AN EXPLORATION OF PUPILS', PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAUSES OF PUPIL NON-ATTENDANCE AND THE REASONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN ATTENDANCE

By

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An exploration of pupils', parents' and teachers' perceptions of the causes of pupil non-attendance and the reasons for improvements in attendance

Abstract

Non-attendance has been explored by educationalists since compulsory education was introduced (Brown, 1983; Irving and Parker-Jenkins; 1995). However, few studies have focused on cases of improved attendance and furthermore, triangulated the views of pupils, parents and teachers in such cases. Therefore, the current study employed a multiple case study design to explore the views of pupils, parents and teachers with regards to the causes of the pupils' non-attendance and the reasons for the improvements in their attendance. The findings of two cases in which there were moderate to good levels of improvement were compared with the findings of a third case in which there had been little improvement in attendance. It was found that the greatest improvement in attendance was evident when there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between at least the parent and teacher, the interventions put in place aimed to address these causes and there was a shared responsibility for improving attendance. In addition to this, the findings highlighted a number of factors that may lead to further improvements in the pupils' attendance. These included: teachers recognising and addressing school related factors; a greater understanding of the reasons for the pupils' refusal behaviour; the pupils' views being acted upon; and consideration of the impact of the pupils' non-attendance. The implications of the findings with regards to the professional practice of Educational Psychologists are discussed along with future research.

Dedication

To my amazing husband Luke,

for all your support, love and containing cuddles. Thank you for always believing in me - I couldn't have done it without you!

To my Mum, Dad, Daniel, Sarah and Sophie,

for all your encouragement and support every step of the way and especially for the laughs at Sunday club!

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Abbreviations

EWOs   Education Welfare Officers

EWS   Education Welfare Service

EPs   Educational Psychologists

FSW   Family Support Worker

DfE   Department for Education

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1. Context

This research was carried out as part of the doctoral training route for Educational Psychologists (EPs) in England and Wales. As a student on the Doctoral course at the University of Birmingham, I was required to secure a placement with a Local Authority during Year two and three of the course. My placement has been with a large County Council in the East Midlands, which I will refer to as Eastshire County Council. I have been placed in one of the four teams that make up Eastshire's Educational Psychology Service. My team is located in the centre of Eastshire and I have delivered commissioned and statutory work to a patch of schools in this area.

1.2. Choice of research area

My placement in Eastshire County Council began a year after the Department for Education announced changes to the allocation of funding to local authorities and schools in line with the School Funding Reform (DfE, 2011a). As a result, funding which was previously held centrally by local authorities was mostly delegated to schools. In Eastshire County Council, this led to a reduction in the number of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and minimising of their role to include statutory duties only. Therefore, greater emphasis was being placed on schools to ensure the regular attendance of pupils. Having had experience of working alongside EWOs as an Assistant Educational Psychologist, I was aware of the

range of preventative and reactive non-statutory roles they undertook with schools. This led me to consider how schools were managing non-attendance in the absence of this support. The first step I undertook was to carry out an initial review of the literature on non-attendance. From this, it became clear that there was limited research into improved attendance, with the majority of studies focusing on pupils who were experiencing attendance problems at the time of the studies being conducted.

Furthermore, EWOs evidently played a large role in supporting school to address non-attendance. After completing this initial review I met with the Principal Educational Psychologist to determine whether this would be an area of interest and relevance for the service. It was agreed that an exploration of the ways in which schools were addressing non-attendance, by focusing on examples of improved attendance, would be beneficial and could highlight ways in which EPs could further support schools in this area. In light of the increased importance placed on involving pupils and parents[1] in decisions made about them (DfES, 2001; DfE, 2013b), it was also agreed that gaining the views of pupils and parents would be crucial in providing a holistic view of attendance. Further information gained from the National Performance Tables (DfE, 2011b; 2012a) and Ofsted reports (Ofsted, 2013) indicated that a small number of schools in the area in which I was based had shown improvements in attendance since the reduction of Education Welfare Service (EWS). Therefore it was decided that carrying out case studies in these schools would provide a rich and in-depth picture of this area of interest.

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[1]Throughout this thesis the term parents will refer to parents and carers and the terms pupils and/or children will refer to children and young people of compulsory school age

1.3. Overview of chapters

The remainder of this thesis includes the chapters outlined below.

1.3.1. Chapter two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature surrounding non-attendance and begins by outlining the review strategy used to search for relevant literature. The historical context of non-attendance is then outlined, leading up to the current national and local context. The different definitions of non-attendance are first explored before moving on to a critical review of the research into the causes of non-attendance and interventions to improve attendance. Finally this chapter concludes by outlining the aims of the current study with reference to previous research.

1.3.2. Chapter three: Methodology

This chapter begins by presenting the rationale for the current study and the research questions along with the proposed theory and theoretical propositions used to guide the data collection. The epistemological stance underpinning the study is then outlined followed by the justification for using a case study methodology. The research design is discussed and details of the participants, data collection methods and procedures are presented. The ethical considerations of the study are outlined followed by the process of data analysis which included thematic analysis, content analysis and matching evidence to the theoretical propositions. Finally, threats to validity and reliability are considered.

1.3.3. Chapter four: Presentation of the Findings

This chapter outlines the findings from each case in relation to the theoretical propositions. Additional findings that emerged from the thematic analysis are also presented. A summary is then provided with regards to the extent to which the theoretical propositions are supported across the three cases.

1.3.4. Chapter five: Discussion of the Findings

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings in terms of the extent to which they support or refute the theoretical propositions. The findings are also considered in relation to those of previous research. Finally a summary of the findings in relation to the proposed theory and research questions is presented and the limitations of the current study are considered.

1.3.5. Chapter six: Implications for Practice and Future Research

This final chapter outlines the impact of the findings of the current study with particular focus on the practice of EPs. Future areas of research are also considered and a conclusion is provided.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by outlining the review strategy used to search for relevant literature. The historical context of non-attendance is then outlined, leading up to the current national and local context. The different definitions of non-attendance are explored before moving on to a critical review of the research into the causes of non-attendance and interventions to improve attendance. Finally this chapter concludes by outlining the aims of the current study with reference to previous research.

2.1. Review Strategy

Peer-reviewed journals, dissertations and theses were searched using the databases: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA); British Education Index; ERIC; International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS); ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (UK and Ireland) PsycArticles; PsycExtra; and PsycINFO. The search was undertaken in two stages, the first stage being a generic search of literature relating to school attendance using the terms: school attendance/non-attendance; school absence; truancy; school-refusal; and school-phobia. The second stage focused on the causes of non-attendance, solutions and interventions for addressing non-attendance and differing perceptions. This included the additional terms: causes; teachers'/pupils'/parents' perceptions; solutions; interventions; Education Welfare Service/Officers; and Educational Psychologists. A number of individual online journals were also searched using these terms, including *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *Educational Review*,

Educational & Child Psychology and *The British Journal of Educational Psychology.* The references of the journal articles identified lead to consideration of other related papers. Government documents, statistics and legislation were also reviewed and the Eastshire County Council website was searched for key documents relevant to attendance.

2.2. Historical and National Context

2.2.1. Historical context of non-attendance

The Education Act of 1870 provided elementary education for all children and the Elementary Education Act 1880 made education compulsory for children aged five to ten years old in an attempt to stop child labour (Gillard, 2011). The minimum age at which children could leave school was incrementally increased since this time by various Education Acts and is currently due to be raised to 18 in 2015 (see Appendix 1). Alongside the introduction of compulsory education came the issue of non-attendance at school. At this time, non-attendance was reportedly caused by parents continuing to send their children to work as they could not afford the loss of income and difficulties getting to school due to transport and the location of the school (Black, 1996). Therefore, legal obligations were placed on parents to ensure that their child received an education and sanctions including fines and attendance orders were introduced and enforced by attendance officers (Atkinson et al, 2000a). These legal obligations and sanctions are still in place at present:

> *"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise... If a child of compulsory school age who*

is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence... A person guilt of an offence... is liable to a fine... or imprisonment..." (Education Act, 1996, p. 7, 155-156)

Addressing non-attendance became a significant part of the Government's agenda in the 1990s due to the increased attention being placed on the declining standards of education in the United Kingdom (Carlen et al, 1992). Furthermore, links between persistent non-attendance and poor educational attainment, poor employment prospects, alcohol and drug use and youth and adult criminality were becoming well established (Ball and Connolly 2000; Baker et al., 2001; Boyle and Goodall 2005; Coles et al, 2002; Garry, 1996; McCray, 2006). Between 1997 and 2002 a national target in England to reduce non-attendance by one-third was imposed (SEU, 1998). A study by Malcolm et al (2003) suggests that at this time, local authorities were playing an important role in supporting schools to reduce non-attendance. This included:

- setting attendance targets;

- raising awareness within schools and with the general public;

- discouraging schools from authorising absences;

- providing support materials (e.g. videos aimed at parents and children, good practice templates); and

- funding EWS to support schools.

However, in recent years the Government has placed increasingly more responsibility on schools to increase their autonomy, subsequently reducing the role of local authorities. For instance, in 2010 the Schools White Paper announced

that schools should set their own priorities and be in control of their own improvements (DfE, 2010). As a result the centrally-driven statutory process of setting targets for attendance ended in 2012 but with the expectation that schools would continue to focus on reducing absence (DfE, 2013a). Furthermore, changes were made to the allocation of funding to local authorities and schools with the DfE stating that *"schools are best placed to make appropriate provision for their pupils and the aim is to maximise the amount of funding allocated to them"* (DfE, 2012b, p2). In terms of attendance, funding that was previously held centrally was mostly delegated to schools, with a limited amount being retained by local authorities for statutory duties (e.g. prosecutions for non-attendance and tracking children missing from education).

2.2.2. Current national context of non-attendance

The most recent Government guidance on attendance outlines the statutory requirements of schools and local authorities, which include:

- promoting good attendance and reducing absence;
- ensuring that pupils have access to the full-time education to which they are entitled; and
- addressing patterns of absence at an early stage (DfE, 2013a).

Schools are required to record pupils' attendance twice a day using attendance registers and codes that fall into three categories: present; authorised absence; and unauthorised absence (see Appendix 2). School must inform their local authority of pupils who fail to attend school regularly or have had unauthorised

absence for a continuous period of 10 or more days. Local authorities then have a duty to ensure that these pupils receive a full-time education whether in school or elsewhere (DfE, 2013a).

Pupils with an attendance level of 85% or lower are considered to be Persistently Absent (PA) and miss the equivalent of at least 28.5 days of school per year (out of a possible 190 days). The threshold for being PA was increased from 80% attendance to 85% attendance in 2011 as the Government highlighted the need for earlier identification and intervention with this group of pupils (DfE, 2011a). Furthermore, Taylor (2012) suggests that children who miss significant amounts of their education in primary school are more likely to be increasingly absent later on in their schooling and by this stage, efforts to increase attendance become less effective. Therefore in changing the threshold of persistent absence, the Government intended for schools to intervene earlier in order to prevent future difficulties (DfE, 2011a). However, it has been recognised recently that more research is needed to identify how schools can effectively decrease persistent absence (DfE, 2014a).

In addition to the statutory responsibilities outlined above, schools are judged on their attendance levels by Ofsted. Attendance can be considered inadequate if it is well below the national average (currently 95.2%) or the number of pupils who are PA is high (Ofsted, 2014). Furthermore, during Ofsted inspections consideration is given to the following:

- effectiveness of strategies to promote good attendance;

- identification of attendance patterns and effectiveness of systems to alert the school to changes in pupils' attendance; and

- support provided to pupils who are absent for long-term medical reasons.

<div align="right">(Ofsted, 2014)</div>

2.3. Local context

Up until 2012, the EWS in Eastshire County Council played a large role in supporting schools to manage attendance which included:

- supporting the development of robust attendance strategies, policies and data collection systems;

- assisting in the identification of pupils with attendance concerns;

- carrying out assessments and interventions with poor attenders and their families;

- facilitating and leading parent contract meetings; and

- providing advice on issues that impact on pupil's access to education (e.g. exclusion, school aged mothers, child employment, elective home education).

<div align="right">(Eastshire County Council, 2006)</div>

However, in line with the School Funding Reform, this role was greatly reduced as the majority of funding for attendance was delegated to schools to allow them to commission services at their discretion (DfE, 2012b). In September 2012, the EWS was subsumed by the Education Entitlement Service, with a reduced number

of EWOs carrying out the local authorities statutory duties for attendance. Therefore, greater emphasis has been placed on schools to ensure the regular attendance of pupils through monitoring, early identification of pupils of concern, involving parents and identifying solutions.

2.4. Definitions of non-attendance

Since the introduction of compulsory education, researchers have been interested in the minority of pupils who do not attend school regularly (Brown, 1983; Irving and Parker-Jenkins; 1995). Across the literature on school attendance, a number of different terms have been used to describe this behaviour, sometimes interchangeably and without precision (Elliot, 1999). One of the most prevalent terms is *truancy,* however there is a lack of consistent definition of this term (Reid, 2005). For instance, Stoll (1990) defines truancy as a pupil being absent from school without a legitimate reason. Sheppard (2010) extends this by stating that the absence is without the knowledge and consent of the parent. However, Kee (2001) argues that the parents may know about the absence but fail to provide a reasonable or acceptable excuse. Kinder et al (1996) on the other hand highlight that truancy can refer to a pupil being present in school but avoiding certain lessons.

Another common term used in the literature is *school refusal*, which again has been defined in different ways. Haight et al (2011) provide a broad definition stating that it refers to child-motivated refusal to attend school or difficulties remaining in classes for an entire day. Whereas Last and Strauss (1990) state that

school refusal is associated with severe emotional difficulties. *School phobia* has been used interchangeably with the term school refusal however, some warn against doing this. For instance, Thambirajah et al (2008) highlight that school phobia implies irrational and extreme fears associated with school alone. Therefore the term ignores any fears and anxieties that may derive from a separation from a parent or being in social contexts in general.

Much of the literature suggests there are distinct differences between pupils who are considered truants and those who are considered school refusers, as the Table 1 demonstrates.

Table 1. Difference between truancy and school refusal

Truancy	School refusal
Pupil chooses not to attend school.	Pupil may want to attend school but due to psychological or emotional obstacles, finds it too traumatic.
Pupil attempts to conceal their non-attendance from the family (e.g. avoid going home when they should be at school).	Parents are likely to be aware of the problem and the pupil remains at home with them.
The pupil's non-attendance is usually intermittent.	The pupil's non-attendance is usually for weeks or months at a time.
The pupil is usually an indifferent or poor learner with a dislike for school.	The pupil is usually a good learner with goals that require schooling.
The pupil usually displays anti-social behaviour and is more likely to be diagnosed with conduct disorder than an emotional disorder.	The pupil rarely display anti-social behaviour and is more likely to display behaviour associated with fear (e.g. refusing to get out of bed, refusing to get dressed, refusing to get in and out of the car).

(Based on Berg et al, 1969; Berg et al; 1993; Elliott and Place, 1998; Hersov, 1985; Kagan et al, 1987).

This view of non-attendance has been criticised for being reductionist as pupils are unlikely to fit neatly into one of these two categories and may demonstrate features of both truancy and school refusal as outlined above (Bools et al, 1990).

Furthermore, these labels suggest the causes of non-attendance derive from the child's motivation, behaviour or emotional state and fail to take into account family or school factors that may be contributing to the issue. Another term that has been used within the literature is *parentally condoned absence*, which refers to parents inappropriately absenting their child from school (Reid et al, 2010). This will be explored in more detail in Section 2.5 as one possible cause of non-attendance, but again it provides a narrow description of the phenomenon.

Traditionally, non-attendance has been constructed as a clinical and/or legal phenomenon with focus being placed on within-child factors and parents' legal obligations (Pellegrini, 2007). Therefore, in practice caution needs to be taken when defining this behaviour as the term given may influence people's understanding of the behaviour, leading to an incorrect hypothesis about its function and the support required. For this reason, I will use the term *non-attendance* as this provides a neutral description of the behaviour without attempting to allude to what underpins it, which should be done through later assessment.

2.5. Causes of non-attendance

Earlier studies, such as those by Stott (1966) and Tyerman (1968), placed a heavy emphasis on within-child factors and family circumstances underpinning non-attendance. However, since this time it has been acknowledged that the causes of non-attendance are likely to be multi-faceted involving a combination of within-child, home and school factors (Reid et al, 2010). Furthermore, it is now widely recognised that pupils who are absent from school, without valid reason, do not constitute a homogeneous group (Easen et al., 1997; Malcolm et al., 2003; Pellegrini, 2007). The differences among these pupils reside not only in the type and extent of their non-attendance but also in the causes of their non-attendance and therefore the interventions required to support them (NIAO, 2004). Across the literature the causes of non-attendance have generally been categorised as within-child factors, family and home factors and school factors.

2.5.1. Within-child factors

The notion of within-child factors underpinning non-attendance has been prevalent since the 1960s (e.g. Stott, 1966; Tyerman, 1968). Authors who have defined non-attendance in terms of school refusal and school phobia often allude to causes related to severe emotional difficulties including extreme anxiety or fear regarding school (Berg, 1969; Last and Strauss, 1990; Thambirajah et al, 2008). However, studies by Kinder et al (1995), Malcolm et al (2003) and Reid (2008) have also identified within-child factors that may be considered less clinical, such as:

- low self-esteem, self-concept and confidence;

- learning difficulties or low academic ability and/or associated embarrassment at perceived inadequacies;

- lack of social skills resulting in difficulties developing friendships;

- tiredness and difficulties getting up; and

- behavioural difficulties including disruptive behaviour and difficulties with self-regulation, concentration and attention.

These studies have tended to rely on professional views of pupils' non-attendance. However, similar findings were reported by Reid (1999) who carried out research with 77 persistent non-attenders and two matched control groups from a secondary school. He found that the persistent non-attenders displayed significantly worse behavioural traits, including neurotic and anti-social behaviour and significantly lower self-concepts and self-esteem than the two control groups. He reported that they also appeared more unhappy, tearful or distressed and had poorer concentration and attention spans that the control group.

2.5.2. Family and home factors

Research carried out in the 1960s-80s suggested that pupils with poor attendance were likely to come from homes characterised by: unemployment or irregular employment; low incomes; fathers who are in unskilled or semi-skilled work; poor material conditions and over-crowding; low housekeeping standards; parents with alcohol problems, mental and/or physical illness; and violence (Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1982; Hersov, 1960a, 1960b; May, 1975; Tyerman, 1968). These factors continue to be cited in more current research suggesting that poor

attenders are likely to come from disadvantaged home backgrounds, unfavourable social circumstances and homes with poor family cohesion (Atkinson et al. 2000a; Hallam 1996; Ireson and Hallam, 2001; Lagana, 2004; McCoy et al. 2007; Reid 1999; Whitney 1994). However, the vast majority of pupils from these backgrounds attend school regularly, suggesting that this is only one possible factor (Reid, 1999).

Parents' attitude towards education and the value they place on schooling has been highlighted as a factor underpinning non-attendance. Studies have explored this by comparing the views of parents of non-attenders with the views of parents of regular attenders, however they have yielded different results. For example, Malcolm et al (2003) found that parents of poor attenders when compared to a comparison group, were more likely to agree that:

- children may have more important things to do at home;
- children should stay at home to help out;
- missing school occasionally would not do any harm; and
- it was acceptable to arrange doctor and dentist appointments during the school day.

However, Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) found that parents of non-attenders shared similar views with a comparison group regarding acceptable and unacceptable reasons for a child to be absent from school. Parents in both groups agreed that it was unacceptable for a child to miss school to help out at home or because they disliked a lesson. Furthermore, they found that nearly half of the

comparison group felt it was acceptable to take their child to the doctors or dentist during school hours and only 31% felt it would be unacceptable for a child to go on holiday during term time. These conflicting findings may arise from methodological weaknesses in these studies as it is questionable as to whether the comparison groups were actually different from the parents of poor attenders. Neither study used objective measures of attendance (e.g. pupil's attendance records) to distinguish between poor attenders and regular attenders. Furthermore, in both studies, some of the parents in the comparison groups appeared to experience difficulties with their child's attendance. For instance, 16 parents in Malcolm et al's (2003) comparison group reported that they were unhappy with their child's attendance and had discussed this with teachers and/or EWOs. Similarly in Dalziel and Henthrone's (2005) study, 20 parents in the comparison sample reported that their child missed at least one day of school a week.

In studies by Kinder et al (1995), Malcolm et al (2003) and Reid (2008), professionals reported that inadequate or poor parenting skills contributed to pupils' non-attendance. The first study alludes to a lack of firm parenting whilst the latter two studies make reference to poor parenting skills leading to parentally condoned absence. However, all three studies fail to go further than this in terms of exploring how their participants conceptualised parenting skills and how poor or inadequate skills were thought to affect attendance. Furthermore, given that non-attenders are likely to come from disadvantaged and unfavourable social circumstances, it may be that non-attendance is linked to the parents' capacity to address the issue rather than their parenting skills. This was highlighted by Dalziel

and Henthorne (2005) who found that parents of non-attenders differed in the way they dealt with their child's poor attendance. They describe four approaches:

- those who try hard to address poor attendance and work cooperatively with the school, EWOs and other support services;

- those who feel powerless to address poor attendance, often due to multiple social and personal problems that take precedence in their lives;

- those who appear to be over-protective or dependent upon their child and are more likely to condone absence and seek advice and counselling rather than accept help from the school or EWOs and;

- those who are either apathetic about addressing poor attendance or who appear not to engage with the school or other professionals.

Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) highlight how factors such as parents' attitudes (positive and negative), capacity and acceptance of support are likely to affect the way parents address non-attendance, rather than simply their parenting skills.

2.5.3. School factors

School related factors have gained increased attention across the literature since the 1980s (Brown, 1983; Reynolds et al, 1980). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) suggest that non-attendance is more common in schools in which the attendance and behaviour policy are inconsistently enforced, the interactions between parents and school staff are poor and teachers are unsupportive and insensitive to diverse learning needs. Other studies have found links between the physical environment of the school and non-attendance, for instance large schools with more areas of

reduced adult supervision are more at risk of having poor attendance (Archer et al, 2003; Lauchlan, 2003).

Studies that have explored parents' and pupils' views of non-attendance have found bullying to be one of the most significant causes cited (Dwyfor-Davis and Lee, 2006; Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid et al, 2010). Dalziel and Henthrone (2005) found that this may lead to parentally condoned absence as 25% of parents in their study reported that it was acceptable to keep a child away from school if they were being bullied. They also found that some parents felt that their child claimed they were ill to hide the fact they were being bullied. Contrary to this, some of the local authority representatives and teachers in Malcolm et al's (2003) study reported that bullying was used as an excuse to stay away from school.

Furthermore, whilst pupils in Kinder et al's (1996) study recognised bullying as a factor, they placed greater emphasis on peer pressure which ranged from enticing to coercing pupils into missing school. However, Kinder et al (1996) failed to distinguish between the views of primary and secondary school pupils which is problematic as Malcolm et al (2003) found that peer pressure was only reported by secondary school pupils.

