHs) and 'making action plans together' (MAPs) could also be drawn upon here to create a shared vision and goal/s with families and school staff.

Within the current research, participants expressed a desire for relevant training, and EPs could be well placed to facilitate and deliver this. This could focus on the known and

researched impacts of having a parent in prison, along with strategies, approaches, and interventions to support this group being shared. This training should be informed by psychological theories and approaches, such as attachment theory, the impact of ACEs and trauma informed practice, along with the applications of these within the classroom.

Finally, EPs could support school staff in undertaking honest reflections on their beliefs, biases, and expectations of CoPiP through supervision and coaching, in order to help them to become reflective practitioners and promote an inclusive approach to supporting CoPiP. EPs are also well placed to offer support by facilitating consultations between school staff, for example by setting up and leading group consultations so that staff have a forum to share their practices.

5.10.3 Implications for Future Research

The current study's findings build on the existing body of literature around PI and enhance our understanding of CoPiP's needs in school and current practices for responding to and supporting this group of children. However, as this research was conducted in only one primary school with five participants, it would be useful to extend this research to other primary school settings to gain a broader view of how CoPiP present in school, their possible needs in school and how they are supported and responded to. It would also be helpful to explore this across different settings (e.g., secondary schools, larger school settings, schools in more affluent areas, specialist settings and pupil referral units). This would reveal if and how different school contexts contribute to CoPiP's presenting needs. It would also help to identify similarities and differences and enable evidence-based practice to be better established.

Another interesting and useful avenue for future research would be to conduct research similar to Dallaire et al. (2010) and Wildeman et al. (2017), who explored teachers'

expectations of CoPiP. This would provide insight into whether UK school staff hold any unconscious biases or stigma that may contribute to CoPiP's perceived challenges and needs. Finally, although this research has focused on school staff's views, the importance of directly gaining children and young people's views and experiences remains extremely important; this continues to be an under researched area in the UK and should be explored further.

5.11 Concluding Statement

This study aimed to develop a better understanding of the needs of CoPiP in school, in addition to contributing to the knowledge base pertaining to current UK school practice for supporting and responding to CoPiP. These aims have been achieved through gathering the views of five primary school staff within one mainstream primary school which were captured through individual interviews and analysed using RTA.

CoPiP were perceived to experience challenges in school which link to PI, however adverse changes and outcomes were not always present. This highlights that although CoPiP may be a vulnerable group, children's circumstances and presenting needs are likely to be heterogeneous, and protective factors and resiliency are likely to be present. Current practice in the case school seemed to be fairly holistic due to being targeted at different levels (e.g., individual and family levels, and curriculum considerations) and the learning mentor seemed to have a key role in this support and response. This support seemed to be predominantly needs-led, rather than due to the circumstance of PI. Information sharing and staff training were the two key areas where further support was perceived to be required.

It is worth reiterating that this study is not without limitations, particularly since the research was conducted in one mainstream primary school. Hence, it is likely that the context, structure and ethos surrounding this school may have accounted for some of the

findings and may not be reflective of other school staff or settings. Nonetheless, the findings allow for consideration of implications for school staff, EPs and future research.

It is truly hoped that this study's contribution to knowledge will, in time, go on to stimulate further research and ultimately contribute to improving the school experiences of CoPiP and potentially their current and future outcomes.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A

Reflection on my values and beliefs relevant to the research

Through working with children and young people in previous roles and my experiences during the doctoral training course, previous beliefs and values have been altered and new ones developed. One belief which has relevance to the current research is the view that child development is impacted by and dependent on the various systems around them (e.g., education setting, home, family, wider society, etc), in addition to the interplay between them (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Because of this, I am committed to encouraging those who work with and support children and young people within educational settings to be curious about behaviour and to view things holistically, and through multiple lenses, particularly considering whether any early adversity has occurred and taking a trauma informed approach. This belief in the importance of taking a holistic, systemic approach to understanding child development has very much guided my research focus.

Moreover, conversations with staff in educational settings about CoPiP have further shaped my beliefs. I now view that PI will impact on children and young people in some way, which may be visible in the school setting, and that further in-school support is likely to be needed for this group of children. I believe that there will be some heterogeneity within this group, with not all responding in the exact same way to these circumstances or requiring identical support. However, I do anticipate there to be common themes and patterns such that a fairly consistent approach to support could be taken, but with this support remaining flexible so modifications and adaptations can be made to each individual child.

