Volume One

An 'outstanding' SEBD special school: Exploring the strategies which promote positive pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour.

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Abstract

Extensive guidance is currently available regarding how best to support the needs of pupils experiencing SEBD. However restricted guidance is currently available which specifically relates to effective practice within SEBD special schools. This is despite Sir Alan Steer's (DfES, 2005) recommendation for the Government to exclusively explore how to improve provision for pupils experiencing SEBD. In addition the Coalition Government has proposed changes to SEND legislation, with an aim to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable pupils (DfE, 2012*a*). The aim of the current research was to develop a greater understanding of 'outstanding' practice within an SEBD special school, with a prominent focus upon the strategies which were believed to enhance pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour. It was anticipated that this enhanced understanding would support the development of high quality practice within additional SEBD provisions.

A single, instrumental case study was conducted within an SEND special school, identified as demonstrating 'outstanding' practice by Ofsted. The views of three participating groups were elicited:-
• A semi-structured interview was conducted with the Senior Leadership team
• Teaching staff each completed three Q-sort activities
• Focus groups discussions were held with pupils from years 10 and 11.
However the data elicited from the school's teaching staff through Q-sort activities, are included within a separate research paper. The data elicited from the SLT and participating pupils was analysed using thematic analysis.

Participants identified a wide range of strategies which were most effective in enhancing pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour. Additionally a number of key factors were identified by the SLT and pupils, which they believed underpinned the school's outstanding practice. The key factors and strategies can be incorporated within 5 key themes:- curriculum focused, holistic and recurrent support, collaboration, engagement and adaptive practice. A number of implications were identified for other contextually relevant SEBD special schools. The current school participated in on-going self-reflective practice, identifying opportunities for further improvement. Previous research suggests that school staff may find it difficult to independently identify shortcomings within existing practice. However EPs may provide an objective, external perspective regarding opportunities for school improvement and can facilitate self-reflective discussions within schools.

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List of Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AfA	Achievement for All
APP	Assessing Pupils' Progress
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
FSM	Free School Meals
FTE	Fixed-Term Exclusion
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
LA	Local Authority
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PEP	Principal Educational Psychologist
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RADIO	Research and Development in Organisations
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Difficulties
SIMSEN	School Improvement Model for Special Educational Needs

SLCD   Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties

SLT   Senior Leadership Team

SSS   Staff Sharing Scheme

TEP   Trainee Educational Psychologist

UK   United Kingdom

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study focuses on the factors which are believed to contribute to outstanding practice within an SEBD special school. This study focuses specifically upon the strategies which are believed to be the most effective in supporting positive attainment, attendance and behaviour for students who currently attend a secondary special school for students who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).

The research originated from an initial request by the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) within the Local Authority (LA) in which I was a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). The LA conducted a number of pilot studies in relation to the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) pathfinder, on behalf of the UK government. One aspect of this work is to measure the impact of Achievement for All (AfA) and how this school improvement framework can be incorporated within the education, health and care (EHC) plan. It was originally proposed that I would conduct research regarding the impact of AfA within a SEBD special school. Unfortunately it was not possible to conduct this research as key participants withdrew from the research. However the results of the original AfA pilot study, completed by Humphrey and Squires (2011), suggest that the effectiveness of AfA was reduced within SEBD special schools. This finding then led me to consider how school improvement may better be supported within SEBD special schools.

A number of government policies and legislation have been introduced to support schools to address undesirable behaviour (see Appendix A). However this guidance is often designed to support mainstream settings. Currently there appears to be

restricted guidance available regarding what works within the context of SEBD special schools. This is despite Sir Alan Steer's (DfES, 2005) recommendation for the Government to explore how to enhance the efficacy of provision for pupils experiencing SEBD specifically, following his review into improving pupil behaviour. Currently it appears guidance regarding school improvement is focused on mainstream provision and does not account for the range or severity of needs SEBD students may experience in special school settings.