Negative relationships with teachers has been associated with non-attendance as pupils may remove themselves from lessons or school to avoid interactions with such teachers (Carlen et al, 1992). This has been identified as a cause of non-attendance in a number of studies (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Kinder et al,

1996; Kinder and Wilkin, 1998; Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid, 2008). For example, Kinder et al (1996) found that nearly half of the 160 pupils that took part in their study reported difficulties with teachers as a cause of their non-attendance. This included a dislike of way the teachers spoke to pupils, pupils feeling a lack of respect or consideration from the teachers and feeling unfairly blamed, singled out or excessively punished. Again, it is difficult to know if this issue is relevant to both primary school and secondary school pupils as the authors failed to distinguish between the two. However, Malcolm et al (2003) found that difficulties with the teacher-pupil relationship were evident in both groups, but interestingly there were differences between the views of primary and secondary school teachers. Whilst secondary school teachers recognised that unenthusiastic, unsympathetic, uncaring and sarcastic teachers could contribute towards non-attendance, most of the primary school teachers did not feel that non-attendance was caused by school related factors.

Studies have suggested that non-attendance may also be underpinned by pupils becoming dissatisfied with the content of the National Curriculum (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Reid, 2004; 2006a; 2006b; 2007). For instance, local authority representatives and secondary school teachers in Malcolm et al's (2003) study reported that difficulties with school work and an overly academic, irrelevant and uninteresting curriculum contributed towards non-attendance. Furthermore, studies that have explored pupils' and parents' views of non-attendance have often identified "*boredom at school*" as a cause of non-attendance, which may allude to this notion of dissatisfaction with the curriculum (Kinder et al, 1995, 1996;

Kinder and Wilkin, 1998; Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid et al, 2010). For instance, Kinder et al (1996) found that pupils cited uninteresting lessons and boring school work as causes of non-attendance. This often related to learning tasks involving constant writing and copying and a lack of interest in the lessons content. Furthermore, pupils reported that teachers failed to provide appropriate support which led to them feeling frustrated at having to wait for support, feeling ignored or having their difficulties publicly exposed. This coincides with findings by Reid et al (2010) that suggest tailored learning approaches, such as one-to-one situations can be successful in re-engaging non-attenders.

2.5.4. Differing views of non-attendance

Research into the causes of non-attendance has found that pupils, parents and professionals often have differing views of the main causes of non-attendance. For instance, it has generally been found that school staff and other professionals are more likely to report that within-child factors, parental attitudes and home environments are the main causes of non-attendance (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Malcolm et al, 2003). Malcolm et al (2003) found that only 5 out of 42 primary school teachers believed that school factors contributed towards pupils' non-attendance. Parents and pupils on the other hand are more likely to identify school related factors as the main causes of non-attendance (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Kinder et al, 1996; Kinder and Wilkin, 1998; Malcolm et al, 2003).

As mentioned previously, focus on the legal obligation of parents and the within-child factors that underpinned non-attendance has led to legal and clinical notions surrounding non-attendance, placing greater emphasis on the child and parent. Whilst focus has shifted towards school-related factors, legal and clinical discourses still appear dominate amongst professionals and school staff, who are essentially the gatekeepers to support and interventions for these pupils. This can be problematic as Bosworth (1994) argues that by attributing non-attendance to factors that are largely outside of the schools control (e.g. individual, family and community factors), school staff may feel a sense of hopelessness and a lack of need or effort to make changes within school. Equally, attributing causes to school-related factors may have the same impact in terms of pupils and parents making changes.

However, many of these studies have tended to explore participants' general views of non-attendance, rather than exploring their actual experiences (e.g. asking "*what are the causes of non-attendance*" rather than "*what reasons have you/your child/your pupil not attended school?*"). This is highlighted by a comment made by Kinder et al (1996), stating that some pupils in their study used the general question, relating to ways of encouraging better attendance in school, as an opportunity to talk about their own experiences, suggesting that others did not. Therefore, these studies may have explored the way participants construe non-attendance as a phenomenon rather than exploring their actual experience of it.

Few studies have considered individual cases of non-attendance and explored the views of those involved to ascertain whether differences in views prevail at this level. One study that has considered individual cases of non-attendance was conducted recently by Gregory and Purcell (2014). They found that non-attendance was caused by a fear of teachers, bullying, peer difficulties and anxiety manifesting as physical symptoms. However, they only gathered the views of the pupil and parent in three cases and the parent alone in two cases. Furthermore, the authors did not distinguish between these views in terms of comparing the views of the pupil with the views of the parent.

2.6. Preventative interventions to improve attendance

Some researchers suggest that the issue of non-attendance in primary schools has become more prominent in recent years (Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid, 2012). Furthermore, it is recognised that patterns of non-attendance starting in primary school are likely to persist into secondary school, where pupils may become further disaffected and difficult to engage (Taylor, 2012). Thus, the need for preventative and early intervention is essential for addressing non-attendance before negative habits develop and persist (Easen et al, 1997; Learmouth, 1995).

Preventative whole-school strategies are thought to be important in creating an environment which promotes regular attendance (Atkinson et al, 2000a). This may involve raising the profile of attendance through school displays, assemblies, parents evenings and published materials (NIAO, 2004; Reid, 2002). It can also involve targeted strategies aimed at pupils, parents and school staff in order to

promote good attendance. Atkinson et al (2000b) found that EWOs played important roles in supporting schools in this way. This involved working with schools to develop attendance policies, effectively record and monitor attendance, develop reward schemes and build effective home-school liaisons. These strategies and interventions were reported to be effective in terms of having positive impacts on pupils, parents and schools. However, effectiveness was expressed through subjective comments rather than formal evaluations or objective measures such as attendance figures.

2.6.1. Attendance policies

Attendance policies enable schools to demonstrate to staff, parents and pupils the priority and value they place on attendance by highlighting expectations and consistent approaches for ensuring regular attendance (Dougherty, 1999; RSM McClure Watters, 2012). A report commissioned by North Ireland Department of Education (2012) suggested that good attendance policies should cover the following:

- how attendance is recorded and monitored;
- procedures for parents to report absences and for staff to identify and following up absences and lateness;
- how attendance is promoted including rewards;
- how poor attendance is addressed, including sanctions and other interventions; and
- procedures for reintegrating long-term non-attenders and pupils on a reduced time table.

However, attendance policies are not a statutory requirement (DfE, 2014b) and this report found that only 58.6% of the 177 schools surveyed had an attendance policy.

2.6.2. Attendance related reward schemes

In their study, Reid et al (2010) found that primary school pupils reported a number of school rewards related to attendance, including: prizes, certificates and trophies; letters praising their attendance; extra play-time or golden time; and school trips or outings. These related to daily, weekly and yearly attendance for pupils with the highest attendance and most improved attendance. School staff in Malcolm et al (2003) study reported similar rewards being used in their schools for individual pupils and whole classes. Whilst some studies have suggested improvements in overall attendance figures following the introduction of reward schemes (Atkinson et al 2000a; Dougherty, 1999; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002), this type of preventative intervention does not seem to be common place in schools. For instance, Hubbard (2003) found that only 2 out of 17 teachers interviewed in their study reported that pupils received rewards for attendance. Furthermore, a study commissions by North Ireland Department of Education (2012) found that only 66% of primary school in their sample offered reward schemes.

2.6.3. Building effective home-school liaisons

Developing trusting and respectful relationships with parents is thought to be essential in preventing issues of non-attendance occurring (Epstein and Sheldon,

2002). Parents who have positive relationships with school staff are more likely to pass on positive messages, encouragement and support regarding attendance to their children (Irving and Parker-Jenkins, 1995). Teachers in Malcolm et al's (2003) study reported that this should be done from an early stage through the use of attendance officers, learning mentors or liaison teachers.

2.6.4. First day response

One of the earliest interventions used in schools is the first day response, in which a member of school staff contacts the pupil's parent by telephone on the first day of absence (Atkinson et al 2000a). Although this strategy occurs following an absence it is considered preventative as it aims to raise awareness of the importance of attendance, remind parents of their legal responsibilities and demonstrate to pupils that non-attendance will be immediately followed up (Atkinson et al, 2000a). Malcolm et al (2003) found that several schools in their study reported a sudden drop in unexplained absence when first day calling was introduced. However, issues with time capacity, staffing and getting through to the parent can prevent this from being a consistent approach (Malcolm et al, 2003).

2.7. Reactive interventions to improve attendance

When issues do arise with attendance, reactive interventions that address the causes of non-attendance are required (Pellegrini, 2007). As outlined below, these interventions can be supportive or punitive and vary in terms of resources used and who they are targeted at. Again, Atkinson et al (2000a) found that EWOs previously played an important role in supporting schools in this way. This included

working directly with parents and pupils though casework and group work and carrying out truancy sweeps, education supervision orders and prosecutions. Similarly, parents in Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) study reported that EWOs helped them liaise with the schools, negotiate timetable changes and provided intensive one-to-one work with the child and/or parent which was seen as extremely helpful. However, both of these studies relied on subjective comments which were not validated by formal evaluations or objective measures, such as improvements in attendance figures.

2.7.1. Child focused interventions

Individual and small group interventions that aim to build certain skills and coping strategies have been used to address non-attendance (Kinder et al, 1995; Lauchlan, 2003). They are thought to be effective in encouraging pupils to value themselves, develop trust in adults and gain support from other pupil in similar situations (Atkinson et al, 2000b). Depending on the pupils needs, these interventions may focus on teaching social skills, boosting self-esteem, building relationships and managing strong emotions such as anger and anxiety (Atkinson et al, 2000b; Bokhorst et al, 1995; Kinder et al, 1995; Malcolm et al, 2003). They may also focus explicitly on attendance by promoting its importance, identifying causes of non-attendance and empowering pupils to creatively solve problems (Atkinson et al, 2000b; Baker and Jansen, 2000). School staff in Kinder et al's (1995) study reported drawing upon the support of EWOs to work with pupils in this way. However, Pellegrini (2007) warns that individual and group interventions aimed at the pupil are unlikely to be successful unless they are implemented

alongside strategies to address issues within the pupil's environment (e.g. school and home factors).

2.7.2. Parent and family focused interventions

With regards to parent and family focused interventions, there are several supportive and punitive approaches to addressing non-attendance. The view that non-attendance may be underpinned by parents lacking the necessary behaviour-management skills to deal with their child's non-attendance has resulted in parenting courses becoming a solution (Atkinson et al 2000b; Kearney and Beasley, 1994; Mansdorf and Lukens, 1987). These can involve teaching the parent to give clear instructions to their child, praise appropriate behaviours and ignore "tantrums" and psycho-somatic complains (Blagg, 1987; King et al, 1998). EWOs in Atkinson et al's (2000b) study reported at least a 40% increase in pupils' attendance after their parent had attended a parenting course. They also reported that the course promoted better communication between parents and school staff, led to a reduction in parentally condoned absences, raised parents' awareness of attendance and provided parents with support. Furthermore, Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) found that parents had positive opinions of parenting courses when they were tailored to their individual needs. It has been suggested that in doing this, the facilitator is able to explore and support in addressing the causes of non-attendance but also place the power of change in the parents' hands (Atkinson et al, 2000b).

Providing a key person with whom parents can liaise about their concerns is another approach to addressing non-attendance and Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) and Epstein and Sheldon (2002) have found this to have a positive effect on pupil's attendance. This seems particularly important given Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) finding that some parents experience difficultly in dealing with pupil's non-attendance and are likely to require the support of others. Furthermore, a positive relationship between the parent and school staff is more likely to lead to a shared commitment to reduce non-attendance and enable the child's needs to be identified and met by all concerned (Irving and Parker-Jenkins, 1995, Malcolm et al, 2003).

In addition to these supportive interventions, the DfE (2014c) outlines various legal actions that schools and local authorities can take to enforce attendance. These are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Legal actions for enforcing attendance

Legal action	Description
Parenting Order	Imposed requirements on parents to attend parenting courses or counselling for three months
Education Supervision Order	The appointment of a supervisor to help get the child into education
School Attendance Order	If the local council thinks that a pupil is not getting an education they will give parents 15 days to provide evidence that they have registered their child with a school or that they are educating them at home
Penalty notice	Parent is issued a penalty of £60 which is increased to £120 if it not paid within 28 days. If the parent fails to pay the fine they are prosecuted.
Prosecution	Fines up to £2,500 can be issued along with a community order or a jail sentence up to 3 months

However, these more punitive measures do not appear to significantly impact on attendance as studies have found that local authorities that frequently prosecute do not have better attendance figures (Blacktop and Blyth, 1999; Zhang, 2004). One reason may be that these solutions are concerned with returning and keeping the pupil in school, without necessarily addressing the specific causes of their non-attendance (Cooper and Mellors, 1990).

2.7.3. School focused interventions

Providing a key adult within school with whom a pupil could build a relationship with is thought to be an effective strategy for reducing non-attendance (Malcolm et al, 2003). School staff in Malcolm et al's (2003) study reported that this adult could help find solutions to the pupil's non-attendance and support the development of a positive teacher-pupil relationship by facilitating a greater understanding of the pupil. Parents in Kinder and Wilkin's (1998) study also spoke positively of adults in school undertaking befriending roles and being a source of support for pupil with attendance problems.

Putting in place alternative curriculum arrangements may be another school based strategy to improve attendance (Kinder and Wilkin, 1998). This involves providing pupil-focused structured learning experiences and may include the pupil attending agreed lessons (e.g. key subjects such as English and Mathematics) along with work experience, personal tutorials and non-curricular projects (Irving and Parker-Jenkins, 1995). Malcolm et al (2003) found that staff in 13 schools reported that special arrangements were put in place to support and reintegrate poor attenders.

These included access to learning mentors, placement in units to support social inclusion and adapted or negotiated time tables.

Due to the complex and multifaceted nature of non-attendance, schools may also need to liaise with and seek support from a variety of services including: Educational Psychology services; Hospital and home tuition services; Pupil Referral Units; Social Services; Police; Health and Mental Health services; Youth Offending Teams; and Housing services (Atkinson et al, 2000a).

2.7.4. Targeting interventions to meet needs

In order to address non-attendance, the type of non-attendance should first be identified and there should be a clear understanding of the reasons for the pupil not attending school (Kearney and Sims, 1997). This would then allow the appropriate interventions to be identified and put in place to address these presenting problems (Elliott and Place, 1998). EWOs in Atkinson et al's (2000b) study proposed that listening to the pupil and parent, identifying the underlying causes of non-attendance and tailoring the intervention to their needs promoted the effectiveness of interventions. Similar views were expressed by teachers and parents in Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) and Malcolm et al's (2003) studies as participants recognised the need for interventions to be tailored to the individual pupil and their family in order to be effective. Furthermore, Kearney and Silverman (1990) demonstrated this in their study that measured the outcomes of interventions tailored to individual pupil's needs. For instance, a child whose non-attendance was underpinned by anxiety related to the school setting received

relaxation training, children with peer difficulties and social anxiety received cognitive interventions with social skills training and a child who displayed difficult behaviours in order to stay at home received reinforcement of positive behaviours. Following these interventions, six out of the seven children were attending school on a full-time basis and this was maintained after 6 months.

With the exception of Kearney and Silverman's (1990) study, much of the research outlined above has relied on subjective comments or proposed ideas regarding effective interventions. With regards to the latter, studies by Dalziel and Henthorne (2005), Kinder et al (1995), Kinder et al (1996) and Kinder and Wilkin (1998) were conducted with pupils who were experiencing attendance problems at the time, which gives little insight into the actual effectiveness of the interventions suggested. Few studies have focused on pupils with improved attendance and explored the reasons for this improvement to shed light on effective interventions.

2.8. The current study

Previous research has explored the way pupils, parents and teachers view non-attendance in terms of the causes and solutions. The present study aimed to build upon this but within the current context of schools receiving reduced support from the local authority. However, few studies have triangulated these views in specific cases of non-attendance and furthermore, in cases where attendance has improved. Therefore the current study also intended to further enhance the research in this area by taking a case study approach that allowed the triangulation of pupils', parents' and teachers' views and other sources to create a

rich picture of individual cases of improved attendance. In doing so, the current study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. *In cases of improved attendance, what were the perceived causes of the pupil's non-attendance?*
2. *In cases of improved attendance, why did the pupil's attendance improve?*

These questions were underpinned by a proposed theory and theoretical propositions that were used to guide the study. These are discussed in further detail in chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by outlining the rationale for the current study and the research questions along with the proposed theory and theoretical propositions used to guide the data collection. The epistemological stance underpinning the study is then outlined followed by the justification for using a case study methodology. The research design is discussed and details of the participants, data collection methods and procedures are presented. The ethical considerations of the study are then outlined followed by the process of data analysis. Finally threats to validity and reliability are considered.

3.1. Rationale for the study and research questions

The rationale for the current study emerged from limits in previous research and the changes to the political climate. Dalziel and Henthorne (2005), Kinder et al (1995), Kinder et al (1996), Kinder and Wilkin (1998) and Malcolm et al (2003) have explored the perceptions of pupils, parents and teachers with regards to the causes of non-attendance and proposed solutions. However, there is no current UK research that has explored individual cases of non-attendance from these three viewpoints. Therefore the extent to which there is a shared understanding of non-attendance amongst those involved in a particular case is largely unknown. Furthermore, previous research has focused on pupils who were experiencing attendance problems at the time of the studies being conducted. There has been little research carried out with pupils whose attendance has improved, which would allow the effectiveness of interventions put in place to be explored. Finally,

previous research was conducted prior to the delegation of attendance responsibilities to schools. Therefore, little is known about how schools are currently addressing non-attendance in a context of reduced support from the local authority. In addition to this, DfE (2014a) has stated the need for more research to identify how schools can influence reductions in persistent absence.

Therefore, the current study aimed to explore cases of improved attendance within the current political context, in order to identify examples of good practice. This was done by gaining the views of those involved in the case (the pupil, parent and teacher) with regards to: the causes of the pupil's non-attendance, to establish the extent to which there is a shared understanding; and the interventions put in place that led to improvements in attendance. Due to the apparent increase in non-attendance in primary school pupils and the recognition of the importance of early intervention, the current study was carried out with primary school pupils.

The study aimed to answer the following overarching research questions:

1. *In cases of improved attendance, what were the perceived causes of the pupil's non-attendance?*
2. *In cases of improved attendance, why did the pupil's attendance improve?*

3.1.1. Proposed theory and theoretical propositions

The theory that the current study aimed to support was generated from previous research and is as follows:

> *Improvements in attendance will result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parent and teachers and interventions being put in place that aim to address the causes identified. Therefore these would be tailored to the individual and be in addition to the whole school approaches to increase attendance.*

Theoretical propositions were stated in order to direct attention to what should be explored and where to look for relevant evidence (Yin, 2009). They related to previous research and were used to inform the appropriate data collection for the study:

1. The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance
2. The pupil, parent and teacher will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving
3. The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupil's attendance that reflect the causes identified
4. These interventions will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

3.2. Epistemology

The philosophical stance underpinning the current study was that of critical realism. Critical realism assumes that there is a reality that exists independently of our representations of it and that our representations are subject to historical and social influences (Norris, 1999). Bhaskar (1989) states that events can be seen but there are structures and mechanisms that exist beyond these events which are not readily observable and have the causal power to produce effects. Therefore, the social world can only be understood if one understands the structures and mechanism that generate these events. Critical realists consider reality as consisting of three domains: the empirical, which refers to observable experiences; the actual, which refers to actual events that have been generated by mechanisms; and the real, which refers to the mechanisms that generate the actual event (see Figure 1: Mingers and Wilcocks, 2004). A researcher's aim is to investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships between what

individuals experience, what actually happens and the underlying mechanisms that produce events (Danermark et al, 2002). The critical aspect of critical realism refers to the attempt to empower individuals by revealing the power of underlying structures and mechanisms which may create barriers in their lives (Livock, 2008). Therefore, critical realism calls for a deep understanding of a social situation, going beyond the observable and investigating the mechanisms behind an event (Dobson, 2001).

Figure 1: The empirical, actual and real domains of critical realism (Mingers and Willcocks, 2004).
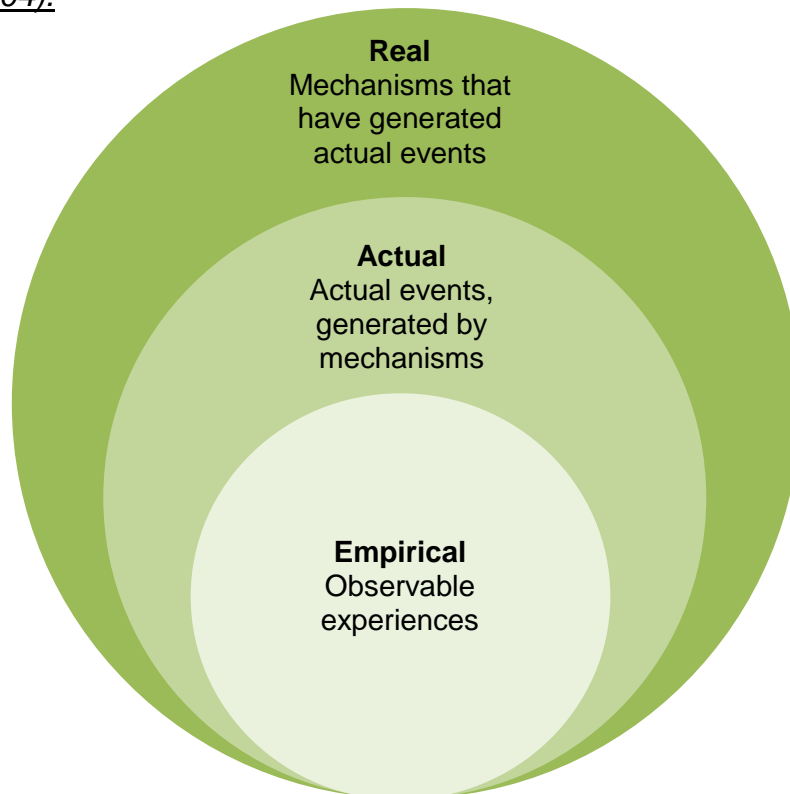
3.3. Case study methodology

A case study methodology was employed in this study, which is described by Robson (2011) as a research strategy that employs multiple sources of evidence

to investigate a phenomenon within its real life context. Thomas (2011, p.23) goes on to describe case studies as:

> "... *analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – an object- within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates".*

In terms of Thomas' (2011) definition, the *subjects* in the current study were pupils with improved attendance and the *analytical frame* relates to the analysis of why the pupils' attendance improved. Yin (2009) suggests that the use of a case study is most appropriate when asking "*how*" and/or "*why*" questions about a current event over which the researcher has no control. Therefore, this was deemed an appropriate design for the current study as I intended to explore why attendance had improved, without manipulating the behaviour being studied. This could not have been achieved using other designs such as experiment or evaluative designs which require the manipulation of variables (Stangor, 2011). Another advantage of case studies is that they allow the researcher to explore events in their real life contexts (Cohen et al, 2011). For instance, the current research was placed within the context of the school and aimed to explore the practice that had occurred with regards to improving the pupils' attendance. This would have been difficult to do using longitudinal or evaluative designs as the presence of the researcher throughout the intervention stage (e.g. action taken to address the non-attendance) may have influenced the practice of the schools (Robson, 2011). Case studies also allow the triangulation of data to provide an holistic and in-depth picture of a phenomenon (Denscombe, 2007). This is something the current study

aimed to do as there is a lack of research which explores individual cases of non-attendance by gathering the views of those involved (e.g. the pupil, their parent and their teachers) and triangulating these with information gathered from school documents and records, to provide an holistic picture of each pupil's attendance. Furthermore, previous studies have highlighted an inability to generalise their findings due to small sample sizes (e.g. Kinder et al, 1995; 1996). However, findings from case studies can be generalised to theories rather than populations (Yin, 2009; Thomas, 2011). Therefore, I judged that a case study would be appropriate for the current study as it would allow the proposed theory to be supported or refuted.