A final key belief I hold which is relevant to this research is that school staff may be able to provide valuable insight into these children's personal and educational experiences, presentation in school and available support, and that this is best captured through personal interactions such as face-to-face interviews.

Appendix B

Ethical Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Dear Nooreen Khan, James Birchwood ,

RE: Primary School Staff's Views and Experiences of Working with Children of Imprisoned Parents/Carers: A Case Study Exploration

Application for Ethical Review: ERN_0758 -Mar 2023

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

Appendix C

Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Primary School Staff's Views and Experiences of Working with Children of Imprisoned Parents/Carers: A Case Study Exploration

What is involved and when?

- Individual interviews with mainstream primary school staff at *** Primary School who:
  - Have previously worked or currently work with at least one child who has experienced the incarceration of a parent/carer. This contact/involved will have been relatively sustained and not merely coincidental.
- One face-to-face interview in your school setting, lasting between 30 minutes and 1 hour. This will be completed at a time convenient for you.
- The interview will explore your views and experiences of working with children of imprisoned parents/carers.

Who is conducting this research project?

Rachel Hanrahan, Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Birmingham and currently on placement in X Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Dr X (Senior Educational Psychologist at X EPS) is supervising Rachel on placement.

Background and Aims

There is a growing number of children who are affected by parental imprisonment in the UK, and research has found that this brings greater risk of negative outcomes, including anti-social behaviour, poor mental health, lower academic attainment, school dropout and stigmatisation. However, due to limited research, relatively little known is known about children of imprisoned parents/carers in UK schools, and the views and experiences of primary school staff have not yet been captured.

This research aims to explore your perspectives on the educational experiences and presentation of children of imprisoned parents/carers; current practice for supporting these children in your setting; and perspectives on how these children could be further supported.

What will taking part involve?

Participation will involve answering questions that relate to your views and experiences of working with children of imprisoned parents/carers. On request, you can receive a copy of the interview schedule prior to your interview. With your consent, the interviews will be audio recorded, which you can choose to stop at any point. This recording will be deleted as soon as there is a written transcript of your interview.

What are the potential benefits and risks of taking part?

Contributing to this research will hopefully be a rewarding experience and an opportunity to share your views and reflect on your experiences of working with children of imprisoned parents/carers. Participation is voluntary and you are free to leave the interview or stop the audio recording at any time, and you can opt out of answering any questions.

If necessary, you can access support from the Educational Support Partnership, a UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of education staff. Their national helpline is 08000 562561 and their website is https://www.educationsupport.org.uk.

What will happen if I do not wish to continue the study?

To take part in the study, written consent will be needed. You will be able to withdraw from this research within 2 weeks of your individual interview. You will not have to provide an explanation for withdrawing and there will be no negative consequences for you. Your data will be destroyed and not included in the research if you chose to withdraw in the 2-week withdrawal period.

How will my data be kept confidential?

Your identity will be treated as confidential and any identifiable information will either be removed or replaced with a pseudonym during transcription. You will not be identifiable in any research outputs (written or verbal). The information provided will solely be used for research purposes.

In line with University of Birmingham policy, your data will be securely stored in a password-encrypted file using the University's secure software (UoB BEAR DataShare). The audio recordings will be deleted following transcription, and any paperwork will be scanned and kept securely in electronic format, with the physical copies being confidentially shredded.

This research project has been reviewed by the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

What will be the outcome of this research?

The interviews from this research will be analysed as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis. Publications, reports or presentations may result from this research. Your identity will remain confidential throughout, with no identifiable information included in any of these research outputs. After this research project has been completed the key findings will be summarised in a short presentation, which you and the primary school you work within will be invited to attend at a convenient time. Again, your identity will remain confidential during this.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Rachel Hanrahan via email at [redacted]. The lead supervisor of this research project is Dr Nooreen Khan (Academic Tutor at the University of Birmingham) who can be contacted via email at [redacted] should you have any further questions.

Thank you for your interest in this research project and for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you decide to participate, it will be greatly valued and appreciated as I believe it could support children who have a parent/carer in prison.