The current research took place within a secondary SEBD special school located in a South-East London Borough. All of the students in attendance are subject to a statement of SEN. A statement of SEN, is a formal document issued by LAs to pupils who are adjudged to experience the most significant and complex SEN. Included within a pupil's statement is an outline of their needs and the provision which the pupil requires in order to access the school curriculum. LAs may provide extra resources to a school to support them to provide the provision outlined within the statement (DfES, 2001). This is the only secondary SEBD special school located within the Borough. This school received a grade of 'outstanding' following its most recent Ofsted inspection in March 2011, suggesting therefore that its provisions were judged to have been effective in supporting the diverse and complex needs of its pupils. I therefore anticipated that insight gained from the staff and students within the school, regarding the factors which underpin the school's effective practice could be shared with other SEBD special schools.

Within this volume, I provide an account of my comprehensive literature review, design and implementation of interviews with the school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and focus group interviews with Year 10 and 11 students. However it should be noted that these two related strands formed a substantive part of a more

comprehensive, multi-method study, in which I also explored the views of the school's teaching staff using Q-methodology. The school's teaching staff completed a Q-sort activity, in which they were required to rank the strategies they believed were most effective in raising student attainment, attendance and behaviour. The strategies included within this activity were derived from my interrogation and analysis of the relevant policy, professional and theoretical research literature and the strategies outlined within the interview conducted with the school's SLT. In order to provide the degree of critique and analysis required at doctoral level, I decided only to include the research conducted with the SLT and students within Volume One of my thesis. However it is my intention to report the findings of the research conducted with the school's teaching staff separately in an article to be submitted to *Operant Subjectivity: The International Journal of Q Methodology* and *Educational Studies*. I also intend to submit an account of the of the full three-strand mixed methods study to James Gillum's *Open Journal of Educational Psychology*, or the *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* journal.

To address the primary research purpose of identifying the subjective perspectives of school leaders and students on factors which constitute effective special provision for young people who express social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, within a school identified by Ofsted as offering 'outstanding' provision for its secondary-aged students, I employed a single, instrumental case study design. The semi-structured interview with senior staff and focus group discussions with students were both analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Statistical data relating to student's attainment, attendance and behaviour are included in order to position the case and showing the extent to which it is exceptional of other cases.

The current research was conducted during a period of significant change to the processes and legislation underpinning assessment and support for SEN within the UK (DfE, 2011*a*). A significant change within these reforms is the introduction of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The EHCP will replace the Statement of SEN from September 2014 (DfE, 2014). However within the current paper, I continue to refer to Statements of SEN, as this reflects the legislation in place at the time in which the research was conducted and is the terminology referred to by participants within the current research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

The chapter begins by discussing the construct of SEBD and the variety of needs experienced by students who attend SEBD special schools, highlighting key terms. I also review research which relates to the current context, exploring studies of specialist provision and the current Ofsted school inspection framework. I will then move on to review theory and research relating to the process of school improvement, before focusing more explicitly on the areas of pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour. The key strategies identified by research evidence as instrumental in enhancing pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour are highlighted.

2.2   Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)

2.2.1   Defining the term SEBD

The construct of SEBD is described in many ways within existing governmental policy and research literature. Although it is widely used within the field of education, the term encapsulates a broad range of needs, leading to different interpretations of the term. O'Brien (2005) states that attempts to define SEBD must consider what the construct excludes, in addition to what it includes. Cooper (2014) states that SEBD lies between two ends of a continuum, mild routine misbehaviour and severe psychiatric disturbance. Mild routine misbehaviour is socially accepted within society (Cooper, 2014). The DfE (2013*a*) outlined that during the 2012/13 academic year 13.9% (29,960) of pupils with a statement of SEN, across all educational settings within England experienced a primary need of SEBD. 12,740 students with a primary

need of SEBD and statement of SEN attend a special school in order to support their SEN (DfE, 2013*a*).