It is acknowledged that case studies, like any other design, are not without limitations. These have been identified in Table 3 along with the measures that were put in place to address these limitations.

Table 3: Potential limitations of case studies and measures to address them

Potential limitations of case studies	Measure to address limitations
Case studies can be time-consuming and generate excessive amounts of data which are difficult to analyse.	Clear research questions and theoretical proposition were used to set the parameters of the study. A case study protocol was used to ensure that all data collected was relevant to the research questions and theoretical propositions (see Appendix 3). The theoretical propositions were also used to guide the data analysis.
Case studies can be vulnerable to researcher bias in terms of the selection and analysis of data.	Throughout the process, rationales for decisions were made explicit and steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study (outlined in Section 3.8).

Potential limitations of case studies	Measure to address limitations
Case studies have been criticised for producing findings that cannot be generalised beyond the immediate case study.	The present study does not claim to produce findings that can be generalised to all pupils with improved attendance. Rather, the results can be generalised to theoretical propositions which derived from extensive reading of previous literature.
Case studies have been criticised for being descriptive and having no purpose	The findings of this case study will be presented in a way that is useful for schools and the Educational Psychology Service, by providing examples of good practices in increasing attendance and future considerations.
Case studies have been criticised for lacking rigour	This was addressed throughout the research by continually referring back to the case study protocol (see Appendix 3), developing a systematic procedure for carrying out the research and keeping a record of decisions and rationales for these decisions.

Based on Corcoran et al (2004), Denscombe (2007), Robson (2011), Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009).

3.4. Design frame

There are many different kinds of case study that serve different research purposes and have been defined differently by authors in this field (e.g. Bassey, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Thomas (2011) has reviewed and refined these, providing distinctions between different subjects, purposes, approaches and processes in case studies. This was used to inform the planning of the current research and the case study design is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: The case study design used in the current study

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Key cases: pupils with improved attendance	**Instrumental** : using cases to provide insight into improving attendance	**Testing a theory:** Improvements in attendance will result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parent and teachers and interventions being put in place that aim to address the causes identified. Therefore these would be tailored to the individual and be in addition to the whole school approaches to increase attendance	**Multiple**: three cases
	Exploratory: exploring participants perception of the cause of non-attendance and solutions		**Parallel**: evidence will be gathered at the same time
	Explanatory: gaining an understanding of why attendance improved		

(adapted from Thomas, 2011)

A multiple case study design was employed in the expectation that this would allow for direct replication of the findings, leading to more robust analytical conclusions (Yin, 2009). The contexts of the three cases differed in a number of ways and as Yin (2009) suggests, if under these varied circumstances common conclusions are found, this expands the generalisability of the findings (to theory), compared to those from a single case alone.

3.5. Settings and participants

As mentioned in the literature review, non-attendance affects a small number of pupils in schools (Brown, 1983; Irving and Parker-Jenkins; 1995). Furthermore, the complexities surrounding non-attendance mean that schools may not always be

successful in bringing about improvements. Therefore, in order to find cases of improved attendance a set of selection criteria was devised to identify the schools that were most likely to have such cases. The rationale for the criteria is outline in Table 5.

Table 5: Criteria for selecting participating schools and rationale

Criterion	Rationale
Primary schools in the area in which I am based, but not one of the schools to which I delivered commissioned or statutory work (i.e. my link schools).	This was to ensure that cases were from similar contexts as the four areas across the county differ greatly. Removing my link schools was judged to reduce the chances of bias caused by myself already being familiar with the school in a different capacity.
Primary schools with an improved absence rate from 2011 - 2012 (i.e. absent rate above the national average for 2011 (5.14%) and below the national average rate for 2012 (4.4%))	I considered that this would increase the likelihood of finding cases of improved attendance.
Primary schools that had been recognised by Ofsted as taking action to improve attendance.	This would identify schools which were actively addressing non-attendance and were examples of good practice.

This information was gained from the DfE performance tables 2011 – 2012 and from the Ofsted website (DfE, 2011b; 2012a; Ofsted, 2013). Four schools met the selection criteria and were invited to take part in the research by letter (see Appendix 4). Of these four schools, three initially agreed to take part. The characteristics of these schools are shown in the Table 6

Table 6: Characteristics of participating schools

Setting	No. of pupils	Absence 2011	Absence 2012	Pupils with SA+ or Statement	Pupils with EAL	Pupil eligible for FSM
School A	209	5.25% (6.7% PA)	4.2% (2.7% PA)	7.7%	21.5%	32.5%
School B	213	7.05% (9.8% PA)	4.4% (3.8% PA)	8.9%	41.2%	32.4%
School C	412	6.13% (7.2% PA)	4.3% (3.1% PA)	5.1%	28.4%	16.7%

National average 2011 = 5.14% (5.2% PA); National average 2012 = 4.4% (3.4% PA)

PA = Persistent Absence (15%); SA+ =School Action Plus; EAL = English as an Additional Language; FSM = Free School Meals

Each school identified a key contact with whom I liaised throughout the study and who supported in organising the data collection. Initial meetings were carried out with these key contacts to discuss the research process. They were asked to identify pupils whose attendance had been 85% or less during the academic year 2011/2012 and had improved by around 10% by Term 5 of the academic year 2012/2013. These inclusion criteria intended to identify pupils who were previously PA and had shown improvement in attendance that brought them in line with the national average (95%). However, the key contacts within each school reported that they found it difficult to identify pupils that met these criteria and therefore the criteria were modified to include pupils with less that 90% and at least a 5% increase. In school B, the criteria was broadened further (due to difficulties identifying pupils) to include pupils with attendance lower than the school's target during the academic year 2011/2012 and who had shown an increase in attendance by term 5 of the academic year 2012/2013. The key contacts then sent letters to the parents of those identified to invite them to take part in the research

(more details on this process are provided in Section 3.6.). Table 7 shows the number of pupils identified by the key contacts in each school and the number of parents who agreed for themselves and their child to take part in the research.

Table 7: Number of pupils identified and number of parental consent gained

School	Number of pupils identified	Number for whom consent gained
School A	3	1
School B	6	2
School C	2	0

As the table shows, there were only 11 potential participants identified across the three schools which reflects the small number of pupils who do not attend school regularly. Of these, only 3 parents agreed to take part in the study. The key contact in each school contacted the parents who had not returned the consent form by telephone but no further consent was gained. As neither of the parents of the pupils identified by school C agreed to take part in the research, the key contact and I devised a different selection criterion in an attempt to identify more potential participants. This included pupils whose attendance had increased over three terms during the academic year 2012/2013, following specific intervention. However the school subsequently withdrew from the research as staff felt that they could no longer commit due to increased pressure following a recent Ofsted inspection. In a final attempt to gain more participants, I made further telephone contact with the Head Teacher of the fourth school originally identified, however they did not wish to take part.

Therefore, the study comprised of three cases across two schools and involved 11 participants. The characteristics of the pupils in each case are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8: Characteristics of the pupils in each case

Case	Gender	Age	Attendance 2011/2012		Attendance Term 5 2013	
			%	No. of days absent	%	No. of days absent
1	Male	10	82% (95.8%)	34	87% (94.8%)	25
2	Male	6	77% (95.6%)	44	90% (93.7%)	19
3	Female	8	93% (95.6%)	13	94% (93.7%)	11

Percentage in brackets shows the schools average attendance for that period

As shown in the table above, the pupil in case 3 had the highest attendance and made minimal improvements (1%). The key contact identified this pupil as her attendance was below the school target (95%) and she missed up to 13 days of school each year which was thought to be having an impact on her academic progress. Throughout her compulsory schooling this level of absence each year would equate to missing 28 weeks of school by the time she was sixteen (Taylor, 2012). Ideally a pupil with more significant attendance problems and greater gains in attendance would have been chosen, but due to the limited number of parental consent received I decided to include this pupil in the study. Furthermore, according to Yin (2009), multiple cases can offer either literal replication due to similar findings arising across the cases, or theoretical replication due to contrasting findings arising but as the result of predictable reasons. Therefore, it was hypothesised that the findings from case 1 and case 2 would support the theoretical propositions, providing literal replication. Whereas the findings from

case 3 would dispute the theoretical propositions due to the higher level of attendance and minimal increase, thus providing theoretical replication.

3.6. Data collection methods and procedures

This study employed a multi-method approach to collecting data, with evidence from semi-structured interviews, document analysis and administrative records being triangulated (Cohen et al, 2011). A critical realist epistemology lends itself to a multi-method approach as traces of reality can be revealed using quantitative methods, with qualitative methods then allowing for a more explanatory approach with regards to searching for generative mechanisms (Carter and New, 2004).

3.6.1. Semi-structured interview

According to Yin (2009), interviews are one of the most important sources of information in a case study as they allow researchers to gain participants' insights into events and situations, along with their opinions and attitudes. They allow the researcher to utilise open questions, prompts and probes to elicit rich and in-depth discussions about topics and follow up on participants' responses (Cohen et al, 2011). In comparison to other methods such as postal or self-administered questionnaires and telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews also allow the researcher to observe participants' non-verbal cues, which can support them in understanding the participants' verbal responses (Robson, 2011). A semi-structured interview was used in the current study and was chosen over an unstructured or structured interview, since it allowed me to devise a schedule of topics to be covered in order to answer the research questions, whilst also

allowing for the wording and order of the questions to be modified as necessary and interesting comments to be followed up (Robson, 2011).

It was acknowledged that interviews have potential limitations that needed to be taken into consideration. These are outlined in Appendix 5 along with the measures put in place to address them.

In each of the three cases, interviews were carried out with the pupil, their parent and their teachers. The person responsible for attendance in each school was also interviewed to provide a contextual picture of the school's practice in relation to attendance. The interviews were carried out in a private room to ensure confidentiality was maintained and to avoid interruptions. The interview schedule used to guide the interviews consisted of an introductory comment, a list of topic headings and possible key questions, a set of associated prompts and probes and a closing comment (see Appendix 6). The interviews were digitally recorded in order to capture an exact record of the conversation. However, it was acknowledged that this failed to capture the visual aspects of the interview such as physical context, facial expression and body language (Robson, 2011). It was not deemed appropriate to use video recordings as these can be obtrusive and cause participants to feel uncomfortable (Walliman and Buckler, 2008).

3.6.2. Documentation analysis

The analysis of documents that have been created for a purpose can reveal aspects of behaviour (Webb et al, 1981; 2000). This method is considered

unobtrusive in that there does not need to be direct contact between the researcher and the producers of the document (Lee, 2000). It is also considered to be non-reactive in that the document should not be influenced by the researcher as it was created for a purpose independent of the research (Robson, 2011). In the current study, the school Attendance Policy was analysed as I considered this would give insight into the way attendance was approached at the whole-school level. Although, it cannot be assumed that this is a reflection of practice within the school, the analysis of this document provided a useful cross-validation of the information collected from the interviews (Robson, 2011).

3.6.3. Administrative records

The administrative records collected by organisations can provide another valuable supplementary source of evidence (Robson, 2011). Again, administrative records are considered to be unobtrusive and non-reactive as they are created for administrative purposes rather than for the purpose of the research (Lee, 2000; Robson, 2011). In the current study, attendance records were used to select the pupils but also provided a quantitative verification of the improved attendance discussed in the interviews. It was recognised that there are limitations to the use of administrative records. For instance, the researcher has no control over the collection of these data and therefore cannot rule out errors and biases in the data collection or ensure that data are not missed (Robson, 2011). However, these limitations were reduced in the current study due to there being clear government guidance on the collection and coding of attendance data.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the current study was sought and gained from the Ethics Research Committee at the University of Birmingham. I was required to identify key ethical considerations pertinent to this study and state how these would be addressed. Conduct relating to voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity was adhered to throughout the study (British Psychological Society: BPS, 2010).

The schools that were approached to take part in the study were identified using data in the public domain (e.g. DfE attendance figures, Ofsted). They were sent a letter outlining the aims of the research, followed by a telephone call to gauge their interest in taking part (see Appendix 4). Voluntary participation was emphasised at this point as it was made clear to the schools that their involvement in the research was on a voluntarily basis and they had the right to withdraw from the study up to the point of analysis (Cohen et al, 2011).

As I did not have parental consent to view the pupils' attendance data in order to identify potential cases, the key contact from the school was asked to do this. The parents of pupils identified were sent a letter (see Appendix 7) and the *Information for Parents* document (see Appendix 8) which outlined the purpose of the study and what was required of participants so that they could make an informed decision about whether to take part. Again, it was made explicit that their involvement in the research was on a voluntarily basis and they had the right to

refrain from answering questions or withdraw from the study up to the point of analysis (Cohen et al, 2011).

It was also made clear that personal information concerning the participants would be kept confidential. As the key contact was involved in contacting participants and arranging the interviews, complete anonymity of the participant could not be promised. However, participants were assured that their responses from the interviews would be anonymised and key identifying characteristic such as the name of the school and participant would be removed when reporting the data.

Written informed consent was gained from parents who agreed to take part in the study (see Appendix 9). Parents were also asked to give consent for their child to take part in the study as the pupils were under the age of 16 years old (BPS, 2010). Once parental consent was gained information about the research was sent to the pupil and the pupil's teachers (see Appendices 10 and 11) and again informed consent was gained from these participants (see Appendices 12 and 13).

Before the interview began the participants were reminded of their right to withdraw, that their personal information would be kept confidential and their responses would be anonymised. Following the interviews, all participants were given an oral debrief which reiterated these criteria and provided them with the opportunity to ask questions.

It was also recognised that ethical challenges can occur during the conduct of research (Macfarlane, 2010). Procedures were identified from the outset regarding responses to any safeguarding concerns or disclosures (see Appendix 14). Integrity and respect were maintained throughout the research, with the latter including acknowledging the dynamics of school-life and family-life by respecting any refusals to take part. The potential for a power imbalance between myself and the participants was also recognised (BPS, 2010). In order to reduce this, participants were assured that they had been selected as examples of good practice and efforts were made to reduce the notion of myself as being an "expert" (Litosliti, 2003). Children in particular are more vulnerable to unequal power relationships and may be more susceptible to demand characteristics due to a desire to please or fear of the adult's reactions to their responses (Hood et al, 1996; Mauthner, 1997). Therefore, time was taken to build rapport with the pupils before the interview began, including a conversation about their likes and interests.

3.8. Methods of data analysis

The school's attendance policy was analysed using content analysis (Robson, 2011). Categories were devised based on Holsti's (1969) suggestions and included:

- values - what values are being revealed in the text;

- intentions - what are the intentions of the document;

- methods – how are the intentions achieved: and

- actors and actions – who is being asked to do what.

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed in full to allow the transcriptions to be coded and qualitative analysis to be undertaken. The analysis was carried out in two phases. The first phase was indicative and involved a thematic analysis of participants' responses in each of the three cases. The process undertaken is outlined in Table 9. This analysis allowed agreements and contradictions between the participants' views to be identified within each case and key themes and subthemes to be abstracted. The second phase of the analysis was deductive and involved matching the patterns emerging from the data analysis to the theoretical propositions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This enabled the theoretical propositions to be either validated or refuted, and in the case of the latter, alternative explanations were sought (Yin, 2009).

Table 9: Five phases of thematic analysis (based on Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Phase	Action
1: Familiarisation with data	Reading and re-reading transcripts, noting down initial ideas.
2: Generating initial codes	Interesting and distinct features are coded within each transcript (see Appendix 15 for example).
3: Searching for themes	The codes are collated into potential themes (i.e. a view mentioned by two or more participants), gathering all relevant data for each theme. Individual and counter views were also noted (e.g. view of one person or view that contrasted with another) (see Appendix 16 for example).
4: Checking and reviewing themes	Themes are reviewed and refined to ensure that they relate back to the original transcripts.
5: Defining and naming the themes	Themes are defined and named so that the full sense and importance of the theme is reflected

3.9. Criteria for validity and reliability of the data

It is recognised that there are different opinions of validity and reliability in quantitative and qualitative research and qualitative researchers need to be cautious that they are not working to the agenda of positivists (Cohen, 2011; Maxwell, 1992). Within qualitative research, the meaning that participants give to data and inferences drawn from the data by a researcher take precedence over the validity of data and methods themselves (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). With this in mind, steps were taken throughout the study to ensure the quality and robustness of the findings and these are outlined in Appendix 17.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter will first outline the extent to which the theoretical propositions are supported by each case in turn. A summary will then be provided of the extent to which the theoretical propositions are supported across the three cases.

4.1. Case 1 (school A)

The three participants within the first case comprised of a 10 year old male pupil with an attendance increase of 5% (equivalent of 9 days), his mother and his teacher. The member of staff responsible for attendance was also interviewed.

4.1.1. Proposition 1: The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non attendance

This proposition was not supported by the findings of case 1 as there was not a complete shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance across all three participants. Table 10 shows that the pupil and the parent shared the view that the pupil's non-attendance was caused by medical problems and difficulties getting up. However, each participant identified at least one cause which was not identified by the other two participants.

	Pupil	Parent	Teacher
Pupil	Difficulties with teachers Difficulties with peers	Medical problems Difficulties getting up	
Parent		Mood	
Teacher			Lack of parenting ability Gaining control

Shared view ⬜   Partially shared view 🟧   Individual view 🟥

No shared views ⬜   No individual view ⬜   Duplicated box ▨

Partially shared views of the causes of non-attendance

Two causes were identified by both the parent and the pupil and therefore were considered to be partially shared:

a. Medical problems

Both the pupil and the parent reported that the pupil's non-attendance was mostly due to medical problems:

> *He had problems with his stomach which was making him sick so he had a lot of sickness... I mean that is the only reason I keep him off, if he's been sick (parent, school A).*

> *Most of the time was because I was poorly (pupil, school A).*

b. Difficulties getting up

The pupil and parent also reported that the pupil experienced difficulties getting up in the morning. The pupil reported that this was due to him going to sleep late:

I wanted to stay in bed... because I used to go to bed at 1am
(pupil, school A).

Whereas the parent reported that this was due to the pupil's disposition and reluctance to get up:

I just don't think he's a morning person. It's the getting up, the getting
dressed, he won't do anything (parent, school A).

Individual views of the causes of non-attendance

The pupil, parent and teacher each identified a cause of non-attendance that none of the other participants mentioned:

a. Difficulties with teachers

The teacher reported that the pupil was fine once he was in school and felt there were no school related factors that were impacting on the pupil's attendance. However the pupil reported that some of the reasons he did not go to school were because of issues his teachers:

The teachers always shouted at me because I didn't bring my home work in
(pupil, school A).

b. Difficulties with peers

The pupil also identified difficulties with his peers as a cause of his non-attendance:

> *I always got bullied... and annoyed with people in our class (pupil, school A).*

c. Mood

The parent reported that the pupil occasionally refused to go to school and believed that this was as a result of his mood at the time:

> *There were a couple of times where he just completely refused. That was just a bad temper, you know, he just wasn't going to school and that was it, there was no reason (parent, school A).*

d. Gaining control

The teacher reported that the pupil refused to attend school in an attempt to gain control over the parent and felt that this was the main reason for the pupil's low attendance:

> *There was an issue there of him having control over the situation... he wants to exhort that power over mum and school is the issue that he can have the most impact because actually he's only got to hold out for half an hour and... he's won because he's late for school or he's not going in, or mum's late for work and just gives up (teacher, school A).*

e. Lack of parenting ability

The teacher felt that the pupil's refusal to come to school also resulted from a lack of parenting ability with regards to enforcing rules and consequences:

> *A lack of ability if you like for mum to actually force him to come into school... he didn't want to come in and this was something he could control because mum couldn't...(teacher, school A).*

The teacher reported that the pupil received consequences at school for his behaviour at home:

> *he knows the boundaries... he knows the consequences and they'll be followed through, even if he breaks mum's boundaries and doesn't get a consequence, there will be when he gets back into school*
> *(teacher, school A).*

4.1.2. Proposition 2: The pupil, parent and teacher will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

The findings support this proposition as two themes emerged with regards to the factors that led to an improvement in the pupil's attendance. These were *support for the parent* and *motivation for the pupil* and each had a number of subthemes as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The themes and subthemes relating to the factors that led to improvements in the pupil's attendance in case 1
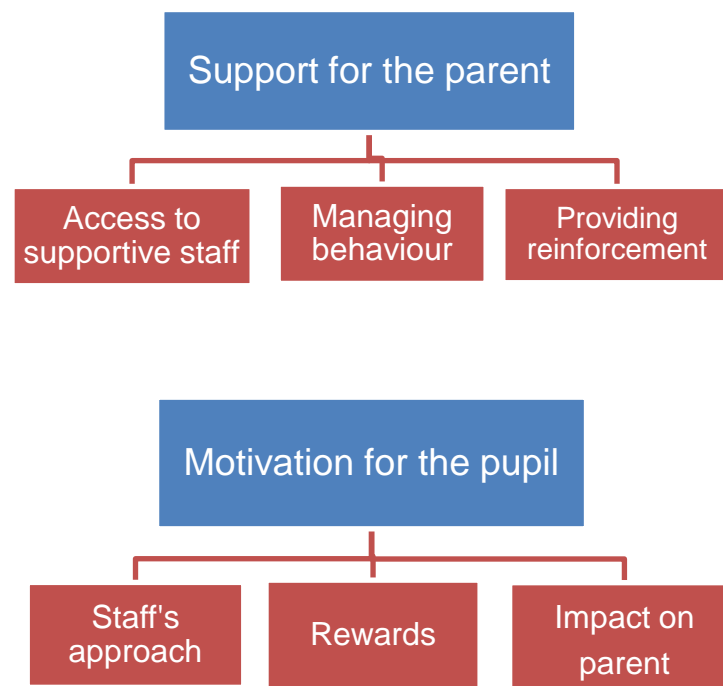
Theme 1: Support for the parent

The first theme that emerged related to the school providing support for the parent. This appeared to occur in three different ways; through providing access to supportive staff; supporting the parent to manage the pupil's behaviour and; providing reinforcement.