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Primary School Staff's Views and Experiences of Working with Children of Imprisoned Parents/Carers: A Case Study Exploration

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the present research project. I understand/confirm that:

1. I have read the information sheet for the above project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. My participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw within 2 weeks of my individual interview. I understand that I can withdraw without explanation, and this will incur no consequences. ☐
3. Any information I share will be used solely for the purposes of this research project. There may be a chance that this research is included in future publications, academic conferences or seminar presentations. ☐
4. I will be audio-recorded which will be kept confidential and this will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed. ☐
5. All information will be treated as confidential, with no identifiable information being included in the written transcripts or research outputs. Pseudonyms will be used for any identifiable features. ☐
6. The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity. ☐

Name of participant	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix E

Headteacher Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

RESEARCH PROJECT:

Primary School Staff's Views and Experiences of Working with Children of Imprisoned Parents/Carers: A Case Study Exploration

I understand that ..... have been invited to participate in a research project looking at mainstream primary school staff's views and experiences of working with children of imprisoned parents/cares, which will involve completing interviews with several members of staff in the setting. ☐

I understand the aims of this research project, the potential risks and benefits, the outcome of this research, that no identifiable information regarding specific children will be gained and that informed consent will be obtained from staff members who participate. ☐

I am happy for the school setting to be involved in this research. ☐

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix F

Data Management Plan

Data description

What types of data will be used or created?

- Qualitative data regarding mainstream primary school staff's views and experiences of working with children who have parents/carers in prison will be gathered through semi-structured interviews.
- These interviews will produce verbal data (audio recordings on a Dictaphone), which will then be transcribed to create written data.

How will the data be structured and documented?

- The interview data will initially be verbal and then will be transcribed to create written data. Any identifiable information (e.g., names) will be anonymised when transcribing, either being removed from the data or a pseudonym used. Audio recordings will be deleted as soon as the data has been transcribed.
- The written transcriptions of each interview will be in separate Microsoft Word documents with consistent names (e.g., Interview 1, Interview 2, etc) to keep the data organised. These word documents will kept in one file ahead of and following analysis.

Data storage and archiving

How will your data be stored and backed up?

- The audio recordings from the interviews will initially be uploaded to the University of Birmingham's secure OneDrive at the earliest opportunity, and the Dictaphone will be stored securely in my home office, in a lockable draw/filing cabinet.
- Interview transcriptions will be stored securely in a password encrypted file using the University of Birmingham's software (UoB BEAR DataShare) in the Research Data Store (RDS). This is restricted to project members and backup copies are taken daily.

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

- The data is not envisaged to be of a highly sensitive nature. However, if any identifiable information is spoken about during the interviews (e.g., names), pseudonyms will be used to anonymise such information during transcription. The audio files will then be deleted.
- Project members will only have access to the data held within the RDS.

Where will your data be archived in the long term?

- The University of Birmingham BEAR Archive.

Data sharing

Which data will you share, and under which conditions?

- Publication of my research project which will contain the reporting of the analysed data, which will be shared through the University of Birmingham's eData repository. I may also speak about the findings of this project to peers and other professionals, for example during conferences. However, within all these research outputs the data will remain confidential.

Appendix G

Interview Schedule

Introduction

As you know, my name is Rachel, and I am a trainee Child and Educational Psychologist studying at the University of Birmingham. As part of my training, I have to carry out a research project.

I have chosen to focus on mainstream primary school staff's views and experiences of working with children who have experience the incarceration of a parent/carer, particularly thinking about the impact this has on their educational experiences and presentation in school, current practice to support these children in school, and what further support may be needed.

This interview should take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Please let me know if you want to stop the interview at any time to take a break.

Before we start, I just want to highlight some key points from the information sheet:

- I will be audio recording this interview. I will let you know when the recording starts and when it has finished. If you would like me to stop recording at any point, please let me know. The data from this interview will be kept confidential, in a password encrypted file on the University's secure software (UoB BEAR). When analysing and writing up the findings for my thesis, you will be given a pseudonym, and any names of people and places will be anonymised.
- If you wish to withdraw, you have 2 weeks to do so. I'll delete your interview (audio recording and transcription) and your data won't be used in my thesis.
- If anything discussed leaves you unsettled or upset, then please do contact Education Support. Their national helpline is 08000 562561 and their website is https://www.educationsupport.org.uk. They are a brilliant resource for education staff wellbeing, and can provide further support, such as counselling sessions.

Do you have any questions about the interview or anything you'd like to discuss before we start?

Interview Questions

Background / Introduction:

1. Can you tell me a little bit more about your role and how this has involved working with children who have experienced the imprisonment of a parent/carer?

2. How did you come to learn about these children having a parent/carer in prison?

Research Question 1 - Presentation in School:

3. How have the children with imprisoned parents/carers that you have worked with presented in the school setting? What have you seen?