The descriptions ascribed to SEBD within existing literature provide an extensive list of needs (Ewen and Topping, 2012; DCSF, 2008*a*; Cooper, 2006; DfES, 2001). The needs identified are summarised below:-

- Conduct disorder

- Emotional disorders

- Externalised behaviour, for example defiant behaviour

- Internalised behaviour, for example negative thoughts about oneself

- Anxiety

- Depression

- Low self-esteem and low self-confidence

- Immature social skills or socially isolated

- Hyperkinetic disorder or behaviour, including ADHD

- Low concentration

- School phobia

Pupils may experience these needs in isolation or in combination. Pupils may also receive a related medical diagnosis, such as ADHD, however a medical diagnosis is not required to indicate that SEBD are present (DCSF, 2008*a*).

The DCSF (2008*a*) state the term SEBD implies the pupil's needs have been severe, persistent, frequent and deviate notably from the age-expected behaviours. This therefore excludes pupils experiencing temporary behaviour difficulties. As a consequence pupils with the most severe and long standing needs should receive the most specialist support; a key objective of the current government (DfE, 2012*a*).

Fovet (2011) questions the subjectivity of assessing a pupil's behaviour and argues the label SEBD implies a 'within-child' need rather than a response to environmental factors such as inadequate teaching.

2.2.2 Factors Contributing to Socially Unacceptable Behaviour

The focus upon externalising behaviour has received criticism within recent government documentation. The DfE (2012*a*) highlighted that during their consultation with parents and professionals, the majority of respondents found the label of SEBD unhelpful. Respondents indicated that this label was too generalised and emphasised the behavioural needs of the child or young person. However it was felt that behaviour was often underpinned by social and emotional needs, manifested within the child's presenting behaviour. This view is also held by researchers within this area (Cooper, 2006; Bennett, 2005). Ofsted's (2010) review of SEN highlighted that inaccurate diagnoses and assessments have led to children and young people receiving inappropriate support and interventions within school.

This perspective is endorsed by the ecological paradigm, in which pupils' needs are positioned within the context of their immediate and wider environments. This paradigm moves away from the within-child perspective, often associated with the biological paradigm or medical model (Ayers et al., 2000). The ecological paradigm is largely associated with the earlier work of Bronfenbrenner (1988; 1979) who believed that a child's development was largely influenced by the environments which envelop them, so that a presenting difficulty must be analysed at five levels which interact and evolve (see Figure 1). Bronfenbrenner (1988; 1979) also stated that in order to facilitate a change in the child's behaviour, change must occur within the environment(s) which surrounds the child.

Figure 1. *The five interacting systems which envelop a child's development –as outlined within Bronfenbrenner's (1988; 1979) ecological systems theory.*

Microsystem
- Comprises all the social systems with which the child engages directly: for example school, family, peers.
- To understand the microsystem one must understand the activities, relationships and roles exhibited within each microsystem.

Mesosystem
- The interaction which occurs between the different microsystems
- These interactions are dynamic and therefore are difficult to examine.

Exosystem
- Systems which do not include the child directly but have an indirect impact upon their lives, such as parents' employment, family friends.

Macrosystem
- The culture which surrounds the child, including values, attitudes, beliefs and laws.

Chronosystem
- Through the chronosystem, Bronfenbrenner acknowledges that the four systems and the child will evolve over time.

However Rosa and Tudge (2013) highlight that Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development changed considerably over time. In 1993 Bronfenbrenner began to place greater emphasis upon the influence of the individual within their development, as opposed to simply emphasising the influence of their surrounding context. Bronfenbrenner referred to his evolved theory as the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1993). The bioecological model still focused upon the

settings which an individual spends time within, however this adjustment emphasised the need to also explore:

- The relationships between the individual and others within those settings

- The personal characteristics of the individual and those that the individual interacts with

- The individual's development over time

- The processes which drive the individual's development (proximal processes, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1993).