Subtheme: Access to supportive staff

The teacher reported that the parent had access to supportive staff within school:

> *Mum relies on school heavily, particularly the Family Support Worker who's really supportive (teacher, school A).*

The parent agreed that the Family Support Worker (FSW) had been a source of support and felt that the FSW understood the difficulties she experienced with the pupil;

> *[FSW] can actually see what I'm dealing with and has helped me tremendously (parent, school A).*

The FSW appeared to be a source of both emotional and practical support for the parent:

> *I suppose because I go in her office and have a good cry... (parent, school A).*

> *I can go to her, I can phone her and leave a message, she'll get back to me. If I need anything, I just go to [FSW] now (parent, school A).*

The teacher felt that he also had a good relationship with the parent:

> *Myself and [another teacher] are his teacher for a second year so there's a relationship already there with mum (teacher, school A).*

However, the parent felt that the FSW was the only supportive member of staff in school:

> *There had been nobody to talk to in this school until [FSW] came... I didn't like to speak to any of the teachers about it because they were all so negative about everything and I felt I was hitting my head against a brick wall (parent, school A).*

Subtheme: Managing behaviour

The teacher felt that the biggest factor in improving the pupil's attendance related to supporting the parent to manage the pupil's behaviour through the involvement of different professionals:

> *It's the work that we've done, I suppose with the relationship with [pupil] and mum at home that's had the biggest impact on his attendance... there's lots of links with CAMHS and CAFs and outside agencies working with mum to support her to manage [pupil] (teacher, school A).*

Whilst the parent also reported that she received support to manage the pupil's behaviour, she spoke negatively of this and did not feel that it contributed to the increase in attendance:

> *I was getting told 'there's nothing wrong with him, it's your parenting'... to go on this course, that course, the other course and I did it all and he was still the same. If not worse... But you know, you get to a point and you think 'is it me?' (parent, school A).*

Subtheme: Providing reinforcement

The pupil and teachers also spoke about school staff providing back up for the parent. For example, by collecting the pupil when he refused to go to school:

> *[FSW], she came to my house and made me come to school (pupil, school A).*

We supported mum... and sort of said "we'll come and get him if needs be, even if he's in his pyjamas"... we said that in front of him so he got the jist of you may have your control over your mum but actually if I turn up to collect you, you're coming in your pyjamas if that's what it takes (teacher, school A).

The teacher also mentioned putting in place consequences at school for the pupil's behaviour at home as he felt the parent was unable to do this:

[Pupil] knows that... he may rule the roost at home but actually mum will come in and tell us at school so there's going to be a consequence even if he breaks mum's boundaries and doesn't get a consequence (teacher, school A).

Theme 2: Motivation for the pupil

The second theme related to factors that motivated the pupil to attend school and included the way in which school staff approached the pupil, rewards put in place for him and the pupil realising the negative impact his non-attendance was having on the parent.

Subtheme: Staffs approach with the pupil

The teacher, parent and pupil all highlighted the positive approach school staff took with the pupil. This included encouraging the pupil to attend school:

They just encouraged me to come to school more... they kept saying 'come on [pupil] you need to start coming to school a bit more often' (pupil, school A).

I've been out to the front gate when he's refused to get out of the car and things like that or he's refusing to come in and sort of coerced him in.... [I've given him] positive reinforcement for you know, when he comes in (teacher, school A).

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This also involved members of staff being consistent, calm and fun in their approach to the pupil:

I think having those positive relationships with him, with the teachers, with the Family Support Worker... I've been his teacher now for two years so... he's had that stability which has helped (teacher, School A).

[FSW] has been a big, big help from the other one that was here... Just her whole attitude and approach. The way she spoke to him just now, calmly, the other one would have come in like a bull in a china shop... she's been brilliant with him (parent, School A).

It started to get a bit more fun with my teacher because every time I go to mathletics he always sings and plays music and it encourages me because I want to hear him (pupil, School A).

Subtheme: Rewards

Both the teacher and the pupil talked about the school rewards put in place for the pupil. However the pupil mentioned rewards that were specifically related to his attendance whereas the teacher mentioned rewards relating to the pupil's behaviour in general:

Last year my LSA, she done a rewards chart and she said 'if you come into school this many days you get a treat' and I kept getting treats so it encouraged me to go school (pupil, school A).

The behaviour agreement has been quite good... he can see there's a reward there [bowling], it's a physical thing, it's not just a merit or a sticker it's a physical thing that he wants to do... that's about progress but he realises, in order to achieve that he needs to be in (teacher, school A).

Subtheme: Impact of non-attendance on parent

The pupil and teacher both felt that the pupil recognised the negative impact his non-attendance was having on his mother:

> *If you don't come to school your mum can get arrested, so I just started coming to school (pupil, school A).*

> *Mums lost a job I believe as a result of his poor attendance so I think, that's impacted on him, so he's sort of realised the severity (teacher, school A).*

4.1.3. Proposition 3: The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupil's attendance that reflect the causes identified

This proposition was supported to some extent as the interventions put in place reflected some of the causes identified as shown in Table 11.

Table 11: The extent to which the interventions put in place reflected the causes identified

Causes	Interventions
Medical problem (Pa/Pu)	Rewards (Pu/T)
Difficulties getting up (Pa/Pu)	Managing behaviour (T)
Refusal due to mood (Pa)	Support from school staff (T/Pa)
Refusal as control (T)	Reinforcement (T/Pu)
Lack of parenting ability (T)	Staff's approach to pupil (Pu/Pa/T)
Difficulties with peers (Pu)	
Difficulties with teachers (Pu)	

(Brackets indicate views represented, Pa = parent, Pu = pupil, T = teacher)

As the table shows, the reported support put in place by the school aligned mostly with the teacher's views as to why the pupil was not attending and to some extent the parent's views. However, there was no support reported that addressed the issues raised by the parent and pupil alone (e.g. medical problems, difficulties

getting up and difficulties with peers) and the parent and pupil reported that some of these were still an issue:

I can't get up by alarm because it don't wake me up, my mum every morning shouts at me and I don't wake up, so she has to get water on her fingers and tap me (pupil, school A).

It takes me two hours to wake [pupil] up in the morning. Plus now he's on sleeping pills so it can take longer, you know so I feel like I've done a full day before he even gets to school (parent, school A).

I think the main issue was his tummy but we're still not done with that, we've still got to go and have blood tests for celiac disease. So it's still ongoing (parent, school A).

4.1.4. Proposition 4: The interventions put in place will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

This proposition was supported as the interventions put in place to increase the pupil's attendance were in addition to those outlined in Table 12. The support would fall under stage 4 of the reactive strategies but was tailored to the causes identified.

Table 12: General whole school strategies to improve attendance in school A

	School A
Preventative interventions	- Using the attendance policy to: - Highlight the importance of attendance and impact of absence on learning; - Highlight the importance of a home-school partnership and the shared responsibility for ensuring good attendance. - Raising awareness of attendance through the website and newsletters. - Rewarding pupils for good attendance both individually and as a class (see Appendix 18).

	School A
Reactive interventions	1. First day response: telephone call to parent(s) if the child does not attend and the parent has not already contacted the school.
	2. Pupils with attendance below 94% over 5 weeks are identified.
	3. A letter is sent to parent(s) and they are given 5 weeks for attendance to improve.
	4. If there is little or no improvement, parent(s) meet with the FSW to identify issues and support needed.
	5. If there is still little or no improvement, parent(s) meet with the Head Teacher.
	6. If there is still little or no improvement, a referral is made to the Educational Entitlement Service.

4.2. Case 2 (school B)

The three participants within the second case comprised of a 6 year old male pupil with an attendance increase of 13% (equivalent of 25 days), his mother and his teacher. The member of staff responsible for attendance was also interviewed.

4.2.1. Proposition 1: The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance

This proposition was supported to some extent as all participants agreed that medical problems were a cause of the pupil's non-attendance. However, only the parent and teacher agreed on two additional causes and the parent identified a cause that neither the pupil nor the teacher had identified (see Table 13).

Table 13: The extent to which the views of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance are shared and by whom in case 2

	Pupil	Parent	Teacher
Pupil		Medical problems	Medical problems
Parent		Boredom at school	Medical problems Behavioural difficulties Lack of parenting ability
Teacher			

▮ Shared view	▮ Partially shared view	▮ Individual view
▯ No shared views	▮ No individual view	▨ Duplicated box

Shared views of the causes of non-attendance

One cause was identified by the pupil, parent and teacher as underpinning the pupil's non-attendance and therefore considered to be a shared conceptualisation:

a. Medical problems

The pupil, parent and teacher all agreed that some of the pupil's non-attendance was due to him being unwell due to medical problems:

> *Sometimes I don't want to go to school because my tummy hurts (pupil, school B).*

> *Sometimes I think he feels he's not well... in the winter because of his asthma he tends to get ill quite, and he's also got eczema and his skin plays up... he has had lots of admissions in A&E with his croup... at the beginning of the year, January he had an operation to have his adenoids out (parent, school B).*

> *He's... had some health related issues that have prevented him from coming to school (teacher, school B).*

Partially shared views of the causes of non-attendance

There were two causes that were identified by two out of the three participants and therefore considered to be partially shared:

a. Behavioural difficulties

The parent and the teacher reported that the pupil's non-attendance was often due to him refusing to get into the taxi in the morning which they attributed to behavioural difficulties:

> *He just decides he doesn't want to go to school which isn't very good. And he does play up, he does have tantrums. Sometimes if he's going to be naughty and things... I'm going to struggle to get him in the taxi (parent, school B)*

> *Mum's tried to send him in and he's refused to get in the taxi... he just decided school wasn't for him that day I think... if he says "no I'm not going", they don't stand an awful lot of chance of getting him here and on occasions even when we've been out to collect him, he's still refused to get in the car (teacher, school B).*

b. Lack of parenting ability

Both the parent and the teacher felt the pupil's refusal to go to school was also related to the parents inability to manage his behaviour at home:

> *Because he is quite strong willed and they have behavioural issues with him more so at home... [it] can be quite challenging for them to follow through with, sort of consequences at home (teacher, school B).*

> *I just think he thinks... he's in charge and he's not, we are in charge... I spoke to the headmistress about it and she said I wasn't being firm enough... And perhaps I was being a bit weak... it's only until somebody says to you about it (parent, school B).*

Individual view of the causes of non-attendance

The parent also highlighted a cause of the pupil's non-attendance that neither the pupil nor the teacher mentioned:

a. Boredom at school

The parent raised issues with the pupil being bored at school and reluctant to do the work:

> *At the beginning of the year he said he was bored so I spoke to his teacher about this because he's very clever... sometimes he doesn't want to do [school work] so they did try to do things in a different way (parent, school B).*

4.2.2. Proposition 2: The pupil, parent and teacher will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

The findings support this proposition as three themes emerged with regards to the factors that led to an improvement in the pupil's attendance. These were *support for the parent, motivation for the pupil* and *clear expectation regarding attendance*. Each of these had a number of subthemes as displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The themes and subthemes relating to the factors that led to improvements in the pupil's attendance in case 2
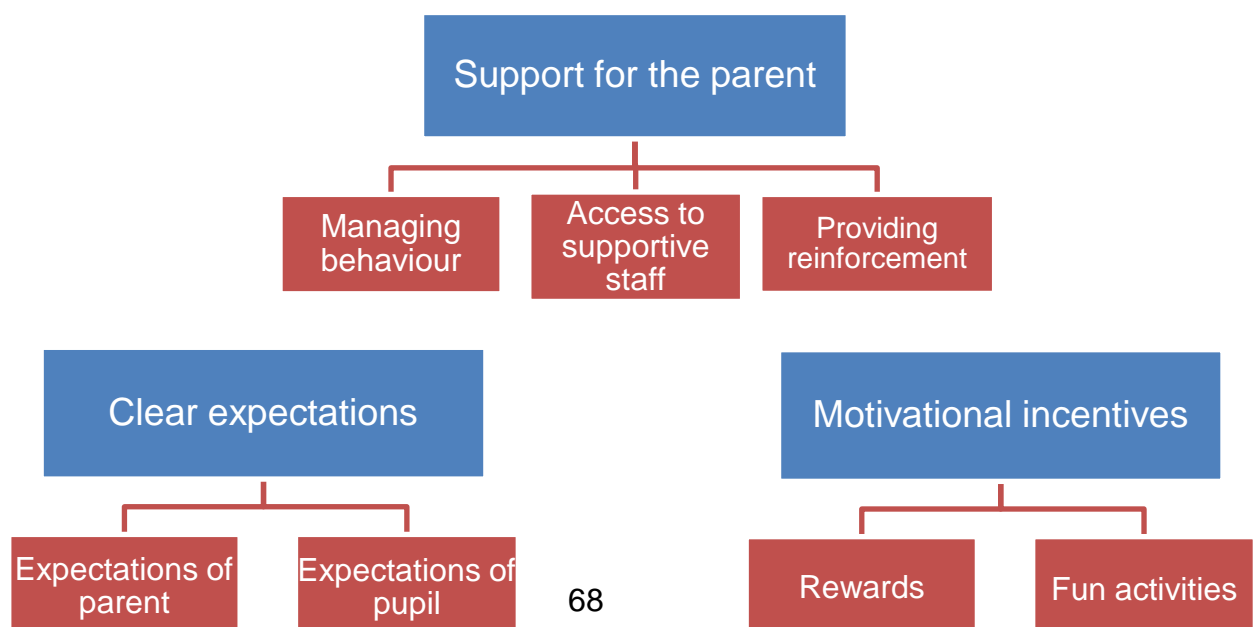
Theme 1: Support for the parent

The first theme related to the school providing support for the parent by helping her to manage the pupil's behaviour, providing access to supportive staff and providing the parent with reinforcement when she was struggling to get him to school.

Subtheme: Managing behaviour

The parent and teacher reported that school staff supported the parents in managing the pupil's behaviour by offering advice and arranging for the mother to attend a parenting course:

> *We have kind of supported parents with behaviour management... that is an issue for this particular child....we've given her advice... if things behaviour wise have helped at school, what sort of strategies I've used that have been successful then mum can try the same at home as well (teacher, school B).*

> *Mrs [SENCO] sent me on a course to assess [my] ability to help [pupil] and I've just finished that. And that was quite nice, I met other parents that have different age group children... (parent, school B).*

The parent felt that this enabled her to understand the pupil better and deal with his behaviour more successfully.

Subtheme: Access to supportive staff

The teachers and parents also felt that the parent had access to members of staff within school who were supporting her with the pupil's attendance:

> *If there's any concerns about [pupil], we'd just go see [head teacher]... [deputy head] is helping me with [pupil] as well... it's a lovely school, they've been supportive right from the beginning (parent, school B).*

It's just making sure mum knows that we are here for her as well as to teach [pupil]. We've set up a TAF which is Team Around the Family to give mum as much support as we can... [FSW] coordinates the TAF meetings... obviously I attend as well if they need me to, [Deputy Head] attends from sort of the attendance point of view but also the SENCO point of view (teacher, school B).

[FSW] can make regular contact with mum to make sure things are still sort of happening in a positive way at home (teacher, school B).

Subtheme: Providing reinforcement

The parent and the teacher reported that school staff also supported the parent in getting the pupil to school when he refused to go:

If I'm going to struggle to get him in the taxi I can phone the school up and they can help me, because one of the girls comes and picks him up. They come to the house first and chat with [pupil] to see why he's reluctant to get in the taxi to go to school (parent, school B).

As a school obviously we support [mum] as much as we can and I've been out to collect him before now (teacher, school B).

Theme 2: Motivational incentives

The second theme related to incentives that motivated the pupil to attend school and included rewards related to attendance and behaviour and fun activities.

Subtheme: Rewards

The teacher, parent and pupil reported that the pupil received rewards in school which they felt encouraged him to attend. The teacher mentioned rewards related to a whole class incentive regarding attendance, whereas the parent and pupil

reported rewards related to good behaviour and effort in class:

If we've hit our school target of 95.5 per big term, then sometimes there is a treat involved so it might be that the children choose that they'd like an extra play time (teacher, school B).

When [we] be good at school we might get to play in the afternoon for two days (pupil, school B).

I know that in the classroom they have groups and if they do something good they get stickers and rewards that way, and then the class, the whole class gets certificates (parent, school B).

<u>*Subtheme: Fun activities*</u>

The pupil and parent reported that the pupil was encouraged to go to school when he was able to engage in activities that he found interesting and enjoyed:

Last time [FSW] came she was telling him... that they were going to do bingo... and he quite likes that so that actually got him from being upstairs to being down stairs so it did work (parent, school B).

It makes everyone come to school when [we] go on school trips and play on [our] own time and assembly... We colour, we build, we do racing cars and stuff like that (pupil, school B).

Theme 3: Clear expectations

The third theme that emerged related to school staff giving the parent and pupil clear expectations regarding attendance.

<u>*Subtheme: Expectations of the parents*</u>

The parent and teacher both reported that the parent understood the school

expectations with regards to attendance:

[It's about] making sure that parents are obviously aware of the expectation and knowing that we do monitor attendance quite routinely... I think we've been quite clear in what we expect in terms of attendance (teacher, school B).

We have a letter if the attendance isn't [good], and [deputy head] will speak to me and say we're just a bit concerned about [pupil's] attendance... I know that attendance is really important but what I hadn't realised is if children are off for a long time you need to get a letter from the doctors (parent, school B).

<u>Subtheme: Expectations of pupil</u>

The teacher mentioned making children aware of the expectations regarding attendance:

The children know what's expected... we talk about [attendance] when we do the register because the children are so keen to get, as a class, a 100% attendance, if somebody's not here they're like 'oh now much percent is that?' (teacher, school B).

The pupil demonstrated an awareness of this:

I wasn't at school on Friday... and if I was there, there would have been 100% (pupil, school B).

The parent and teacher also reported that they reinforced the importance of going to school to the pupil specifically;

[if] he does stay at home, I don't spoil him... I don't have the telly on so I try really hard to say this is not funny... how important it is to go to school. He realises this isn't fun to be at home, it's much better to be at school with his friends (parent, school B).

I talk to him about... if he's not been to school 'oh why didn't you come to school yesterday?'... if it's because he's refused, then I can sort of reinforce

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'you know it's really important because now you've missed a lot of work, we now need to catch up again on what you've missed' (teacher, school B).

4.2.3. Proposition 3: The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupil's attendance that reflect the causes identified

This proposition was supported to some extent as the interventions put in place reflected some of the causes identified as shown in Table 14.

Table 14: The extent to which the interventions put in place reflected the causes identified

Causes	Interventions
Medical problems (Pa/Pu/T)	Rewards (Pu/Pa/T)
Behavioural difficulties (Pa/T)	Managing behaviour (Pa/T)
Lack of parenting ability (Pa/T)	Support from school staff (Pa/T)
Boredom (Pa)	Reinforcement (Pa/T)
	Clear expectations (Pu/Pa/T)
	Fun activities (Pu/Pa)

(Brackets indicate views being represented, Pa = parent, Pu = pupil, T = teacher)

As the table shows, the reported support put in place by the school aligned with both the parent's and teacher's views as to why the pupil was not attending. The pupil being able to engage in fun activities also aligned with the parent's independent view that the pupil was bored at school and reluctant to do school work. However, there was no support reported with regards to the medical problems underpinning the pupil's non-attendance.

4.2.4. Proposition 4: The interventions put in place will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

This proposition was supported to some extent as many of the interventions put in place to increase the pupil's attendance were in addition to those outlined in Table

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15. However, the rewards were in line with the whole school reward scheme rather than being tailored to the pupil. The remaining support falls under stage 4 and 5 of the reactive strategies but was tailored to the causes identified.

Table 15: General whole school strategies to improve attendance in school B

	School B

Preventative interventions	• Using the attendance policy to:
	  ○ Highlight the importance of attendance and impact of absence on learning;
	  ○ Highlight the importance of a home-school partnership and the shared responsibility for ensuring good attendance.
	• Raising awareness of attendance through parents evening and initial meetings with parents.
	• Raising the profile of attendance throughout the school through displays, assemblies and in the classroom.
	• Rewarding pupils for attendance both individually and as a class (see Appendix 18).

Reactive interventions	1. First day response: telephone call to parent(s) if the child does not attend and the parent has not already contacted the school.
	2. Pupils with attendance below 95% over 5 weeks are identified.
	3. A letter is sent to parent(s) and they are given 5 weeks for attendance to improve.
	4. If there is little or no improvement, parent(s) meet with the Deputy Head to identify issues and support needed.
	5. If there is still little or no improvement, further support is put in place (e.g. parenting contract, CAF, FSW).
	6. If there is still little or no improvement a referral is made to the Educational Entitlement Service.

4.3. Case 3 (school B)

The three participants within the third case comprised of an 8 year old female pupil with an attendance increase of 1% (equivalent of 2 days), her mother and her teacher. The member of staff responsible for attendance was also interviewed.

4.3.1. Proposition 1: The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non attendance

This proposition was supported as the pupil, parent and teacher all agreed that the pupil's non-attendance was due to an annual family holiday taken during term time and the occasional illness (see Table 16).

Table 16: The extent to which the views of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance are shared and by whom in case 3

	Pupil	**Parent**	**Teacher**
Pupil		Illness Family holiday	Illness Family holiday
Parent	⧄		Illness Family holiday
Teacher	⧄	⧄	

🟩 Shared view		🟧 Partially shared view		🟥 Individual view	
⬜ No shared views		🟫 No individual view		⧄ Duplicated box	

Shared views of the causes of non-attendance

The pupil, parent and teacher all agreed that the pupil's non-attendance was caused by a family holiday and general illness.

a. Family holiday

The pupil, parent and teacher all reported that the majority of the pupil's non-attendance was due to an annual two week family holiday taken during term time at the beginning of the year:

> *She has a two week holiday to Turkey... earlier on in the year. That was in the first half term... a two week holiday makes a big impact, especially in that first term (teacher, school B).*

Both parent and teacher reported that the reason for taking the holiday in term time was due to cost:

I'm not going to lie to you, it's cheaper to go out of term time you know so [that's a] big factor when you've got a big family to take with you, definitely (parent, school B).

The teacher appeared to empathise with this but also recognised the difficult position it put the school in:

Because of cost and we're in an area of need here, a lot of the families are not able to afford holidays in peak season. So it's either family holiday taken out of school, or no family holiday. It's a real dilemma... So you can't blame the parents particularly you know... I can understand it, I mean it's awkward from our point of view, as teachers and as an educational establishment and there's obviously pressure from Ofsted as well (teacher, school B).

b. Illness

Other than the family holiday it was reported that the occasional illness impacted on the pupil's attendance:

[I don't come to school] when I'm poorly and I feel like I'm going to be sick (pupil, school B).

They might have had the odd day when they've been poorly, I mean they all went down with chicken pox at the same time, so they were off then for a week but apart from that it's probably, one day, very, very rare to be fair that they're off (parent, school B).

4.3.2. Proposition 2: The pupil, parent and teacher will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

The findings in this case did not support this proposition as the participants were unable to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving:

Erm I don't know it's quite hard for me to say, because... I don't really know (parents, school B).

It's a difficult case to talk about in those terms really (teacher, school B).

Analysis of the pupil's attendance records showed that the 1% increase appeared to be due to the pupil having fewer days off due to illness.

4.3.3. Proposition 3: The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupils attendance that reflect the causes identified

This proposition was not supported as it appears there were no specific interventions put into place to improve the pupil's attendance. However, the teacher and parent mentioned changes to legislation which involved the introduction of a fixed penalty for taking pupils out of school during term time. This would be applied the following year and therefore considered to be a future intervention:

[parents] now can't take their child out during term time for a holiday without being subject to penalties, fixed penalties.... the letter has gone home to explain to parents about next year and that they must obviously comply with the new directives (teacher, school B).

They've sent letters out now to say that you will be fined if you go so... I think it's a general thing, that they will fine people, I think £60, if you take your child out of school to go on holiday (parent, school B).

The teacher did not feel that this would prevent families from taking holiday during term time, however the parent felt that it would influence her decision about taking her children out of school.