Prompts:

- *Strengths*
- *Difficulties*

Research Question 2 - Current practice for supporting and responding:

4. What support do children who have imprisoned parents/carers in your setting currently have access to?

Prompts:

- *Universal support*
- *Targeted support*
- *External professional involvement*

5. Have you seen this support to be effective? How? / What have you seen to be the benefits of this support?

6. Have there been any challenges or barriers for supporting children of imprisoned parents/carers in school?

7. Have you received any training or support around working with children of imprisoned parents/carers in school?

Research Question 3 - Further support:

8. Are there any ways that you think the current support for children of imprisoned parents/carers in schools could be strengthened or improved? *(e.g., anything different, additional)*

9. Are there any ways that you think school staff could be further supported in working with this group of children?

...Before we finish, is there anything else you wish to add to our conversation about working with children of imprisoned parents/carers? Is there anything you wish to ask me at this stage? Thank you very much…

Appendix H

Coded Transcript Samples

P2 Transcript Sample:

How have children with imprisoned parents or carers that you have worked with presented in the school setting? So, what have you seen?	
Yeah, so ah so various things, erm, one one of the (sigh) most obvious things I've seen, one one of the children in particularly erm, their dad is in prison erm. They really really look for I think male figures to kind of cling to, and whether or not this is erm in relation specifically to to dad being unavailable for much of the time, but yeah, she does she looks for male members of staff she likes to spend time with them. She says a lot and does a lot of things to try and I think to please them and to keep, erm to try and build in her eyes what she sees as a positive relationship with them. Erm said things to me like 'Ohh I knew as soon as a met you or as soon as I saw that you were going to be a nice person' and that sort of things, and it is although she likes the attention of all adults, it is clear there's definitely a preference towards around the males, erm.	Differing presentations. Gravitating to males figures in school. Possible link between father in prison and seeking connection with male staff members. Trying to build positive relationships with male adults. Offering compliments to male adults. Enjoys adult attention generally in school but preference for males.
She's often quite unsure of what's going on in terms of dad. So, there have been visits, erm which were quite regular, erm big change around the time when dad was coming out of prison, which is actually only only just, erm and she's been very unsure as to when she's seeing him or when she's been allowed to see him and she's projected a lot of blame on to other people who she's felt you've kept me from seeing him or he was out and nobody told me and things like that, so a lot of confusion around kind of the end, you know with with with him coming home, erm. Can be quite erm *(pause)* popular popular girl with friends but can be quite downhearted erm a lot of the time erm can be quite quick to tears misses people very quickly very easily.	--- Confusion around contact and parent's release leading to the projection of blame on other people. Continue to be popular with other children in school. Downhearted in school. Easily upset.

Will talk about missing dad but also misses mum, will miss sibling, so there's a lot of erm 'I miss this person, I miss that person', lots of that attachment sort of things. Erm so that's one example, erm, other family I think it's presented more in kind of behaviour and attendance, although behaviour has been more sort of outside of school and I think the impact has been with mum having a number of children and kind of essentially being a single parent, erm, while- whilst dads away, and then sort of, muddling through with varying amounts of support, one minute we would you know we'd kind of get to a point where it's crisis and I want some help and then things will blow over and will pull back, kind of muddling through until dad is released.	Talking and sharing experiences and situation with adults in school. Change in behaviour outside of school. Difficulties outside of school associated with family composition and dynamics in the home setting.
Erm but, then again actually this is a family who dad has recently been released erm and I don't think the change that mum anticipated has quite been there, so she thought he would come out and the kids will behave and there's two parents again, but actually what the kids are doing is the gonna push the boundaries because it's someone who's not been in the home for sort of four five years, erm who they've only seen on visits so the dynamic at home isn't quite I think perhaps as mum expected. Er school attendance has has certainly been th the main impact that we've seen from that, erm, so erm you know if if if one decides they don't want to be in school they put up quite a significant challenge to erm to mum, then the others will jump on so you'll find they all have similar days off, erm and they know that they're kind of mums on her own with that perhaps she's trying but then you know the- they can be quite *(pause)* abusive in terms of the language that they use to mum.	---- Unmet expectation that children's behaviour will change upon prison release. School attendance negatively impacted during imprisonment. Siblings having similar days off school. Inappropriate language used towards other parent. Two siblings absconding on the way to school.
They'll you know they'll run away if if they're on the way to school erm, you know there was an occasion where they absconded on the way and the- there was a big panic in terms of where they were and police had to called and er the they were found but it's that kind of level of challenge, and again I think that comes from you're on your own and there's more of us, so we're gonna kind of push it, and then obviously they're in the pattern of poor school attendance, so dads home, it doesn't particularly make a difference, its, that's the pattern they're in now having done that for so many years	Pushing boundaries other parent outside of school. School attendance negatively impacted during imprisonment. Poor school attendance continuing on parent's release.