Rosa and Tudge (2013) argue that the inclusion of the theory of 'proximal processes', was the most significant change between Bronfenbrenner's ecological and bioecological models. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1993) stated that the interaction between the individual and people, objects and symbols within their surrounding context, was fundamental to their development. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1993) emphasised the reciprocal nature and complexity of the relationships between the individual and other people.

As Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development continued to evolve, further expansion was provided in regards to the individual's role within their development. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) emphasised 3 key personal characteristics which impacted upon an individual's interactions with people within their surrounding context:

1) An individual may develop 'generative force characteristics' which enhance the degree and quality of their interactions with other people in their surrounding environment or 'distractive force characteristics' which inhibit this interaction. Generative force characteristics are exemplified by qualities such as curiosity and the individual's responsiveness to activities initiated by others.

Distractive force characteristics include traits such as impulsiveness and distractibility. One could argue that these distractive force characteristics hold relevance for pupils who attend SEBD special schools, due to the fact that their social, emotional and behavioural needs impacted upon their capacity to engage with adult-led activities and instructions within mainstream school settings.

2) 'Resource characteristics' which the authors argued underpin an individual's ability to engage with people and their surrounding environment. These included factors such as the individual's knowledge, skill and experience.

3) 'Demand characteristics', which can either, attract or discourage interactions within the surrounding social environment. In relation to pupils who experience SEBD, this may include the temperament of the pupil or their physical appearance.

Bronfenbrenner also continued to emphasise the importance of the context and time, when his theory of human development evolved. However in 1995 Bronfenbrenner expanded upon his reference to the significance of time, which he had previously referred to within his description of the Chronosystem in 1988. Bronfenbrenner (1995) stated that an individual's development is shaped by the conditions and events which have occurred during the period of time in which the person lives. For example in relation to the current research, one could argue that the policies and priorities set forth by the government at the time, will impact upon the practice of a school and therefore the support and curriculum made available to each pupil.

In relation to the current research, the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Bronfebrenner and Ceci, 1993) would suggest that the interactions which occur within an SEBD special school, between individual pupils and their

peers, staff and families will be impacted upon by the period of time in which the pupil attends the school setting, the surrounding contexts with which the pupil engages within and the pupil's personal characteristics. The pupil's personal characteristics may support or inhibit their ability to engage with individuals within the school and may also impact upon the willingness of staff or peers to engage with them.

Despite Bronfenbrenner's emphasis upon the exploration of a child's needs within the context of their immediate and wider environments, one could argue that this exploration places significant time demands upon schools. Chong and Ng (2011) explored the views of teaching staff located within mainstream and special schools within Hong Kong regarding the behaviours exhibited by pupils experiencing SEBD and the strategies the teachers employed in order to support these pupils. Chong and Ng (2011) conducted interviews with 102 mainstream teachers and 89 teachers from special schools. Both groups included staff from primary and secondary schools. Chong and Ng (2011) categorised the teachers' responses regarding the strategies they utilised into one of eight approaches:-

- Behavioural
- cultural
- psychotherapeutic
- religion / moral development

- systemic (ecosystemic)
- social
- cognitive
- medical

Chong and Ng (2011) reported that 37.3% of the responses from special school teaching staff referred to strategies which were categorised as a systemic approach. Chong and Ng (2011) describe a systemic approach as one which focuses upon the establishment of greater structure within the pupil's surrounding ecosystems, including enhanced levels of collaboration throughout the school and community.

This approach was most commonly adopted by specialist teaching staff. In comparison 17% of the strategies shared by mainstream teachers were judged to be of a systemic approach. Mainstream teachers were found most commonly to refer to strategies categorised as a behavioural approach (27.8%). Chong and Ng (2011) identified that the teachers from special schools frequently reported that their pupils experienced challenges within their family home, resulting in teaching staff working more systemically. One could argue that the variation in approaches adopted by staff within mainstream and special schools is a result of a number of factors:-

the type and/or degree of difficulties experienced by pupils within each setting,

the knowledge, understanding and experience of teaching staff in relation to working with pupils who experience SEBD; and the time available to staff to work more systemically, due to reduced class sizes within special schools (Frederickson and Cline, 2009).