4.3.4. Proposition 4: The interventions put in place will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

Again, this proposition was not supported as there were no specific interventions put in place to improve the pupil attendance. Furthermore, it was reported that some of the general whole school interventions to improve pupil's attendance were not relevant for this pupil:

[for] some children... you do put in incentives and things to help get them here on time ... We had attendance incentives for the 100 percenters and the children who've reached the school's target this year... those things aren't really useful for tackling holidays (teacher, school B).

obviously the school in my case couldn't do anything because I'm the one really causing the under attendance, because my children are never out of school apart from that. So... that would have to be my personal thing, to sort that out." (parent, school B).

4.3.5. Additional findings

Although there was no specific proposition related to this outcome, it was found that the parent and teacher did not share the same views with regards to the impact the non-attendance had on the pupil. The parent reported that:

[pupil] over achieves, she doesn't under achieve, so I don't find that it has a negative effect on her education at all... Although [pupils] attendance looks bad it's not valid... it's for different reasons (parent, school B).

However, the pupil seemed concerned about the time she missed at school:

I'd rather go on holiday during the summer holiday so I don't miss learning and school stuff (pupils, school B).

Furthermore, the teacher felt that the absence had an impact on the pupil's learning and progress:

I think had she been here for those two weeks she might have made better progress... that's a lot of education to miss... because everything is building upon [those lessons] and you're constantly referring back and making links (teacher, school B).

As well as her attitude towards school and approach to learning:

I almost think she is... quite complacent, and it doesn't matter how much you talk to her about that and say to her "look this is important" I think you know missing two weeks and maybe that... message that school's not that important maybe, it can... you know, set a precedent for how she feels about school (teacher, school B).

Finally it was felt that her absence impacted on the whole class:

If... they're coming in half way through something you have to then spend one to one catching them up and either you miss part of the lesson where you would normally be supporting a lower ability child, maybe or a child with specific difficulties, or you would be helping the whole class and then you're having to sort of go over something just so that they can actually come back into the class and carry on (teacher, school B).

4.4. Across case summary

As outlined in Section 3.5. it was expected that the propositions would be supported by case 1 and 2 (providing literal replication of the findings) and disputed by case 3 (providing theoretical replication of the findings). As Table 17

demonstrates the findings from case 1 and case 2 fully support proposition 2 and 4 and partially support proposition 3. However, they did not support proposition 1. As predicted the findings from case 3 refute proposition 2, 3 and 4, however they support proposition 1.

Table 17: A summary of the extent to which the propositions were supported across the three cases

Proposition	Case 1 (9 day increase)	Case 2 (25 day increase)	Case 3 (2 day increase)
1. Shared understanding of causes	**Not supported:** partially shared and individual views of causes	**Partially supported:** shared, partially shared, and individual views of causes	**Supported:** shared views of causes
2. Identify reasons for improvements	**Supported:** reasons for improvements were identified (support for parents, motivation for pupil)	**Supported:** reasons for improvements were identified (support for parents, motivation for pupil, clear expectations)	**Not supported:** reasons for improvements were not identified
3. Interventions reflect causes	**Partially supported:** interventions reflected causes but some causes not addressed	**Partially supported:** interventions reflected causes but some causes not addressed	**Not supported:** intervention did not reflect cause
4. Interventions in addition to whole school	**Supported:** interventions were in addition to whole school approach	**Supported:** interventions were in addition to whole school approach	**Not supported:** intervention was not in addition to whole school approach

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study sought to answer the research questions: *In cases of improved attendance what were the perceived causes of the pupil's non-attendance and why did the pupil's attendance improve?* In this section I will explore the extent to which the findings support the propositions that derived from these questions. I will also consider the findings of the current study in relation to those of previous research. A summary of the findings in relation to the proposed theory and research questions will then be provided and the limitations of the current study will be considered.

5.1. Findings in relation to the theoretical propositions

This section will consider the findings across the three cases in relation to each proposition in turn and the extent to which the proposition was supported or disputed. It was hypothesised that findings from case 1 and 2 would support the propositions thus providing literal replication, whereas findings from case 3 would refute the propositions thus providing theoretical replication.

5.1.1. Proposition 1: The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance.

The extent to which this proposition was supported in each case is outlined in Table 18.

Table 18: Support for proposition 1

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Not supported: partially shared and individual views of causes	**Partially supported:** shared, partially shared and individual views of causes	**Supported:** Shared views of causes

As the table shows, this proposition was not supported by the findings in case 1 as the pupil, parent and teacher did not agree on a cause of the pupil's non-attendance. The only shared views were by the parent and the pupil who both identified medical problems and difficulties getting up as underpinning the pupil's non-attendance. The remaining causes were identified by one of the three participants and related to the pupil's mood (identified by the parent), the pupil's desire for control, a lack of parenting ability (identified by the teacher), difficulties with peers and difficulties with teachers (identified by the pupil).

With regards to case 2, the proposition was partially supported as all three participants agreed that medical problems were a cause of the pupil's non-attendance. However, only the teacher and the parent agreed that issues with the pupil's behaviour and a lack of parenting ability underpinned the pupil's non-attendance. Furthermore, the parent identified boredom at school as a factor which was not identified by the teacher or the pupil.

It was expected that the findings from case 3 would not support this proposition. However, there was a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance as the pupil, parent and teacher all agreed that it was caused by an annual family holiday and general illness.

From these findings it appears that there did not need to be a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance for attendance to improve as demonstrated in case 1 and case 2. Furthermore, a shared understanding in case 3 did not lead to great improvements in attendance. Therefore, it is likely that the pupils' improvement in attendance resulted from factors other than the pupil, parent and teacher having a shared understanding of the causes.

Research by Roffey (2004), which focused on addressing pupils' behavioural issues in school, may offer insights into this finding. Roffey found that positive outcomes were evident when teachers and parents not only had a shared understanding of the problem but also shared the responsibility for addressing the problem. This appears to be most evident in case 2, as the parent and teachers had a shared understanding of most of the causes and appeared to share the responsibility for addressing the non-attendance (the latter will be discussed in more detail in relation to the remaining propositions). Whereas, in case 3, there was a shared understanding of the causes but a lack of shared responsibility for improving attendance as it was agreed to be parentally condoned. Contrary to this, in case 1 there was a lack of a shared understanding between the parent and the teacher but some shared responsibility for improving attendance as both the parent and the teacher were involved in the interventions. However, the improvement in attendance in this case may be considered moderate compared to the improvements in case 2 (5% and 13% increase respectively). Therefore, it may be that there needs to be both a shared understanding of the causes and a shared responsibility for increasing attendance for the greatest outcomes to be achieved.

5.1.2. Proposition 2: The pupil, parent and teachers will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

Table 19: Support for proposition 2

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Supported: reasons for improvements were identified (support for parents, motivation for pupil)	**Supported:** reasons for improvements were identified (support for parents, motivation for pupil, clear expectations)	**Not supported:** reasons for improvements were not identified

This proposition was supported by the findings of case 1 and case 2 as participants were able to identify reasons for the pupils' attendance improving. Two themes were identified across these cases along with several subthemes. The first theme related to the school providing support for the parent. This involved:

- supporting the parent to manage the pupils' behaviour;

- the parent having access to supportive staff; and

- providing reinforcement when the parent struggled to get the pupil to school.

Supporting the parent to managing the pupil's behaviour

It was reported that the parents in both case 1 and case 2 were supported to manage the pupils' behaviour through school staff giving advice and support and arranging for the parent to attend a parenting course. This is in line with Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) findings that some parents are likely to require support from others in order to deal with their child's non-attendance. However, the parents in these two cases differed in their opinions of the parenting courses. The

parent in case 2 felt it was useful in terms of giving her a better understanding of the pupil, how to deal with his behaviour and providing access to other parents with similar concerns. This is in line with findings by Smith et al (2013) who reported that parenting groups can lead to parents feeling more confident and empowered in their parenting roles. However, the parent in case 1 reported a sense of blame and felt that the course did not have an impact on her child's behaviour. Previous research suggests that parenting courses are valued by parents when they are tailored to their individual needs (Atkinson et al, 2000b; Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005). Therefore, as the parent in case 1 attributed the causes of the pupil's non-attendance to within-child factors, it may be that she did not feel the course addressed what she perceived to be the causes of non-attendance. On the other hand, the parent in case 2 identified a lack of parenting ability as a factor underpinning the pupils non-attendance and therefore may have viewed a parenting course as a relevant solution.

Access to supportive staff

In both case 1 and 2, the teacher and parent reported that the parent had access to school staff who supported them in addressing the pupil's attendance. In case 1 the parent reported that the FSW understood the difficulties she faced and was a source of emotional and practical support. This is in line with findings by O'Mara et al (2010) who found that parents reported that advice and emotional support were the most important forms of support offered by school staff. Similarly, the parent in case 2 named two members of staff who she felt supported her with the pupil's non-attendance. The parents perceived these members of staff as easily

accessible and felt that they could approach them with their concerns. This finding is consistent with those by Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) and Epstein and Sheldon (2002) who found that providing a designated contact person for parents to talk to about attendance concerns and other issues had a positive effect on attendance. This seems even more pertinent as the parent in the case 1 had a negative perception of the rest of the school staff and did not feel supported until the FSW became involved. This finding seems to reflect a positive outcome of the responsibility for attendance being placed on schools. For example, this role may have been previously undertaken by an EWO, a professional separate from the school who may not have been as readily available (Malcolm et al, 2003).

Providing reinforcement

Again in both case 1 and 2, school staff provided reinforcement for the parent in terms of collecting the pupils from home when they refused to go to school. In case 1 the teacher also mentioned putting in place consequences at school for the pupils' behaviour at home. In both cases, a member of staff collecting the pupil from their home was viewed as a last resort. There is limited research on this approach but its effectiveness may be due to parents and school staff working together to set and enforce rules regarding attendance (Eastman et al, 2007).

The second theme that was found across case 1 and case 2 related to factors that were reported to motivate the pupil to attend school. Rewards emerged as a subtheme in both cases. In addition to this, the staffs' approach to the pupil was

found to be a subtheme in case 1 and fun activities and clear expectations were found to be subthemes in case 2.

Rewards

In case 1, the pupil and teacher reported that rewards were put in place for the pupil and in case 2, all three participants reported that rewards encouraged the pupil to attend school. This is in line with previous research by Atkinson et al (2000a), Dougherty (1999) and Epstein and Sheldon (2002) who found that reward schemes led to improvements in attendance. As found in previous research, the rewards in the current study varied and involved certificates and stickers, material treats, extra play time and trips out (Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid, 2010). However there was variation in views within each of these two cases with regards to the purpose of the rewards. For instance, in case 1, the pupil reported receiving rewards for attendance whereas the teacher reported that the rewards related to the pupil's behaviour. Conversely, in the case 2, the teacher reported that the rewards related to attendance, whereas the pupil and parent mentioned rewards relating to the pupils behaviour and effort in class. This raises questions over the clarity of these reward systems in terms of their purpose and the behaviour that is being encouraged and therefore rewarded. Reid (2013) suggests that the most effective reward schemes involve a clear understanding amongst the pupils, parents and teachers of the attendance needed to achieve a reward and consultation with the pupil about the type of rewards they receive.

Staffs' approach to pupil

A subtheme that emerged in case 1 related to the way in which the school staff approached the pupil. This was highlighted by all three participants and included staff encouraging the pupil to attend school and being consistent, calm and fun in their interactions with the pupil. This is in line with previous research that has found adults undertaking befriending roles or being a source of support for the pupil can produce positive outcomes for non-attenders (Kinder et al, 1995; Kinder and Wilkin, 1998). Research has suggested that positive teacher-pupil relationships can foster greater feelings of belonging, confidence and willingness to engage in the classroom (Koplow, 2002; Roeser et al, 1996). Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Cornelius-White (2008) found that pupils' perceptions of supportive teacher relationships were associated with increasing attendance amongst other academic outcomes.

Impact of pupil's non-attendance on the parent

This subtheme offers a rival explanation for the improvement in attendance in case 1 in that it suggests factors other than specific interventions or approaches employed by the school led to improvements. The teacher and the pupil both reported that improvements in attendance were due to the pupil witnessing the impact of their non-attendance on the parent. Firstly, the pupil highlighted concern regarding his mother being prosecuted, which may be considered a secondary effect of an intervention aimed at the parent. This is supported by Halsey et al (2004) who found that threats of prosecution against parents had positive effects on pupils with regards to improving attendance and improving attitudes towards

school. Secondly, the teacher reported that the pupil witnessing his mother losing her job as a result of his non-attendance led to improvements in attendance. A study by Wilson et al (2008) explored the impact of non-attendance on pupils' peers and teachers however, there little research considering the impact on parents and furthermore, the effect of this impact on the non-attender. Whilst the threat of prosecution and the mother's job loss may have led to improvements in attendance, it is unlikely that these were main factors as each was only mentioned by one participant.

Fun activities

With regards to case 2, the parent and pupil reported that fun activities at school motivated the pupil to attend, however this was not highlighted by the teacher. The parent reported fun activities were used as an incentive to get the pupil to school when he refused and the pupil reported a number of non-curricular activities that made him want to go to school. Previous research that has considered the use of interesting or appealing activities within school to motivate pupils to attend have tended to focus on alternative curriculums or extra-curricular activities before or after school (Hallam and Lynne, 2008; Irving and Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Kinder and Wilkin, 1998). However, little research has been carried out into the use of fun activities throughout the school day as part of a flexible curriculum.

Clear expectations

Another subtheme that emerged from case 2 related to clear expectations regarding attendance which applied to both the parents and the pupil. These

expectations were emphasised by school staff as found in previous research (Reid, 2002). However the parent also reported emphasising the importance of going to school and reducing the incentives for staying at home. This is in line with research that suggests parents play an important role in promoting good attendance through setting expectations and passing on positive messages to their child (Attendance Works, 2013; Irving and Parker-Jenkins, 1995).

As predicted, the findings from case 3 did not support this proposition as participants were unable to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving. This along with analysis of the pupil's attendance records suggests the slight improvement was due to chance rather than specific intervention by the school to improve attendance.

5.1.3. Proposition 3: The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupil's attendance that reflect the causes identified

Table 20: Support for proposition 3

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Partially supported: interventions reflected causes but some causes not addressed	**Partially supported:** interventions reflected causes but some causes not addressed	**Not supported:** intervention did not reflect cause

The findings from case 1 and case 2 partially support this proposition as the interventions put in place reflected some of the causes identified however, not all of the causes were addressed. With regards to case 1, most of the interventions reflected the causes identified by the teacher (a lack of parenting ability and pupil's desire for control). For instance, the interventions were aimed at the parent in

terms of improving her ability to manage the pupils' behaviour through a parenting course, providing her with emotional and practical support, collecting the pupil from home and putting in place consequences at school for his behaviour at home.

Other interventions, including rewards and the staff's approach to the pupil appear to reflect the causes identified by the parent (refusal due to mood) and the pupil (relationship with teachers) respectively. However, the other causes identified by the pupil and parent such as medical problems, difficulties getting up and difficulties with peers did not appear to be addressed. This may account for the increase in attendance being moderate and still below school A's target of 94%, as not all of the perceived causes were addressed and may have continued to impact on the pupil's attendance. This would coincide with Atkinson et al's (2000b) finding that an important aspect of increasing attendance involves listening to the pupil and parent and tailoring the intervention to their needs.

In case 2 most of the interventions reflected both the parent's and the teacher's view of the causes of non-attendance; a lack of parenting ability and the pupil's behavioural difficulties. Again the interventions were aimed at improving the parent's ability to manage the pupils' behaviour through a parenting group and providing her with practical support, including advice and a member of staff collecting the pupil from home. There were also interventions put in place such as rewards and clear expectations which appeared to be aimed at addressing the pupil's refusal to attend school. Furthermore, the cause identified by the parent, boredom with work, appeared to be addressed through fun activities at school.

There was no reported intervention put in place for the pupil's medical problems which again may account for the pupil's attendance still being below school B's target of 95%.

As mentioned, in case 3 there were no specific interventions put in place to improve the pupil's attendance. The whole school reward scheme was highlighted but was not deemed appropriate by the teacher as the non-attendance was causes by the mother withdrawing the pupil from school. Therefore, as predicted proposition 3 was not supported by the findings of this case.

5.1.4. Proposition 4: The interventions put in place will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

Table 21: Support for proposition 4

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Supported: interventions were in addition to whole school approach	**Supported**: interventions were in addition to whole school approach	**Not supported**: intervention was not in addition to whole school approach

Again the findings from case 1 and 2 supported this proposition as the interventions put in place were in addition to those identified from the attendance policy and interview with the member of staff responsible for attendance. In both school A and school B the attendance policy was used to highlight the importance of attendance and emphasis the notion of a shared responsibility to ensuring good attendance. In addition to this, awareness of attendance was raised through the schools website and newsletter in school A and through parents evening, displays and in assemblies in school B. Furthermore, rewards schemes for attendance

were evident in both schools. These types of whole school preventative interventions reflect those highlighted in the literature (NIAO, Reid, 2010, Malcolm et al, 2003). With regards to reactive strategies, these involved first day response, identification and monitoring of attendance issues and meetings with members of staff to identify issues and support required. Again these strategies reflect those found in previous studies (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Malcolm et al, 2003).

In both case 1 and case 2, the interventions put in place to address the pupil's non-attendance were in addition to those outlined above. Therefore it appears that the schools tailored the interventions to the pupils' needs which concurs with the recommendation of previous researchers (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Kearney and Silverman, 1990; Malcolm et al, 2003). Contrary to this, in case 3 there was a lack of specific intervention in addition to the whole school strategies. This was despite there being a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance and again suggests that there also needs to be a shared responsibility for improving attendance (Roffey, 2004).

5.2 Additional findings

Some additional findings emerged from the current study that were not directly related to the theoretical propositions but may provide further insight into addressing non-attendance.

5.2.1 Differential identification of within-child, parental and school related factors

The teachers in all three cases identified causes related to within-child and parental factors, rather than school factors. This finding is in line with previous research which has found that professionals are more likely to attribute non-attendance to inadequate parenting skills, parentally condoned absence and the pupil's disposition (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Malcolm et al, 2003). However in cases 1 and 2, school related factors were identified as a cause of the pupils' non-attendance by either the pupil or the parent. This finding suggests that teachers continue to omit school related factors despite these being identified by others. As Bosworth (1994) argues, this is problematic as it can lead to a lack of need or effort to make changes within school. This appeared to be the case in the current study as the interventions were aimed at the pupil and the parent.

5.2.2 Understanding behaviour

Another additional finding related to the pupils' refusal to attend school in case 1 and case 2. When asked to elaborate on the reasons for this refusal, participants identified behavioural issues, the pupil's mood and a desire for control. However, Kearney and Silverman (1993) distinguish between the presenting behaviour and the function of this behaviour. They suggest that refusing to attend school can serve the function of avoiding or escaping adverse situations, gaining attention or gaining rewards. Therefore the function will determine the way in which the behaviour should be addressed. When considering non-attendance in this way,

the participants did not appear to recognise or identify the underlying functions of this behaviour and therefore there may have been causes that were not identified.

5.2.3. Exclusion of pupils' views

In both case 1 and case 2 the interventions put in place mostly aligned with the causes identified by the parent and teacher. This raises questions over the extent to which the pupils' views were sought by the school throughout the process of addressing the non-attendance. Increased awareness of the importance of the child's voice has been reflected in both national and international legislation (Woolfson et al, 2008). Legislation in this country highlights the duty of professionals to consult with children, take account of the opinions and involve them in making decisions (DfES, 2001; DfE, 2013b). With regards to non-attendance, gaining the child's view is an important part of developing a holistic view of the child's experiences (Gregory and Purcell, 2014).

5.2.4. The impact of non-attendance on the pupil, peers and teacher

An interesting finding that emerged from case 3 related to the perceived impact of the pupil's non-attendance. The parent reported that the pupil's non-attendance did not have a negative impact on her education. However, the pupil reported that she would rather not miss school and the teacher reported that her absence not only impacted on her academic progress but also her attitude towards school and learning. The teacher also reported that the pupil's non-attendance had a negative impact on her peers as the time and input required to help her catch up meant the teacher was unable to offer as much support to other pupils. Similar findings were

reported by Wilson et al (2008), suggesting that the effects of non-attendance can extend beyond the pupil and impact on their peers and teachers.

5.2.5. The desire to change

The parent in case 3 recognised that her actions were causing the pupils non-attendance but did not express a desire to change this. This is in line with Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) findings that some parents may be apathetic about addressing their child's non-attendance. As mentioned above, this may result from the view that pupil's non-attendance was not having a negative impact on her education. Contrary to this, parents in case 1 and 2 seemed to demonstrate a desire to change as they engaged in the interventions put in place to address the pupil's non-attendance. Therefore, a desire to change may play an important factor in improving attendance.

5.3. Summary of the findings in relation to the research questions and proposed theory

With regards to the research questions, the causes of non-attendance included within-child, parental and school related factors in the first two cases but these were not highlighted by all participants. In the third case, within-child and parental factors were identified by all three participants. Several reasons for improvements in the pupil's attendance were highlighted in case 1 and 2, including: the parent being supported to manage the pupil's behaviour (e.g. parent group, advice, collecting pupil); the parent having access to supportive staff; rewards and incentives being put in place for the pupil; the school staffs' approach to the pupil;

there being clear expectations of the parent and pupil; and the pupil realising the impact of their non-attendance on the parent. However there were a number of causes that were not addressed through intervention, which tended to be either medical problems or causes identified by the pupil and parent alone.

The proposed theory of this study aimed to show that improvements in attendance result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parents and teacher and tailored interventions being put in place that aimed to address the causes identified. This was supported to some extent. The greatest improvement in attendance was evident in case 2 where there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the parent and teacher. Interventions were put in place to address these causes and the parent also reported that the cause of non-attendance she identified alone was addressed (e.g. boredom addressed through fun activities). There also appeared to be a shared responsibility between the school and parents for improving attendance.

There was less improvement in attendance in case 1 where there was little agreement amongst the participants as to the causes of non-attendance. Furthermore, in this case the interventions appeared to reflect the causes identified by the teacher with most of the causes identified by the parent and pupil not being addressed.

In case 3, in which there was a minimal improvement in attendance, all three participants agreed on the causes of the pupil's non-attendance. However no

specific interventions were put in place to address this and the parent appeared to display a lack of desire to change. Therefore, from these three cases, it appears that the greatest outcome occurred when at least the parent and teacher agreed on the causes of non-attendance, these were addressed through specific interventions tailored to the individuals needs and there was a shared responsibility for improving attendance.

5.4. Limitations of the current study

Although the design of the current study was carefully considered and steps were taken to address limitations associated with case studies and the methods used, there were still some limitations evident.

Firstly, there were limitations associated with the process for identifying potential participants. As I did not have parental consent to view pupil attendance records the key member of staff was responsible for selecting potential participants. This could have led to a selection bias as this person may have omitted certain pupils for a number of reasons. Furthermore, difficulties with gaining parental consent resulted in a small number of cases with differing level of improvement in attendance. As mentioned in Section 3.5., case 3 was not ideal but provided an opportunity for theoretical replication of the findings. However, Yin (2009) suggests that ideally 4-6 cases should be used for theoretical replication. In addition to this, response bias may have been evident as those who did not choose to participate in the research could have been different in some way from those that did (Robson, 2011).