P4 Transcript Sample:

I: *Yeah, no that's great. Er, really interesting. Erm… what support do children who have a parent or carer in prison in your setting currently have access to? So, is there any support that these children have access to that you're aware of?*	
P: Well, obviously in our class we try to do as much as we can, we'll give them a timer, "just go outside have 5 minutes". I do know the learning ment- pastoral mentor, he takes them out, he plays games with them or he does other stuff as well. But some of them might have interventions, like Seedlings, erm and stuff, and it just gives them that bit of a break and time to chat, but they're always welcome to chat with anyone, cause some, maybe the TA but they've got their favourites so they'll go to certain others that they're happy with and that's fine because you think as long as they get speaking to someone you don't mind. Yeah, yeah.	Giving COPs a break/ time away. Structured activities completed with learning mentor – games. Opportunity to release feelings through physical activities. Opportunity to talk and be listened to by trusted adults.
I: *Yeah, and how have, is there anything that you've done in your role specifically to support that group or is more just giving them time and?*	
P: Giving them time but I always listen, and I'm I'm a big fan of jotting it down even if then you read it and then you get rid of it, let it go. Erm, so whatever gets the feelings out and erm obviously like I said I have to take them for Seedlings and stuff like that.	Opportunity to talk and be listened to by trusted adults. Opportunity to write thoughts and feelings down. Opportunity to release feelings through physical activities.
I: *And is there a child that you said you'd gave a diary to?*	
P: Yeah, I give the diary to yeah, I give the diary to. And they understand before they're given that though out of, we explain like obviously are you comfortable before I do this that you know that we have to like not read it but we prefer it if you'd let us just you know, just in case there's anything like I don't know, you know like dangerous or anything in there that we might think uh oh this kid or this has happening or whatever. And I've, we've always, well I do anyway erm make it clear, and they're fine with that cause I say but it's you it's up to you, if that's the case I'll give it to you do it at home, because then obviously I can't like we have check and double check, so then I'll give everything they need to go home, erm but I've found that none of them, they're happy for you to go go look at this miss or I've drawn this for my dad miss,	Use of a diary for one COP to document thoughts and feelings whilst being mindful of safeguarding. Writing letters to imprisoned parent.

so then we just get I get them an envelope and just say right okay seal it put your dads name on.	
So, we try to do it where, like erm, where they've got every basis so, Sir's doing that with them, I've got interventions and then they know they've got time out and they know they can talk and everything like that. One girl whose left she was very angry, very angry with her dad. Erm and it it messed with her head a lot, so she was fine with it, so she also had write it down, so she wrote him a letter, two identical letters, erm put it in and envelope for her, but we had to speak to her mam over certain things that were in the letter. Erm, nothing like untowards but we just thought maybe you should speak to her about that and blah blah blah. And then we kind of had like a, it wasn't a burning ceremony, but you know when you just go right, rip it up type thing, put it in the bin, throw it away and how do you feel. And that but that was like a working progress and even now I still see her cause she lives around the area. She's a lovely kid, but obviously still things are still that way.	Trying to provide holistic support in school. Opportunity to write thoughts and feelings down. Letting go of feelings by ripping letter up. Support being a work in progress – adjustments being made.
I: *That sounds like something really nice, in school, that you can put in place to try and help with that. So yeah, kind of writing things and drawing things and…*	
P: Yeah, I just think, get it out and then, it's poison so get it out your system and then, it doesn't always work, but it might.	Letting go of feelings by ripping letter up. Acknowledging that strategies don't always work.
I: *Yeah, you might as well try. So yeah, you've talked about a few different things there so the pastoral, the kind of the one to one interventions, and then kind of the, having the opportunity for time out and time to talk, and then a few activities…*	
P: The parents are always welcome in as well, but we don't deal with that though. Erm obviously the pastoral would deal with all that and if there is anything they'll CPOM it or let us know. Erm, but yeah, yeah..	Parents welcome to come into school. Family supported by learning mentor. Use of recording system in school to share information - CPOMs.

Appendix I

Example of Coding to Theme Generation

Codes	Emerging Themes	Final themes and subthemes
-Working below ARE prior to and during imprisonment. -Most COPs remain poor academically from pre- to post-imprisonment. - Working below ARE in most academic areas. - COPs having low academic ability generally. - Slight negative shift in academic work when parent goes into prison. - Less homework being completed when parent's in prison possibly due to family circumstances. - Drop in academic performance during imprisonment due to limited parent engagement. - Reduced learning engagement. - Parental imprisonment negatively impacts learning. - Reduced enthusiasm for schoolwork. - Unsure about whether there is a direct link between PI and academic difficulties.	Academic Performance / Engagement: - Working below ARE prior to PI – existing academic difficulties - Working below ARE during PI - Negative impact of PI on academic work – direct link - Reduced learning engagement	**Theme 1: Academic difficulties**
- Parent's return home negatively impacting attendance. - Leaving school for prison visits. - School attendance negatively impacted during imprisonment. - Siblings having similar days off school whilst parent is in prison. - Poor school attendance continuing on parent's release. - Poor attendance pre imprisonment. - Difficulty identifying whether attendance is an impact or not. - Late to school due to events at home (e.g., police visiting home).	Fluctuation or changes in attendance: - Reduced attendance during PI. - Reduced attendance continuing post imprisonment. - Poor attendance pre imprisonment.	**Theme 2: Poor school attendance**

- Two siblings absconding on the way to school.
- Trying to leave school early when parent came to sports day.

Appendix J

Reflexive Diary Extracts

Reflection on interview schedule

"Interview schedule planned and submitted as part of my ethics application which was approved. However, I think I may need to review and refine my interview schedule slightly. Not changing the planned areas to be covered but perhaps broadening a couple of questions and making them more open ended as I feel like a couple of the questions may currently be quite leading. Some of my planned questions also seem a little redundant. Conducting a pilot interview will be helpful for further exploring if the interview questions support in answering the research questions and if they are understandable/make sense." 16/06/23

Reflections on whether to expand data collection

"Dilemma around data collection and participants, whether to continue research in the case school or to capture and explore views of school staff from different school settings, which would no longer be a case study of one school. Potential value of including staff from another school/s in terms of a larger sample, greater generalisability and being able to identify possible similarities and differences versus identifying detailed, rich insight about one school system with perspectives from different school staff, and being able to discuss interesting dynamics and specifics that I have so far found in the case school, such as in terms of how information is shared, cascaded, how support is distributed" 22/09/23

"I'm planning on continuing with working in the one case school, SENCo is going to link me up with a couple of TAs who have experienced working with CoPiP on my next visit to the setting, who I can share information with and see if they would be willing to participate. I will need to acknowledge that this may make my research less generalisable than if I was to extend the research outside of the case school, however, I'm not aiming for generalisability, rather I'm wanting to provide initial in depth, rich insight into the one school setting, which future research could expand upon." 25/09/23

Reflections during data analysis

"Currently coding my first three interviews. Trying to make sure I code them on different days so that my coding on one transcript does not skew my view of the next transcript (i.e., automatically using the same codes)" 15/08/23

"Reviewing my initial coding for my first three interviews at the moment and I have expanded and added more detail to quite a few of my codes so that they capture a clear overview of what was said, such that I don't need to refer back to my transcripts and they make sense when standing alone" 25/08/23

"Decided to remove sub-themes within two of the themes as I felt like they were diluting the themes and Braun and Clarke (2022) encourage researchers not to add in sub themes for the sake of it which I felt that I was doing" 28/12/23

"Lots of back and forth with theme names at the moment and moving some codes around. Identified some overlap with two themes in research question 3 so I've decided to group these

together, and I've done similar for research question 1 where I've combined two themes together" 04/02/24

Appendix K

The graduated approach as outlined by the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015).

Stage of the Graduated Approach	Description
Assess	Clear analysis of a pupil's needs, which draws on the teacher's assessment and experience, previous progress, etc. This assessment should be reviewed regularly to ensure support and intervention are matched to a pupil's needs.
Plan	Support and intervention planned which clearly aligns with sought outcomes (identified through assessment). Parents require formal notification of this plan, and a clear date for review is needed.
Do	Implementation of support and intervention, with class or subject teachers remaining responsible for this.
Review	Effectiveness and impact of support and intervention on pupil's progress should be reviewed on the agreed review date. This review should include pupil's and parent's views and should feedback into the ongoing analysis of a pupil's needs. Next steps should be planned.