Another limitation of the study relates to absent views. Many of the participants mentioned the role the school's FSW played in addressing non-attendance. However, the views of this member of staff were not captured in the current study. Doing so might have given further insight into the pupil's non-attendance from a member of school staff undertaking a more pastoral role. Similarly, on reflection it was recognised that only the views of the mother were gained, meaning that the views of the father or other key family members were absent. These individuals may have construed the pupil's attendance differently and would have provided a more in-depth picture of each case. Capturing these views would be an area of development for future research.

Another potential limitation relates to respondent bias which cannot be completely ruled out despite the measures put in place to reduce it. These included, explaining the purpose of the research, encouraging honest responses, emphasising confidentiality and checking responses for clarity, as well as carefully planning and piloting the questions to reduce the extent to which they influenced the participants' response. However, I cannot be certain that the participants responses were unaffected by their perceptions of me and how the results might have been used.

The reliability and validity of the coding process also needs to be considered, as the interpretations of the interview data are subjective and it is important to be aware that my position may have influenced such interpretations. Again I put in place measures to address this, including using the theoretical propositions to

guide analysis, listening to the interviews and checking the coding several times after the data was initially coded and comparing themes to the original data to ensure consistency after the analysis was complete. Peer checking of coded data would have been an additional strategy to further ensure validity (Robson, 2011) but unfortunately this was not achieved due to the lack of availability of colleagues at the time of the data analysis.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This section will consider the implications of the findings in terms of the ways non-attendance may be successfully addressed. Particular focus will be placed on the practice of EPs who are well placed to support schools in this area (Pellegrini, 2007). Future area of research will then be considered.

6.1. Implementation of the findings

6.1.1 Using a multiple perspective approach to identifying all the perceived causes of non-attendance

In order for non-attendance to be addressed the underlying causes first need to be identified. As demonstrated in the current study, there appeared to be several causes which were not identified by all participants and remained unresolved. Taking a multi-perspective approach in identifying the causes would enable each person's views to be heard and the causes of non-attendance to be co-constructed. EPs are skilled in using tools to elicit views in such a way. In particular, focus needs to be placed on eliciting pupils' views as this appeared to be less evident in the current study. EPs can draw upon solution-focused approaches (de Shazer, 1985) and tools from Personal Construct Psychology, such as the Ideal Self (Moran, 2001), Repertory Grids (Kelly, 1955) and Child Drawings (Ravenette, 1977) to elicit the views of children. Furthermore, using the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA; Gameson et al, 2003), an EP can facilitate the exploration of each person's hypothesis

regarding the factors that maintain the non-attendance before then exploring what needs to be in place for change to occur (see Appendix 19). In doing this, conflicts may arise due to contradictions between peoples' opinions, goals and interests (Kriesberg, 1998). However, EPs can draw upon skills of conflict resolution to resolve these issues. Deutsch (1994) proposes that these skills include: building effective working relationships with individuals so that trust and communication can be established; encouraging cooperative problem-solving attitudes among key people; facilitating creative group decision making (including clarifying the nature of the problem, considering solutions in terms of feasibility and desirability and facilitating the implementation of agreed-upon solutions); and drawing upon psychological and practical knowledge of the problem in order to assess the feasibility of proposed solutions or offer further solutions .

6.1.2. Applying a Joint Systems Approach in addressing non-attendance

A Joint Systems Approach focuses on the relationship and communication between different systems within which a problem is maintained (Dowling and Osborne, 1994). The findings of the current study demonstrated the use of a Joint Systems Approach to some extent as the pupils' attendance problems were seen in the context of their wider family system (e.g. parental factors were identified as well as within-child factors) and to some extent the school system, albeit not by the teachers. A Joint Systems Approach emphases the importance of understanding the individual within their contexts and considering the relationships and interaction between these contexts (Thambirajah et al, 2008). Therefore the problem is viewed as occurring between individuals rather than within an

individual. In doing this, no one person is responsible for the problem and participants (child, parent, teachers) hold equal responsibility for identifying and implementing interventions (Thambirajah et al, 2008). EPs can support schools in applying a Joint Systems Approach at a number of levels. Firstly, at a systemic level, EPs could deliver training to school staff to raise awareness of the different factors that underpin non-attendance, with emphasis being placed on school factors and the ways in which schools can be more inclusive for non-attenders and their families (Pellegrini, 2007). This may involve challenging common perceptions about school non-attenders and enabling school staff to develop alternative discourses about these pupils and their families. Secondly, EPs are well placed to support schools at the individual pupil level by facilitating an understanding between pupils, parents and teachers of the ways in which the different systems may be maintaining the problem. This could then be followed by a joint approach to identifying and implementing the appropriate interventions which aim to address the multiple causes of non-attendance.

6.1.3. Facilitating a greater understanding of the causes of non-attendance

Undertaking the two approaches outlined above would provide a greater understanding on the causes of non-attendance by considering multiple perspectives and the influence of the different systems on the pupil's non-attendance. In addition to these, an approach that supports parents and teachers to understand the function of the pupil's behaviour would be useful. This was illustrated somewhat by case 1 and case 2 in the current study, as the parents and teachers struggled to identify the reasons for the pupils' refusal behaviour. An

approach such as Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA) would allow the function of the individual's behaviour to be explored, providing a greater understanding of the child and the support needed to address their non-attendance (Kearney, 2008). FBA is underpinned by the assumption that behaviour serves an important communicative function (Durand, 1990). It also considers the behaviour in the context of the child's environment and how that environment is maintaining the behaviour (Kearney, 2008). Therefore interventions are aimed at addressing the function of the behaviour rather than the form of behaviour, which may involve providing alternative ways of communicating or reducing the maintaining factors in the child's environment. Again, EPs have the tools and skills to support pupils, parents and teachers in exploring the functions of the pupils' behaviour. For instance, EPs can gather information through pupil-interviews, reports from significant others, behavioural observations (Lauchlan, 2003) and assessment scales such as the School Refusal Assessment Scale (Kearney and Silverman, 1993) and the Motivation Assessment Scale (Durand and Crimmins, 1988). They are then in a position to support schools in linking the assessment to interventions that are aimed at addressing the functions of the behaviour (Elliott and Place, 1998).

6.1.4. Effective within-school support

The current study highlights a number of within-school strategies that were effective in addressing non-attendance. Whilst these were tailored to the individuals' needs, they provide examples of good practice which could be shared with other schools. For instance, one of the key findings related to having a

supportive, accessible and approachable member of staff with whom parents could liaise with and gain practical and emotional support from. The findings also highlight the importance of parents and school staff working in partnership to address pupils' attendance issues and the strategies that were successful in supporting this partnership (e.g. clear expectations, collecting the pupil from home, key members of staff). Furthermore, examples of interventions aimed at the pupil were given such as tailored incentives and the staffs' approach to the pupil (e.g. being consistent, calm and fun in their interactions with the pupil and offering verbal encouragement).

6.1.5. Measuring the intention to change

A final implication of these findings arises from case 3 in which there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance but a lack of desire to change by the parent. Again the use of a problem solving model such as COMOIRA would give insight into each participants' intention to change (Gameson et al, 2003). This aspect of the model explores the extent to which those involved in the maintenance of the problem want to change by considering how much the problem affects them, what would be different without the problem and who would be affected by the difference (see Appendix 19). With regards to case 3 using this aspect of the model would have also provided the opportunity to explore the impact of the pupil's non-attendance on her education and the education of her peers. This in turn may have influenced the parent's desire to change.

6.1.6. A reflection on the implications for my practice

Carrying out this research has led me to conclude that EPs possess the necessary knowledge and skills to support children who experience problems with their attendance. This will impact on my practice in the future, as I will be able to offer support to schools at a number of levels (e.g. training, group work, individual casework). Furthermore, this research has highlighted the importance of eliciting and acting upon the views of pupils and parents in cases of non-attendance. In my practice, I will be able to draw upon tools to elicit these views and use psychological knowledge to facilitate a greater understanding of non-attendance amongst those involved. I will also be able to facilitate joint problem-solving and support the implementation of agreed solutions to address the causes identified. With regards to the latter, I believe it is important to promote a shared responsibility for improving attendance, which may involve working at a systemic level to support schools in addressing school related factors. In line with this, I believe EPs can play an important role in challenging common perceptions among school staff with regards to the causes of non-attendance and promote the awareness of school related factors.

6.2. Future research

Reflecting on the current study led to the consideration of future research in this area. Some of the suggestions arise from limitations of the current study whereas others would further the research into non-attendance.

A rationale for carrying out this study related to a lack of research into improved attendance. Whilst this study provides insight into this, the relatively small sample size was highlighted as a limitation. Therefore further research focusing on cases of improved attendance could provide more support for the findings and further insight into effective practice within schools. Furthermore, future research could aim to include the views of other family members and relevant professionals to address the limitation regarding absent views.

An additional finding related to the lack of interventions to address the causes of non-attendance identified by the pupil and to some extent the parent. As the current study explored improvements in attendance, data was collected following the implementation of interventions. The process undertaken by the schools to identify the causes of non-attendance was not explored as part of this study and therefore, it is unclear if the pupil's views were elicited but not acted upon or whether they were not elicited at all. Therefore, further investigation into the process undertaken by schools when attendance issues arise would provide useful insight into how the causes are identified and the interventions decided upon. It would be particularly useful to consider the ways in which the pupil voice is elicited and acted upon given the emphasis placed on this in legislation (DfE, 2013b).

As proposed in chapter 6, the COMOIRA (Gameson et al, 2003) may be effective in facilitating a multi-perspective approach to identifying the causes of non-attendance, the interventions needed and measuring individuals' intention to

change. Therefore, future research could explore the use of this model with pupils whose attendance levels meet the threshold for school intervention.

Another rationale for the current study was to focus on primary school pupils due to the apparent increase in non-attendance in this group and the recognition of the importance of early intervention. However, there is also limited research into the improved attendance of pupils in secondary schools and alternative provisions (e.g. Pupil Referral Units, Special Schools). Future research carried out with these pupils would be useful in identifying good practice in these different settings.

6.3. Sharing of the findings

The findings of the current study will be presented in different formats to different audiences. The literature review, process and findings of the current study will be presented to Eastshire's Educational Psychology Service at a Whole Service meeting in the academic year 2014/2015 (see Appendix 20). The schools that took part in the research will be sent a summary of the research findings and asked to share this with the parents, pupils and school staff involved (see Appendix 21).

6.4. Concluding statement

This research topic was chosen due the limited research focusing on improved attendance from the perspectives of those involved and within a changed climate of reduced support from local authorities. The present study has provided examples of effective interventions put in place by schools to increase attendance. It was also found that the greatest improvement in attendance was evident when

there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between at least the parent and teacher, the interventions put in place were aimed at addressing these causes and there was a shared responsibility for improving attendance. In addition to this, the findings highlighted a number of factors that may lead to further improvements in the pupils' attendance. These included: teachers recognising and addressing school related factors; a greater understanding of the reasons for pupils' refusal behaviour; pupils' views being acted upon; and consideration of the impact of pupils' non-attendance.

It is argued that EPs are well placed to support schools and families in addressing these factors. They can facilitate an holistic understanding of the pupil's non-attendance by gaining and bringing together the views of the pupil, parent and school staff. Furthermore, they can support individuals in gaining a greater understanding of the many factors that maintain the problem and where support needs to be targeted. Finally EPs can facilitate a joint approach to addressing non-attendance in which individuals' views are heard and acted upon. This current study therefore contributes to the development of research in this area and it is hoped that further research can build upon this. Furthermore, this study contributes to professional development by highlighting the role EPs can play in supporting schools and families to address non-attendance.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Education Acts

Act	Key points regarding attendance
Elementary education Act 1880	Attendance at school made compulsory for children aged 5 to 10 years old
Elementary Education Act 1891	Free education was granted for children over three and under fifteen years of age with the aim of increase attendance and the regularity of attendance
Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act 1893	Compulsory education was extended and the school leaving age became eleven years of age. Penalties were given to employers employing children under the age of 11.
Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act (1893) Amendment Act 1899	The school leaving age was raised to twelve years of age
The Education Act 1918	The school leaving age was raised to 14 years of age
Education Act 1944	The school leaving age was raised to 15 years of age
1972	The school leaving age was raised to 16 years of age
Education Act 1996	Consolidated all education acts since 1944.
Education and Skills Act 2008	Stated that the school leaving age would be increased to 17 years old in 2013 and 18 years old from 2015

Gillard (2011)

Appendix 2: Attendance codes (DFE, 2013a).

Pupils must only be marked as present if they are in school during registration.
Registration codes:

	Code	Description
Present on-site and off-site*	/	**Present in school** for the morning session
	\	**Present in school** for the afternoon session
	L	**Late arrival before register has closed.** Schools decide how long to leave the register open for but it cannot be for the whole session
	B	**Off-site educational activity** which is a supervised educational activity such as a field trip, educational visits, work experiences. The provider of the activity should notify the school of any absences which the school would then record using the relevant code
	D	**Dual registered – at another educational establishment** (e.g. pupil referral unit, hospital school). In this case, it would not be expected that the pupil attends the session as they would be attending another school at which they are registered
	J	**At an interview with prospective employers or another educational establishment**
	P	**Participating in a supervised sporting activity**
	E	**Educational visit or trip** that has been organised by the school or an organisation approved by the school
	W	**Work experience** for pupils in the final two years of compulsory education. Work experience providers should notify the school of any absences which are then recoded using the relevant code
Authorised absences*	C	**Leave of absence authorised by the school.** This only applied to exceptional circumstances and schools should consider the nature of the event, the frequency of the request, whether advance notice was given and the pupils attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on the schooling missed
	E	**Excluded but no alternative provision made.** Alternative provision must be arranged for the pupil from the sixth day of a fixed period or permanent exclusion, in which case
	H	**Holiday authorised by the school.** Only in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the Head Teacher
	I	**Illness (not medical or dental appointment).** Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day that the child is unable to attend due to illness. If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, schools can request that parents provide medical evidence (e.g. prescriptions, appointment cards). If school are not satisfied with the authenticity of the illness they can mark the absence as unauthorised but must notify the parents of this
	M	**Medical or dental appointments.** Schools should encourage parents to make appointments outside of school hours but where this is not possible, the pupil should only be out of school for the minimum about of time necessary for the appointment

	R	**Religious observance** which has been exclusively set apart by the religious body to which the parents belong.
	S	**Study leave** which should be used sparingly and only granted to Year 11 pupils during public examinations. Provision should still be made available for those pupils who want to continue to come into school to revise
	T	**Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence.** This code should only be used when Traveller families are known to be travelling for occupational purposes and have agreed this with the school. In such cases, the pupil should attend school elsewhere and be dual registered.
Unauthorised absence**	G	**Holiday not authorised by the school**
	N	**Reason for absence not yet provided.** When the reason for the pupil absence has been established it should be coded accordingly. If no reason is established after a reasonable amount of time it should be coded O.
	O	**Absent from school without authorisation.** This code should be used if the school is not satisfied with the reason given for absence
	U	**Arrived in school after registration closed.** School should actively discourage late arrival, monitor patterns of late arrival and seek explanations from parents
Administrative Codes	X	**Not required to be in school.** This code is used to record sessions that non-compulsory school age children are not expected to attend
	Y	**Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances** (e.g. school closed due to unavoidable cause, transport provided by the school or LA is not available and the school is not within walking distance, a local or national emergency has resulted in disruption to travel, the pupil is in custody)
	Z	**Pupil not on admission register.** Used when schools want to set up registers in advance of pupil joining the school
	#	**Planned whole or partial school closure** (e.g. half terms, bank holidays, training days)

*Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as justification for absence.

**Unauthorised absence is where a school is not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence.

When a pupil is absent, school staff school should ascertain the reason for this, identify whether the absence is approved by the school and enter the appropriate code onto an electronic register which informs the School Census; a statutory return that takes place several times a year (DFE, 2013a).

Appendix 3: Case study protocol

1. Overview of the study

Research aim	To identify good practice with regards to successfully improving the attendance of pupils whose attendance was identified as a concern
Substantive aim	To determine the factors that resulted in improved attendance for pupils whose attendance was identified as a concern
Theoretical aim	To use theoretical propositions (based on the findings of previous research) to ascertain if these theories are confirmed or refused (and to identify new theories)
Methodological aim	To use case study methodology to gain a detail, in depth insight into the reasons for pupils' attendance improving

Research questions:

1. *In cases of improved attendance, what were the perceived causes of the pupil's non-attendance?*
2. *In cases of improved attendance, why did the pupil's attendance improve?*

Proposed theory:

In cases of improved attendance there will be a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parent and teacher. The interventions put into place to improve attendance will reflect the causes identified and be in addition to whole-school approaches to increase attendance.

Theoretical propositions:

1. The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance
2. The pupil, parent and teacher will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving
3. The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupils attendance that reflect the causes identified
4. These interventions will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

Design frame:

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Key cases: pupils with improved attendance	**Instrumental**: using cases to provide insight into improving attendance **Exploratory**: exploring participants perception of the cause of non-attendance and solutions **Explanatory**: gaining an understanding of why attendance improved	**Testing a theory:** Improvements in attendance will result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parent and teachers and interventions being put in place that aim to address the causes identified. Therefore these would be tailored to the individual and be in addition to the whole school approaches to increase attendance	**Multiple**: three cases **Parallel**: evidence will be gathered at the same time

2. Data collection procedures

Method	Source	Date and location
Semi-structured interviews	• Member of staff responsible for attendance • Pupils • Parents • Teachers	May/June 2013 At the school or parent's home
Document analysis	Attendance Policy	May/June 2013 Request from Key contact
Administrative records	Pupils attendance figures	May/June 2013 Request from Key contact for each pupil

3. Ethical considerations

Consent: ensure written consent is gained from all participants prior to carrying out interviews. Check that participants have read and understood the information about the study and had the opportunity to ask any questions.

Confidentiality: The consent forms are to be kept in a sealed envelope separate from the interview data, no names are to be recorded in the collection of data and the school will not be named in the write up of the findings. All data from this study (consent forms, interview recordings, transcripts, attendance figures etc) are to be kept in a locked filing cabinet which is only accessible by the researcher. The data will be kept for up to ten years and then shredded as is the policy for all personal data in the Education Psychology Service (EPS).

Anonymity: Due to the participants providing their signature on the consent forms and taking part in face-to-face interviews complete anonymity cannot be achieved. However identifying features will be removed in the write up of the study (e.g. name of school).

Right to withdraw: Make participants aware that their right to withdraw at any point prior to, during the interview (e.g. they have a right not to answer certain questions if they do not wish to or can leave the interview all together) or after the interview up to the point of analysis. Generate a unique code (e.g. initials and day they were born – CA06) for each participant to be written on their information sheet and the audio recording of their interview. If participants wish to withdraw from the study their data can be identified, removed and confidentially destroyed.

Safeguarding procedures: If I am made aware of harmful or illegal behaviour or it is felt that a child or other person could be at risk of harm the Local Authority Safeguarding procedures will be followed. The designated person for child protection in school would be notified and decide upon further action. The researcher would also inform their supervisor and decide if any further action needed to be taken. If this were to happen the parents of the child would be informed of the procedures needed to be followed.

Home visiting procedures: Parents will be given the option of carrying out the interview at the school or at their home. If they opt for the home visit, I will follow the Local Authorities home visit procedures. This involves providing the EPS office staff with the address and time of the home visit and contacting them by telephone prior to and after the home visit is complete.

Appendix 4: Letter to schools

Dear [Head Teacher]

My name is Clare Aucott and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working for Eastshire Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am carrying out research into pupil attendance at primary school. I am looking for cases of improved attendance and aim to gain the views of the pupil, parent(s) and teacher with regards to the causes of the pupil's non-attendance and reasons for improvements in attendance. This would be done through individual interviews. I would also like to interview the member of staff responsible for attendance and consult the school's attendance policy to gain a contextual picture of the school's practice in relation to attendance.

Your school has been identified as demonstrating overall improvements in attendance between 2011 and 2012 and therefore I would like to invite you to take part in this study.

Participation in the study would involve the following:

- providing a key member of staff with whom I can liaise throughout study. They will be asked to select the pupils in accordance with selection criteria, seek consent from the parents of those selected (I will provide a letter, information for parents and consent forms) and assist in organising the dates and times of the interviews;
- providing a quite room in which the interviews with pupils, parents and school staff can be conducted confidentially and undisturbed;
- providing access to the attendance records of pupils taking part; and
- providing access to the school's attendance policy.

If your school was to participate in this research it would be on a voluntary basis and you could withdraw from the study at any time up until 1st August 2013, at which point the data collected will be analysed. The participation of pupils, parents and teachers would also be on a voluntary basis and again they could choose to withdraw from the study up until this date. The data collected will be confidential as neither the school nor the participants will be named in the write up of the findings. The study will be written up and submitted to the University of Birmingham as part of my Doctoral thesis. The findings will also be presented to the Educational Psychology Service and you will receive a briefing paper outlining these.

I will contact you by telephone next week to ascertain whether you agree to take part in this study.

Kind regards,

Clare Aucott
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 5: Potential limitations of interview and measures put in place to address them

Potential limitations of interviews	Measures to address limitations
Interviews can be time-consuming for participants, which could affect the number of people willing or able to participate.	I agreed with the key contact within school a reasonable length of time for the parents, teachers and pupils to be interviewed (e.g. in keeping with the length of school meetings with parents and the amount of time teachers and pupils may be outside of the classroom for other purposes). It was made clear in the information to participants that this was flexible and I offered to meet participants at times most convenient for them.
Interviews can be time-consuming for the researcher in terms of information gathering and analysis.	I judged that the small number of participants and the depth of information gained from interviews justified the time commitment. Furthermore, the case study protocol was followed to ensure that only data relevant to the theoretical propositions were collected.
Interviews can be vulnerable to researcher bias in terms of the researcher influencing the data collected and interpreting participants' responses.	I ensured that the interview questions were phrased in a clear, neutral and non-threatening way and derived from the study's theoretical propositions. These were checked by a university tutor and piloted with a primary school pupil, parent and teacher to ensure they were clear, easy to understand and not leading. After each question or topic, I provided a summary of the participant's response to ensure that this was a fair representation of their views and provided them with the opportunity to adjust these if necessary.
Interviews can be vulnerable to respondent bias such as demand characteristics (i.e. the interviewee saying what the interviewer wants to hear).	At the start of each interview I reiterated the information regarding the aims of the research and confidentiality. This was in order to establish a calm atmosphere in which the participants felt able to speak freely and securely (Kvale, 1996). I also emphasised the importance of honest and accurate responses. I asked a factual introductory question to start the interview and orientation questions before each topic (e.g. asking a general question about causes of non-attendance before asking about their own experience). Again this was to encourage the participants to talk freely and feel at ease.

Potential limitations of interviews	Measures to address limitations
A lack of standardisation between interviews can lead to problems of reliability.	I carried out each interview and used the interview schedule to provide a degree of standardisation. However, semi-structured interviews should not be completely standardised as this would not allow for interesting comments to be pursued.
Vital information could be forgotten at the time of interview.	Participants were provided with information about the study prior to taking part in the interview, which allowed them time to think about the topic. In addition to this, prompts and probes were used to enable relevant information to be elicited.

Based on Cohen et al (2011), Denscombe (2007) and Robson (2011).

Appendix 6a: Interview Schedule (pupils, parents and teachers)

(Language to be adapted depending on age and understanding of pupil)

- Welcome participant and introduce myself
- Go through key messages from *Information for pupil/parent/teacher* (e.g. voluntary participation, confidentiality, right to withdraw) – check understanding and give opportunity for questions

Opening comment

"So, the reason I have asked you to take part in this study is because [your/ your child's/your pupils] attendance has improved from last year. I was hoping we could first talk about what was causing [your/your child's/your pupil's] non-attendance and what led to improvements in attendance"

Introductory questions

- Pupil – enquire about their likes and interests etc
- Parents – enquire about child/children: number of children, ages etc.
- Teacher – enquire about the year group they teach, how long been teaching etc

Topic 1: Causes of non-attendance

Probes	Anymore?	What is your view on that?	Silence	Repeat back part of

Prompts	School related factors	Home related factors	Child related factors

Orientation question: **What do you think are some of the reasons why pupils might not come to school?**

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

Have [you/your child/your pupil] been absent from school for any of these reasons?
Prompts:

- *Yes* – which ones?
- *No* – what were the reasons for [your/your child's/your pupil's] non-attendance?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

Topic 2: Improvement in attendance

Probes	Anymore?	What is your view on that?	Silence	Repeat back part of

Prompts	School related factors	Home related factors	Child related factors

Orientation question: **For pupil's who have not attended regularly, what do you think helps improve their attendance?**

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

What were the reasons for [your/your child's/your pupil's] attendance improving?

Prompts:

- What was helpful in improving [your/your child's/your pupil's] attendance?
- Was support put in place? What/when/how?
- Was there anything that was put in place that was not helpful? Why/why not?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

Topic 3: Further improvements

Probes	Anymore?	What is your view on that?	Silence	Repeat back part of

Prompts	School related factors	Home related factors	Child related factors

Orientation question: **What else do you think could be done to help improve pupil's attendance?**

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

What else could be done to help you to continue to attend school regularly?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

Closing comments

- Thank for agreeing to take part in the study.
- Reiterate messages of (right to withdraw – deadline and details of how, confidential and anonymity in write up)
- Inform of access to summary of findings through key contact
- Give opportunity to ask any questions
- Remind of my contact details

Appendix 6b: Interview Schedule (staff responsible for attendance)

- Welcome participant and introduce myself
- Go through key messages from *Information for pupil/parent/teacher* (e.g. voluntary participation, confidentiality, right to withdraw) – check understanding and give opportunity for questions

<u>Opening comment</u>

"So, the reason I have asked you to take part in this study is because your school has shown improvements in attendance between 2011-2012 and been recognised by Ofsted as demonstrating good practice with regards to attendance. I am carryout interviews with pupils whose attendance has improved, their parent and their teacher. In addition to this I would like to gain a contextual picture of the school's practice in relation to attendance".

<u>Introductory questions</u>

- **What is your role in school and how long have you been involved with attendance?**

<u>Topic 1: Causes of non-attendance</u>

Probes	Anymore?	What is your view on that?	Silence	Repeat back part of

Prompts	School related factors	Home related factors	Child related factors

Orientation question: **In general what do you think are some of the reasons why pupils might not come to school?**

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

In this school, what do you think are the most common reason why children are absent from school?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

<u>Topic 2: Improvement in attendance</u>

Probes	Anymore?	What is your view on that?	Silence	Repeat back part of

Prompts	School focused	Home/family focused	Child focused
	Preventative strategies		Reactive strategies

What is currently in place in school to improve pupil attendance?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

What happens when absence first occurs?

Prompts

- o Is there a process to be followed?
- o What happens next?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

What happens when non-attendance continues to be problem?

Prompts
- o Is there a process to be followed?
- o What happens next?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

How effective do you think the support offered by school is in terms of improving attendance?

Prompts
- o Why/why not effective?
- o Has there been anything that was not found to be effective?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

Do you feel there are any gaps in support in terms of attendance?

Prompts
- o Yes: what are they, who could fill them?
- o No: why do you say that?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

Is there anything else you can think of that might help improve pupils attendance?

- Summarise response – check that fair representation

<u>Closing comments</u>
- Thank for agreeing to take part in the study.
- Reiterate messages of (right to withdraw – deadline and details of how, confidential and anonymity in write up)
- Inform of access to summary of findings through key contact
- Give opportunity to ask any questions
- Remind of my contact details

Appendix 7: Letter to parents

Dear [Mr/Mrs]

Clare Aucott, a Trainee Educational Psychologist is carrying out some research in our school as part of her training. The purpose of this research is to explore the views of pupils, parents and teachers with regards to improvements in attendance. As [pupil]'s attendance has improved since last academic year, Clare would like to find out if you and your child would be interested in being considered for this research. Please find attached an information sheet which outlines what this would entail.

If you would like to be considered for this research please complete and return the consent form attached to [staff member] by [date]

Many thanks,

[School]

Appendix 8: Information for parents

Pupil Attendance Research: Information for Parents

Background

My name is Clare Aucott and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working for Eastshire Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am carrying out research into pupil attendance at primary school and [SCHOOL NAME] has agreed to take part in my study.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore the reasons for improvements in pupil's attendance. [Key contact] has identified your child as showing good improvements in attendance and I would like to gain your views as to the reasons for this. If you agree to take part in this research I would also like to explore the views of your child and their class teacher. As part of the research, I am interested to find out the causes of your child's previous non-attendance and why there has been an improvement in their attendance.

Participation in the research

If you were to participate in this research it would be on a voluntary basis. You and your child would be invited to take part in separate interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes. I would meet with your child during school time. The interview with yourself could be carried out at school or at your home, depending on which is most convenient for you. The interviews would be tape recorded to allow for accurate analysis however only I will have access to the recordings. Your responses would be confidential as no names would be used in the write up of the findings. Following the interview your responses would be stored securely and in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. Once all the data has been collected, the responses would be analysed and the findings would be produced in a written report. You would have access to a written summary of the research.

Right to withdraw from the research

You would have a right to withdraw yourself and/or your child from the research without consequences before **1st August 2013.** As no names would be used in the collection of information, you would be given a unique code which corresponds with your interview recording. If you decided to withdraw from the research you could contact myself via telephone or email and quote this unique code. Yours and/or your child's interview recordings and transcripts would then be identified and confidentially disposed of. As of 1st August 2013 the interview data will be analysed and the unique code will be removed.

Contact details

If you would like to know more about the research or have any questions, please give me a call on [telephone number] or send an email to [email address]. Alternatively you can contact [key contact] with any questions.

Thank you for your time.

Clare Aucott, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 9: Parent consent form

Participant Consent

If you agree to yourself and your child being considered for this research, please tick the boxes below and sign to indicate your consent.

	I agree to take part in an interview concerning pupil attendance
	I agree to my child taking part in an interview concerning pupil attendance
	I understand that mine and my child's responses will be confidential as no names will be used in the write up of the report.
	I understand that mine and my child's responses will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998
	I understand that I and/or my child can withdraw from the study before 1st August 2013

Sign: _____   *Date: _____*

Appendix 10: Information for pupils

Hello! My name is Clare and I'm doing some research in your school.

My research involves talking to different people to find out more about:

- Why childrens attendance improves
- Why children might not come to school

I am talking to mums, dads and teachers of children who's attendance at school has improved to find out what they think. But I also want to find out what children think, so I am inviting you to come and have a chat with me at school during the school day.

Your mum and/or dad have said that they are happy for you to take part in this research however you do not have to if you do not want to.

If you do want to take part, I will record our chat using a tape recorder, but only I will be listening to the recording. As part of the research I will be writing a report about what I have found. Some of the things we talk about will be written in the report but I will not be using your name.

During our chat you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and you can leave the room at any point.

If you have any questions about the research you can ask your parents or teachers to contact me on [telephone number] or email [email address]

Many thanks,

Clare Aucott, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 11: Information for teachers

Pupil Attendance Research
Information for Teachers

Background

My name is Clare Aucott and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working for Eastshire Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am carrying out research into pupil attendance at primary school and your school has agreed to take part in my study.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore the reasons for improvements in pupils' attendance. [Key contact] has identified [pupil] as showing good improvements in attendance and I would like to gain your views as to the reasons for this. As part of the research, I am interested to find out the causes of this pupils' previous non-attendance and why there has been an improvement in their attendance. I will also be gathering the views of the pupil and their parent.

Participation in the research

Your participation in this research is on a voluntary basis. You are invited to take part in an interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be tape recorded to allow for accurate analysis, however only I will have access to the recording. Your responses will be confidential as no names will be used in the write up of the findings. Following the interview your responses will be stored securely and in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. Once all the data has been collected, the responses will be analysed and the findings will be produced in a written report. You will have access to a written summary of the research.

Right to withdraw from the research

You have a right to withdraw from the research without consequences before **1ˢᵗ August 2013.** As no names will be used in the collection of information, you will be given a unique code which corresponds with your interview recording. If you decided to withdraw from the research you can contact myself via telephone or email and quote this unique code. Your interview recordings and transcripts will then be identified and confidentially disposed of. As of 1ˢᵗ August 2013 the interview data will be analysed and the unique code will be removed.

Contact details

If you would like to know more about the research or have any questions, please give me a call on [telephone number] or send an email to [email address]

Thank you for your time

Clare Aucott, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 12: Pupil consent form

If you would like to take part in this research please tick the boxes below and write your name at the bottom.

	I have read the information about the research and had a chance to talk to someone about it (my mum or dad, my teachers or Clare)	
	I understand that my name will not be used in the report	
	I understand that a tape recorder will be used to record our chat but only Clare will be listening to the recording	
	I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to	
	I understand that I can leave the room at any point if I want to	
	I am happy to take part in the research	

Name: _____   *Date: _____*

Appendix 13: Teacher consent form

Participant Consent

If you agree to take part in this research, please tick the boxes below and sign to indicate your consent.

	I agree to take part in an interview concerning pupil attendance
	I understand that my responses will be confidential as no names will be used in the write up of the report.
	I understand that my responses will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998
	I understand that I can withdraw from the study before 1st August 2013

Name: _____   *Date:* _____

Appendix 14: Safeguarding procedures

It is anticipated that this study is unlikely to pose any risks to the individuals taking part. However there are a few things the researcher has to bear in mind when working with young people and parents:

- The researcher may be made aware of harmful or illegal behaviour. If it was felt that a child or other person could be at risk of harm the Local Authority Safeguarding procedures would be followed. The designated person for child protection in school would be notified and decide upon further action. The researcher would also inform their supervisor and decide if any further action needed to be taken. If this were to happen the parents of the child would be informed of the procedures needed to be followed.
- Parents will be given the option of carrying out the interview at the school or at their home. If they opt for the home visit, the researcher will follow the Local Authorities home visit procedures. This involves providing the EPS office staff with the address and time of the home visit and contacting them by telephone prior to and after the home visit is complete.

Appendix 15: Example of initial coding (extracts from case 1)

Pupil	Code
So what do you think has helped to improve your attendance? They just encouraged me to come to school more (**who did?**) the teachers (**how did they encourage you?**) Erm they kept saying "come on [pupil's name] you need to start coming to school a bit more often." (**oh ok, so by talking to you, and being encouraging?**) yea (**did they do anything else?**) erm... [FSW], she came to my house and made me come to school. I kept getting told off by my mum because erm if you don't come to school your mum can get arrested, so I just start, I just started coming to school. **[Summarised responses] so was there anything else that helped improve your attendance?** I think my erm LSA, she erm done a erm rewards chart and she said "if you come into school this many days you get a treat" and I kept getting treats so it encouraged me to go school (**oh right, what kind of treats did you get?**) pens, books, erm... toy cars and she always used to get us Christmas presents. (**So you had to come to school for so many days/**) I think it, you'd have to stay in school for a week and you'd get erm pens and er a box of toy cars (**was that just for you or for the whole class?**) just for me and then she got this for me and Liam in my class, a little reward thing, if we get loads of smiles we'd get a treat, if we get four we'd get erm an extra five minutes at break time but if we get three we don't get nothing. **Has anything else helped improve your attendance?** It started to get a bit more fun with my teacher because every time I go to mathletics he always sings and plays music and it encourages me because I want to hear him. **So the teachers being a bit more fun** [nods].	Verbal encouragement FWS: collecting from home Knowledge of legal consequences Rewards for attendance - Criteria: number of days in school -Tangible rewards Teacher being fun in lessons

Parent	Code
I think maybe [FSW] been a big big help from the other one that was here. **What do you think [FSW] has done that has been helpful for him?** Just her whole attitude and approach, not just to him but all the other kids, you know. The way, well the way she spoke to him just now, calmly, the other one would have come in like a bull in a china shop and probably pulled him out by his hair, you know. [FSW] only been here since October. You know so, you can feel it now. But before, yea it was quite a err I didn't like to speak to any of the teachers about it because, you	FSW approach towards pupil Negative response

	Code
know, they were all, they were all so negative about everything and I felt I was hitting my head against a brick wall. There had been nobody to talk to in this school until [FSW] came. Whereas now, [FSW] can actually see what I'm dealing with and has helped me tremendously. I can just, I can go to her, I can phone her and leave a message, she'll get back to me. If I need anything, I just go to [FSW] now. Whereas before I was getting told "there's nothing wrong with him, it's your parenting" and you know, "it's your fault, you should have never left your husband, that's what's upset him". That it's my parenting, to go on this course, that course, the other course and I did it all and he was still the same. If not worse, you know. He's nearly bigger than me now. But you know, you get to a point and you think "is it me?" you know. **So you don't feel there was much support in improving attendance until [FSW] came along?** Till [FSW] come, no, no. I mean she, well she's been brilliant with him. **And what do you think it is about her support that's effective/** I suppose because I go in her office and have a good cry. You know. **It's someone you can off load to?** Yea, whereas the others there all like, er "oh do this for him, if he does that, give him a red card du du du" very regimental, and that just doesn't work at home, you know.	Unsupported FSW supporting parent -Empathy -Accessible -Responsive Blaming parent Parenting courses -ineffective FSW approach towards pupil FSW- emotional support Directive-ineffective

Teacher	Code
So you've mentioned already some of the things that were put into place to improve his attendance, so you would go out to collect him/ yea we supported mum there and sort of said "we'll come and get him if needs be, you know even if he's in his pyjamas or whatever", you know and we sort of said that in front of him so he, he sort of got the jist of you know you may, you may have your control over your mum but actually if I turn up to collect you you're coming in your pyjamas if that's what it takes. I mean I've been out to the front gate when he's refused to get out of the car and things like that or he's, he's refusing to come in erm and sort of coerced him in but again once he's in school, he knows the boundaries in school, he knows the consequences and they'll be followed through, he, he complies. **What else do you thinks happened to improve his attendance from last year to this year?** I think the support that	Reinforcement for parent - Getting pupil into school Clear expectations in school Support for parent from school staff/FSW

mum's getting from the school has helped. The positive input she's had from other agencies like CAMHS, erm, Family Support Worker. The fact that it's, it's again myself and [another teacher] are his teacher for a second year so there's a relationship already there with mum. erm mum had had to take time off work and lost a job I believe as a result of his poor attendance so I think, you know, that's impacted on him, so he's sort of realised the severity, er there's still, we're nowhere near out of the woods, you know there's still issues going on.

Was there anything in school directly for him that was a motivator to come in/ we, we did, not, not particularly to come in but, The behaviour agreement has been quite good, we did a behaviour agreement which is up on the, you can see it up on the board there. Which was on, he was one of the children we, we focused on in that and that was about, pushing the positives so he would, he would sometimes get himself into bother at lunchtimes... so we brought him into a group where, it's in all their interests not to be winding each other up because their going for a you know sort of, uniformed group reward that they wanted. Any, any of them mess it up then they would lose out so. That's, he was really positive on that and there's erm three of them out of that group of six that will be reaping the reward of bowling so he, he can see there's a reward there, it's a physical thing, it's not just a merit or a sticker it's a physical thing that he wants to do. **So do you feel that's had a knock on effect, because the focus of that is not attendance/** no that's about behaviour but he realises he needs to be in, in order to achieve that, he needs to be in. I mean he looks forward to coming in, you know he looks forward to doing that sort of stuff.

[Summarised responses] so, anything else/
Yea you know positive reinforcement for you know when he comes in I'm able to say "[pupil], get in!" and again the support for mum in front of him so that he knows that you know, he may rule the roost at home but actually mum will come in and tell us at school so there's going to be a consequence even if he breaks mum's boundaries and doesn't get a consequence, there will be when he gets back into school so.

Do you think there is anything in particular that has been helpful with pupil and improving his attendance?
I think having those positive erm relationships with him with the sch/ with the teachers, with the Family Support Worker. I've been his teacher now for two years, I came up with the class last year so he's had that stability which has, which has helped. He's happy to come into school and it's also the work that we've done, I suppose with the relationship with [pupil] and mum at

Other agencies
Teacher-parent relationship
Loss of job
Realisation

Rewards for behaviour

- Criteria: good behaviour

- Tangible reward

Verbal reinforcement

Reinforcement for parent:
- Enforcing consequences

Pupil-staff relationship

Pupil-parent relationship

Rewards **not** aimed at attendance

Support for parent from school staff
FSW supporting

home that's had the biggest impact on his attendance which is, you know, sounds a bit strange you know, we've not offering rewards for attendance because actually he does, he, he enjoys it in school, he gets on in school, when he's there. It's, it's the issues are with mum, so you are looking at are really the relationship with mum rather than attendance, that, that comes automatically then. **When you say relationship with mum is that his relationship with mum or school's relationship with mum?** His relationship, yea. I mean mum relies on school heavily, particularly the Family Support Worker who's really supportive, erm there's lots of links with erm CAMHS and CAFs and outside agencies working with mum to support her manage [pupil]

parent

Support for parent from other agencies to manage pupil

Appendix 16: Example of searching for themes (extract from case 1)

Potential themes	Related codes
Parent supported by school staff	FSW supporting parent -Empathy -Accessible -Responsive - emotional support Support for parent from school staff/FSW Teacher-parent relationship Contradictory points: Negative response Unsupported Blaming parent Directive-ineffective
Parent managing pupils behaviour	Pupil-parent relationship Support from other agencies Support for parent from other agencies to manage behaviour Contradictory point: Parenting courses -ineffective
Collecting pupil from home	Getting pupil into school FWS: collecting from home
Reinforcement for parent	- Enforcing consequences
Staffs approach to pupil	Verbal encouragement Verbal reinforcement Pupil-staff relationship FSW approach towards pupil Teacher being fun in lessons Clear expectations in school
Rewards	Rewards for behaviour - Criteria: good behaviour - Tangible reward Rewards for attendance - Criteria: number of days in school -Tangible rewards
Impact of non-attendance on parent	Parent lost of job Pupils knowledge of legal consequences

Appendix 17: Steps taken to ensure the quality and robustness of the findings

Possible threat	Steps taken
Research methods failing to effectively elicit participant's views of non-attendance and improved attendance.	• The interview questions were discussed with a university tutor and piloted with a pupil, parent and teacher to ensure they were interpreted as intended and elicited the intended information. • A case study protocol and theoretical propositions guided the research to ensure that focus remained on the research questions.
Researcher effect influencing the data collection procedure.	• Rationales for decisions made throughout the research process were made explicit. • The interview questions were based on the study's theoretical propositions and checked by a university tutor to ensure that they were clear, neutral and not leading. • During the interview I provided a summary of the participants' response after each question or topic to ensure that this was a fair representation of their views. • Triangulation of research evidence resulted in conclusions not being based on a single piece of evidence.
Response bias influencing the participants' responses.	• The importance of honest and accurate responses was emphasised at the beginning of each interview. • Efforts were made to make the participants feel at ease and encourage them to speak freely and securely during the interview (Kvale, 1996). This included reemphasising the aims of the research, notions of confidentiality and anonymity and started with factual introductory questions followed by orientation questions regarding non-attendance.
Making causal links without acknowledging other factors which may influence the links.	• Matching patterns from the data analysis to the theoretical propositions at the analysis stage highlighted causal links but also allowed new and rival explanations to be explored. • Areas of uncertainty and/or evidence that did not support the theoretical propositions were identified and not ignored. • In designing the questions, steps were taken to ensure that responses were interpreted accurately, which enabled accurate causal links to be established.

Possible threat	Steps taken
Failing to consider alternative explanation or theories.	• Rival explanations were identified, refuted or accepted and new information was not ignored. • Throughout the data collection process, data which disconfirmed developing patterns was also sought rather than searching for supporting evidence alone.
Being unable to generalise the results beyond the immediate case study.	• This study does not claim to produce finings that can be generalised to all pupils with improved attendance. Rather, the results can be generalised to theoretical propositions which derived from extensive reading of previous literature.
Poor recording of data collection and analysis procedures.	• As outlined in Section 3.5. and 3.6. all procedures were documented which allow for transparency. • A case study protocol (see Appendix 3) was devised to facilitate data collection and make plans explicit.

Based on Cohen et al (2011), Miles and Huberman (1994), Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009)

Appendix 18: Rewards for attendance in school A and school B

	Frequency	Target	Criterion	Reward
School A	Weekly	Individual children	100% attendance	Sticker
	Weekly	Class	Highest attendance	Award
	Half termly	Individual children	Most improved attendance in class	Certificate
	Termly	Individual child	100% attendance	Certificate
	Termly	Class	Highest attendance	Off-site visit
	Yearly	Child	100% attendance	Tea party with Head Teacher
School B	Weekly	Individual children	100% attendance	Well Done Postcard
	Weekly	Class	Highest attendance	Trophy and 15 minutes extra Golden Time
	Yearly	Individual children	100% attendance	Off-site visit

Appendix 19: Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA).
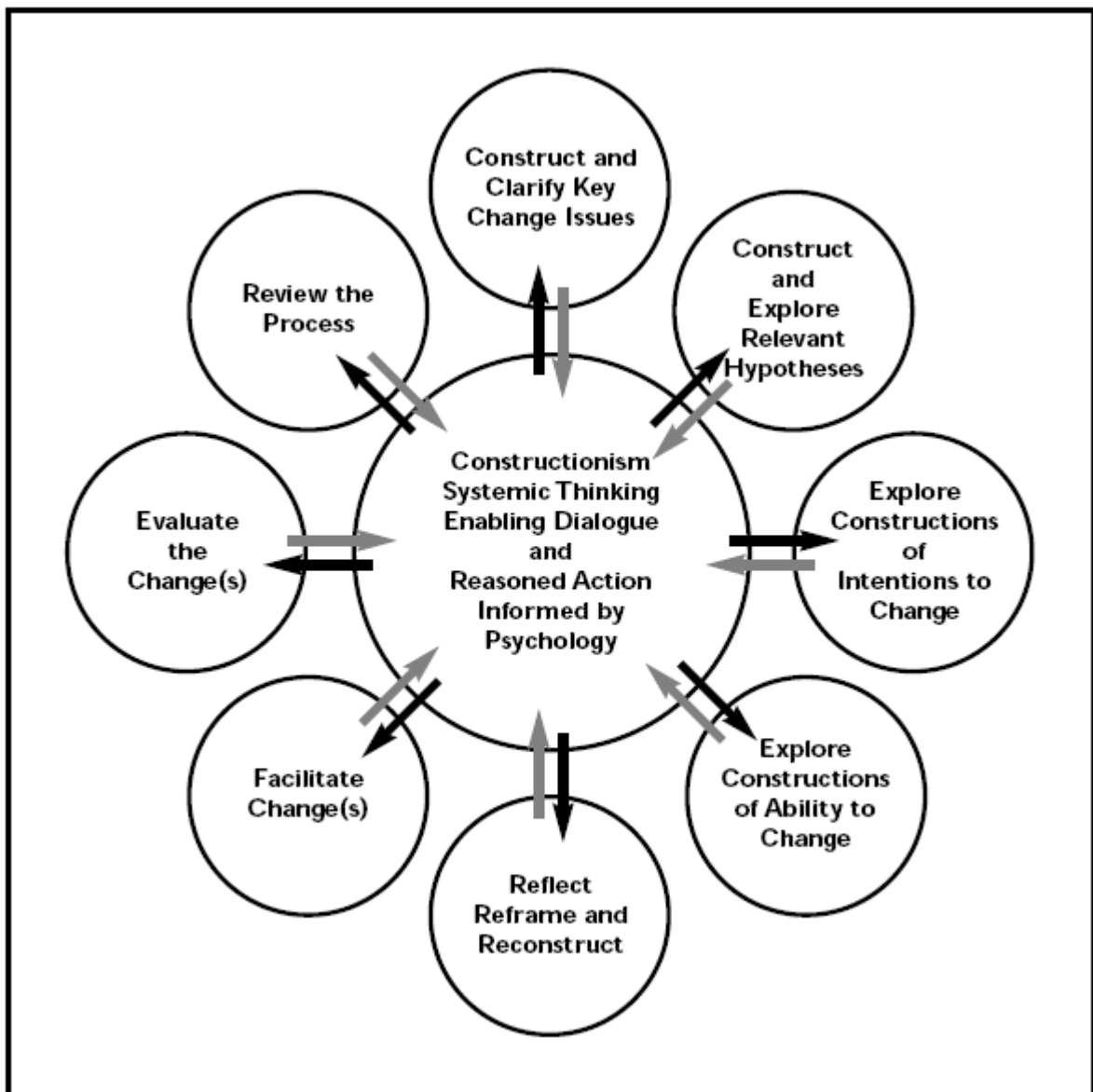
Gameson et al (2003, pp.100)

Appendix 20: Powerpoint presentation to Eastshire Educational Psychology Service

An exploration of pupils', parents' and teachers' perceptions of the causes of pupil non-attendance and the reasons for improvements in attendance

By

Clare Aucott

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Historical and National Context

- Compulsory education introduced in 1880 (Elementary Education Act, 1880)

- Legal obligations placed on parents to ensure that their child received an education

- With the introduction of compulsory education came the issue of non-attendance (due to reduction of income, location of school, transport; Black, 1996)

- Links between persistent non-attendance and poor educational attainment, poor employment prospects, alcohol and drug use and youth and adult criminality

Historical and National Context

- 1997-2002: national target in England to reduce non-attendance by one-third

- Local Authorities played an important role in supporting school to reduce non-attendance (Malcolm et al, 2003)

- Schools White Paper: schools should set their own priorities and be in control of their own improvements (DfE, 2010)

- Schools Finding Reform: "schools are best placed to make appropriate provision for their pupils and the aim is to maximise the amount of funding allocated to them (DfE, 2012b, p2)

Local Context

Previous role of Education Welfare Officers:

- Preventative and reactive support at whole school, group and individual level

September 2012: Education Welfare Service subsumed by the Education Entitlement Service

- Statutory duties only

Definition of non-attendance

Lack of consistency and precision in definition and terms are used interchangeably:

- Truancy
- School refusal
- School phobia
- Parentally condoned absence
- Absenteeism
- Persistence absence

Non-attendance: a neutral description of the behaviour without attempting to allude to what underpins it

Causes of non-attendance

- Within-child factors

- Family and home factors

- School factors

Causes of non-attendance

- **Within-child factors**

  - Attitudes towards school

  - Self-esteem

  - Learning difficulties

  - Lack of social skills

  - Tiredness

  - Behavioural difficulties

  (e.g. Kinder et al, 1995; Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid, 2008).

Causes of non-attendance

- **Family and home factors**

  - Disadvantaged family backgrounds

  - Unfavourable social circumstances

  - Parents attitudes towards school

  - Parenting skills and capacity

  (e.g. Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Malcolm et al, 2003; Reid 1999)

Causes of non-attendance

- **School factors**

  - Physical environment

  - Bullying/peer difficulties

  - Negative relationships with teachers

  - Dissatisfaction with the curriculum

  (e.g. Archer et al, 2003; Kinder et al, 1996; Reid, 2004)

Differing views of non-attendance

- School staff and other professionals are more likely to report that child-related factors, parental attitudes and home environments are the main cause of non-attendance

  - (e.g. Dalziel and Henthorn, 2005; Malcolm et al, 2003)

- Parents and pupils are more likely to identify school related factors as the main causes of non-attendance

  - (e.g. Dalziel and Henthorn, 2005; Kinder et al, 1996; Kinder and Wilkin, 1998; Malcolm et al, 2003)

Interventions to improve attendance

- **Preventative interventions**

  - School attendance policies

  - Reward schemes

  - Building relationships with parents

  - First day response

Interventions to improve attendance

- **Reactive interventions**

  - Individual and group work

  - Parenting courses

  - Building staff-pupil relationships

  - Alternative curriculum or arrangements

  - Education Welfare Service

  - Involvement of other services

  - Legal action (fines and imprisonment)

Tailoring interventions to need

- Interventions found to be effective when they are tailored to individuals needs (e.g. Kearney and Silverman; 1990).

- There needs to be an understanding of the causes of non-attendance so that interventions can be put in place to address these at multiple levels (Kearney and Sims, 1997)

- Important to listen to the pupil and parent, identify the underlying causes on non-attendance and tailor the intervention to their needs (Atkinson et al; 2000b)

Rationale for the study

- No current research that has explored individual cases of non-attendance from pupil, parent and teacher perspective

- Little research carried out with pupils whose attendance has improved

- Little is known about how schools are currently addressing non-attendance in a context of reduced support from the local authority

Aim of the research

- To explore cases of improved attendance within the current political context, in order to identify examples of good practice.

- Gain the views of those involved in the case (pupil, parent and teacher) with regards to:

  - the causes of the pupil's non-attendance to explore the extent to which there is a shared understanding;

  - the interventions put in place that led to improvements in attendance.

Research question

In cases of improved attendance what were the

perceived causes of the pupil's non-attendance and

why did the pupil's attendance improve?

Proposed theory

Improvements in attendance will result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parent and teachers and interventions being put in place that aim to address the causes identified. Therefore these would be tailored to the individual and be in addition to the whole school approaches to increase attendance

Theoretical propositions

1. The pupil, parent and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance

2. The pupil, parent and teacher will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

3. The school will have put in place interventions to improve the pupils attendance that reflect the causes identified

4. These interventions will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

Epistemology: Critical Realism

- There is a reality that exists independently of our representations of it and our representations are subject to historical and social influences (Norris, 1999)

- Events can be seen but there are structures and mechanisms that exist beyond these events which are not readily observable and have the causal power to produce effects (Bhaskar, 1989)

- The social world can only be understood if one understands the structures and mechanism that generate these events.

Case Study methodology

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Key cases: pupils with improved attendance	Instrumental : using cases to provide insight into improving attendance Exploratory: exploring participants perception of the cause of non-attendance and solutions Explanatory: gaining an understanding of why attendance improved	Testing a theory: Improvements in attendance will result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the participants and tailored interventions being put in place to address the causes identified. These would be in addition to the whole school approaches to increase attendance	Multiple: three cases Parallel: evidence will be gathered at the same time

Settings and participants

- Primary school with an improved absence rate from 2011 – 2012: 4 identified, 3 agreed to take part but 1 then withdrew.

- Pupils whose attendance had been highlighted as a concern the previous academic year but had improved: 11 identified, 3 agreed to take part

Case	Gender	Age	Attendance	
			2011/ 2012	Term 5 2013
1	Male	10	82%	87%
2	Male	6	77%	90%
3	Female	8	93%	94%

Data collection methods

- **Semi-structured interviews**

  - Pupil
  - Parent
  - Teacher
  - Staff responsible for attendance

- **Documentation analysis**
  - Attendance policy

- **Administrative records**
  - Attendance records

Ethical considerations

- Ethical approval from University of Birmingham ethics research committee

  - Voluntary participation
  - Informed consent
  - Confidentiality and anonymity
  - Right to withdraw
  - Procedures for safeguarding concerns/disclosures
  - Integrity and respect
  - Potential for a power imbalance

(British Psychological Society, 2010)

Validity and reliability

- Based interview questions on propositions

- Piloted interview questions

- Used a case study protocol

- Provided rationales for decisions throughout

- Gave participants a summary of the responses during the interviews

- Triangulation of sources of data

- Alternative explanations identified and explored during analysis

Methods of data analysis

- Content analysis of attendance policies: categories

  - Values
  - Intentions
  - Methods
  - Actors
  - Actions.

- Thematic analysis of interviews using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach and matching data to theoretical propositions

Findings

Proposition 1: The pupil, parents and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance.

Case 1	Pupil	Parent	Teacher
Pupil	Difficulties with teachers Difficulties with peers	Medical problems Difficulties getting up	
Parent	/////	Mood	
Teacher	/////	/////	Lack of parenting ability Gaining control

▮	Shared view	▮	Partially shared view	▮	Individual view
▯	No shared views	▮	No individual view	▨	Duplicated box

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Proposition 1: The pupil, parents and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance.

Case 2	Pupil	Parent	Teacher
Pupil		Medical problems	Medical problems
Parent	*(duplicated box)*	Boredom at school	Medical problems Behavioural difficulties Lack of parenting ability
Teacher	*(duplicated box)*	*(duplicated box)*	

Shared view		Partially shared view	Individual view
No shared views		No individual view	Duplicated box

Proposition 1: The pupil, parents and teacher will have a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance.

Case 3	Pupil	Parent	Teacher
Pupil		Illness Family holiday	Illness Family holiday
Parent	*(duplicated box)*		Illness Family holiday
Teacher	*(duplicated box)*	*(duplicated box)*	

Shared view		Partially shared view	Individual view
No shared views		No individual view	Duplicated box

Proposition 2: Participants will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

Case 1

Support for the parent
- Access to supportive staff
- Managing behaviour
- Providing reinforcement

Support for the parent
- Access to supportive staff
- Managing behaviour
- Providing reinforcement

Proposition 2: Participants will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

Case 2

Support for the parent
- Access to supportive staff
- Managing behaviour
- Providing reinforcement

Clear expectations
- Parent's responsibility
- Pupil's responsibility

Motivational incentives
- Rewards
- Fun activities

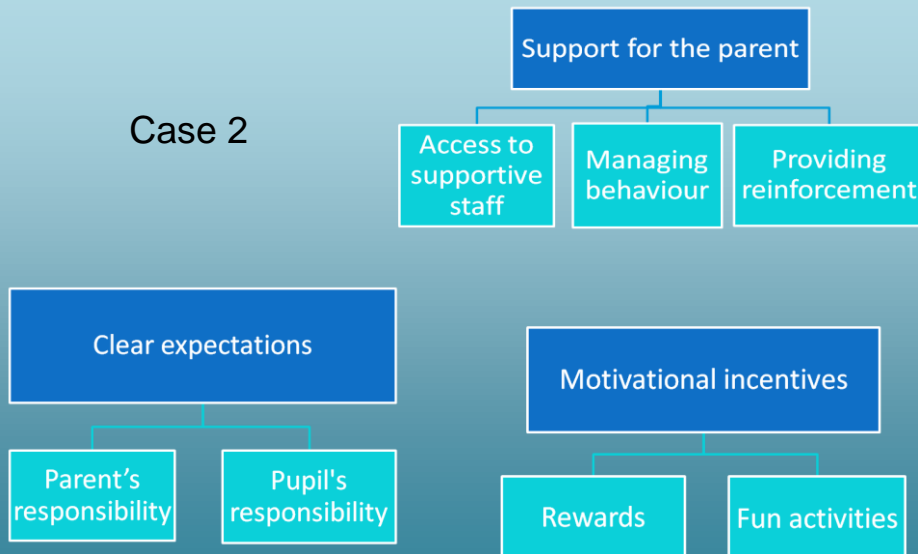**Proposition 2**: Participants will be able to identify reasons for the pupil's attendance improving

Case 3

Unable to identify reason for improvement in attendance and analysis of attendance record revealed two more days off due to illness the previous year

---

Proposition 3: The interventions put in place to improve the pupils attendance will have aimed to address the causes identified

Case 1

Causes	Interventions
Medical problem (Pa/Pu)	Rewards (Pu/T)
Difficulties getting up (Pa/Pu)	Managing behaviour (T)
Refusal due to mood (Pa)	Support from school staff (T/Pa)
Refusal as control (T)	Reinforcement (T/Pu)
Lack of parenting ability (T)	Staff's approach to pupil (Pu/Pa/T)
Peer difficulties (Pu)	(Impact on parent)(Pu/T)
Relationship with teacher (Pu)	

(Brackets indicate views represented, Pa = parent, Pu = pupil, T = teacher)

Proposition 3: The interventions put in place to improve the pupils attendance will have aimed to address the causes identified

Case 2

Causes	Interventions
Medical problems (Pa/Pu/T)	Rewards (Pu/Pa/T)
Refusal due to behaviour (Pa/T)	Managing behaviour (Pa/T)
Lack of parenting ability (Pa/T)	Support from school staff (Pa/T)
Boredom (Pa)	Reinforcement (Pa/T)
	Clear expectations (Pu/Pa/T)
	Fun activities (Pu/Pa)

(Brackets indicate views being represented, Pa = parent, Pu = pupil, T = teacher)

Proposition 3: The interventions put in place to improve the pupils attendance will have aimed to address the causes identified

Case 3

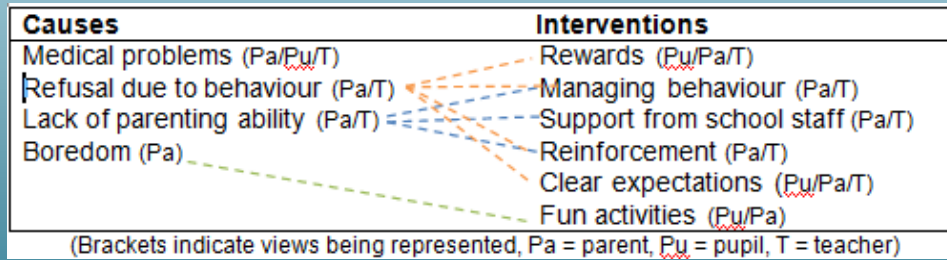No specific interventions put in place other than whole school strategies

Some of these were not deemed appropriate as the non-attendance was seen to be caused by the parents

Proposition 4: These interventions will be in addition to general whole school strategies to improve attendance

	School A

Preventative interventions	• Using the attendance policy to;
	    ○ Highlight the importance of attendance and impact of absence on learning
	    ○ Highlight the importance of a home-school partnership and the shared responsibility for ensuring good attendance
	• Raising awareness of attendance through the website and newsletters
	• Rewarding pupils for good attendance both individually and as a class

Reactive interventions	1. First day response: telephone call to parent(s) if the child does not attend and the parent has not already contacted the school 2. Pupils with attendance below 94% over 5 weeks are identified 3. A letter is sent to parent(s) and they are given 5 weeks for attendance to improve 4. If there is little or no improvement, parent(s) meet with the FSW to identify issues and support needed 5. If there is still little or no improvement, parent(s) meet with the Head Teacher 6. If there is still little or no improvement, a referral is made to the Educational Entitlement Service

	School B

Preventative interventions	• Using the attendance policy to;
	    ○ Highlight the importance of attendance and impact of absence on learning
	    ○ Highlight the importance of a home-school partnership and the shared responsibility for ensuring good attendance
	• Raising awareness of attendance through parents evening and initial meetings with parents
	• Raising the profile of attendance throughout the schools through displays, assemblies and in the classroom
	• Rewarding pupils for good attendance both individually and as a class

Reactive interventions	1. First day response: telephone call to parent(s) if the child does not attend and the parent has not already contacted the school 2. Pupils with attendance below 95% over 5 weeks are identified 3. A letter is sent to parent(s) and they are given 5 weeks for attendance to improve 4. If there is little or no improvement, parent(s) meet with the Deputy Head to identify issues and support needed. 5. If there is still little or no improvement, further support is put in place (e.g. parenting contract, CAF, FSW). 6. If there is still little or no improvement, a referral is made to the Educational Entitlement Service

Summary of findings

Proposition	Case 1 (5% increase)	Case 2 (13% increase)	Case 3 (1% increase)
1. Shared understanding of causes	**Not supported:** partially shared and individual views of causes	**Partially supported:** shared, partially shared, and individual views of causes	**Supported:** shared views of causes
2. Identify reasons for improvements	**Supported:** reasons for improvements were identified (support for parents, motivation for pupil)	**Supported:** reasons for improvements were identified (support for parents, motivation for pupil, clear expectations)	**Not supported:** reasons for improvements were not identified
3. Interventions reflect causes	**Partially supported:** interventions reflected causes but some causes not addressed	**Partially supported:** interventions reflected causes but some causes not addressed	**Not supported:** intervention did not reflect cause
4. Interventions in addition to whole school	**Supported:** interventions were in addition to whole school approach	**Supported:** interventions were in addition to whole school approach	**Not supported:** intervention was not in addition to whole school approach

Discussion

In cases of improved attendance what were the perceived causes of the pupil's non-attendance and why did the pupil's attendance improve?

- Number of causes identified: In case 1 and 2 the pupil and parent identified within-child, family and school related factors and the teachers identified within child and family factors

- Reasons for improvements

  - Supporting the parent to manage the pupil's behaviour (e.g. parent group, advice, collecting pupil)
  - Providing access to supportive staff
  - Putting in place rewards and incentives for the pupil
  - Providing clear expectations of the parent and pupil

Improvements in attendance will result from a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between the pupil, parent and teachers....

Not supported

...and interventions being put in place that aim to address the causes identified....

Partially supported, not all causes were addressed

Therefore these would be tailored to the individual and be in addition to the whole school approaches to increase attendance...

Supported, interventions were in addition to whole school approaches

Additional findings

- Differential identification of within, parental and school related factors

- Understanding of function of behaviour

- Exclusion of pupils' views

- The impact of non-attendance on the pupil, peers and teacher

- The desire to change

Implications for practice

- Using a multiple perspective approach to identifying all the perceived causes of non-attendance
  - Eliciting views, COMORIA

- Applying a Joint Systems Approach in addressing non-attendance
  - Training, individual casework

- Facilitating a greater understanding of the causes of non-attendance
  - Functional behavioural assessment

- Effective within-school support
  - Examples of effective practice

- Measuring the intention to change
  - COMOIRA

Limitations

- Process for identifying potential participants and small number of cases

- Absent views

- Respondent bias

- Subjective interpretations of the interview data

Future research

- More research on improved attendance including focus on pupils in secondary schools and alternative provisions

- Process undertaken by schools when attendance issues arise

- Use of COMOIRA in cases of non-attendance

Concluding points

- Examples of effective practice in improving attendance

- Greatest improvement: shared understanding between at least parent and teacher; interventions tailored to most of the causes; and shared responsibility for improving attendance

- Role for Educational Psychologist to support schools in further improving attendance

- Areas for future research identified

Any questions?

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Appendix 21: Summary of finding for participants

An exploration of pupils', parents' and teachers' perceptions of the causes of pupil non-attendance and the reasons for improvements in attendance

Description of the study

Non-attendance has been explored by educationalists since compulsory education was introduced (Brown, 1983; Irving and Parker-Jenkins; 1995). However, few studies have focused on cases of improved attendance and furthermore, triangulated the views of pupils, parents and teachers in such cases. Therefore the current study employed a multiple case study design to explore the views of pupils, parents and teachers with regards to the causes of the pupils' non-attendance and the reasons for the improvements in their attendance. The findings of two cases in which there were moderate to good levels of improvement were compared with the findings of a third case in which there had been little improvement in attendance. It was found that the greatest improvement in attendance was evident when there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between at least the parent and teacher, the interventions put in place aimed to address these causes and there was a shared responsibility for improving attendance. In addition to this, the findings highlighted a number of factors that may lead to further improvements in pupils' attendance. These included: teachers recognising and addressing school related factors; a greater understanding of the reasons for pupils' refusal behaviour; pupils' views being acted upon; and consideration of the impact of pupils non-attendance.

Summary of the findings

Causes of non-attendance	Reasons for improvement
• Medical problems • Difficulties getting up • Behavioural difficulties • Mood • Desire for control • Lack of parenting ability • Family Holiday • Boredom at school • Difficulties with teachers • Difficulties with peers	• Support for the parent (to manage pupils behaviour, to get pupil to school, having access to supportive staff) • Incentives for the pupil (rewards for attendance/behaviour, fun activities in school) • School staff's approach to the pupil (consistent, calm and fun) • Clear expectations of the parent and pupil regarding attendance • Pupil witnessing the impact of their non-attendance on the parent

Key points

Good level of improvement	Minimal improvement
There did not tend to be a shared understanding of the causes of the pupils non-attendance between the parent, pupil and teacher.	There was a shared understanding of the causes of the pupil's non-attendance between the parent, pupil and teacher
The parents and pupils identified a range of within-child, parental and school related causes of non-attendance, whereas the teachers only identified within-child and parental causes.	The parent, pupil and teacher identified with-child and parental causes of non-attendance.
The interventions put in place to address the pupils' non-attendance reflected some of the causes identified. However a number of causes were not addressed through intervention, which tended to be either medical problems or causes identified by the pupil and parent alone	There were no interventions put in place to address the pupil's non-attendance
The interventions put in place tended to be in addition to the whole school strategies aimed at improving attendance, suggesting that they were tailored to the individuals needs	There were no interventions put in place in addition to the whole school strategies.
There appeared to be a desired to change the situation and a shared responsibility to improve attendance (e.g. parent and teacher were involved in the interventions put in place)	The parent did not seem to demonstrate a desire to change and there was a lack of shared responsibility between the school and parent for ensuring improvements in attendance

It was also found that the greatest improvement in attendance was evident when there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between at least the parent and teacher, the interventions put in place were aimed at addressing these causes and there was a shared responsibility for improving attendance.

Potential role for Educational Psychologist (EPs)

Educational Psychologist could play a role in supporting schools to address non-attendance further. This could be done through:

- Promoting a multiple perspective approach to identifying the causes of non-attendance: eliciting the views of pupil's, parents and school staff and facilitating a shared understanding of the pupil's non-attendance.

- Support pupils, parents and teachers in exploring the functions of the pupil's behaviour to gain a greater understanding of why they may not be attending.

- Facilitate an understanding between pupils, parents and teachers of the ways in which the different contexts (e.g. home, school) may be maintaining the problem.

- Facilitate a joint approach to identifying and implementing the appropriate interventions which aim to address the multiple causes of non-attendance, supporting pupils' and parents' views to be acted upon.

- Highlighting each persons' intention to change by exploring how much the problem effects them, what would be different without the problem and who would be effected by the difference.

- Provide training to school staff to raise awareness of the different factors that underpin non-attendance, with emphasis being placed on school factors and the ways in which schools can be even more inclusive for non-attenders and their families.