Following recommendations within the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) the UK government emphasised changes to the process of assessment of SEN within the 1981 Education Act. Interactionist analysis and formulation was emphasised in which 'special' educational needs were conceptualised as outcomes of complex interactions between children's characteristics and features of the school, family, community and wider cultural and structural contexts which influence their learning and development. Prior to the recommendations within the Warnock report, established practice within the process of assessment largely focused upon the individual child's or young person's needs with reduced consideration of their surrounding context and experiences. The 2013/14 draft of the revised SEN Code of Practice has removed the word behaviour from the term BESD, utilised within the previous SEN Codes of Practice (DfES, 2001), replacing this term with Social,

Mental and Emotional Health (DfE, 2014). One could argue that this change in terminology further emphasises the need to explore the possible underlying issues which underpin a pupil's behaviour, as opposed to focusing upon the behaviour itself. In order to clarify the rationale for this adaptation I contacted the DfE via email. The DfE (e-mail received on 7th April 2014) (see Appendix B for full email response) identified three reasons for the change:

1) to support better identification of need;

2) contingently, to provide better support for those individuals; and

3) to ensure social, emotional and mental health needs are identified, whether or not presenting behaviour gives cause for concern.

Despite the proposed changes, I have referred to the term SEBD within my research questions and in conversations with participants, as this is the current accepted terminology.

2.2.3 SEBD and Additional SEN

It has been acknowledged that pupils with a primary need of SEBD may also experience additional SEN (DCSF, 2008*a*). The DCSF (2008*a*) identified that 60% of pupils who attend SEBD special schools, experience additional, identified SEN.

Benner et al. (2002) reviewed 26 existing studies regarding the prevalence of Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) for pupils identified with SEBD, reporting that 71% of pupils experiencing SEBD were also found to experience a clinically significant language deficit. Unfortunately Benner et al. (2002) did not compare this prevalence rate with all pupils nationally. However the National Children's Bureau (NCB) (2012) report that 10% of children and young people within

the UK are believed to experience SLCD. Gallagher (1999) notes a pupil's behaviour may provide an avenue to communicate needs which they are unable to express verbally. O'Brien (2005) argues that SEBD may be more commonly identified as a primary need, as behaviour is observable and unpredictable and externalised behaviour often requires a response, due to its impact upon others.

Farrell et al. (1999) analysed assessment data relating to 88 pupils aged between seven and sixteen, who attended day and residential schools for pupils experiencing SEBD. Educational psychologists (EPs) and Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) had previously completed standardised assessments of pupils' reading, spelling and numeracy skills, including the Wechsler Objective Reading Dimensions (WORD) and Wechsler Objective Numerical Dimensions (WOND) in order to inform placement decisions. Of the overall pupil sample, 48.3% received a standardised score of below 70 on both tests. This indicates that pupils fell within the lower 2% of the country for age-related literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally pupils within Key Stage 4, on average achieved an age-equivalent score which fell at least 3 years below their chronological age.

Students may also experience underlying SEN which remain unidentified (Barnardo's, 2012). For students with a Statement of SEN, such as the students in attendance at the secondary SEBD special school under investigation, one may anticipate that the preceding statutory assessment should have led to a comprehensive understanding of the student's SEN. Conversely when assessing the SEN of students experiencing SEBD, the assessor may work with students who demonstrate reduced levels of engagement within the process of assessment. As a result this may reduce the assessor's confidence in accurately determining the prevalence and severity of a particular need.

When one considers the prevalence of additional SEN for pupils experiencing SEBD, it is important that such additional needs are taken into account when planning a framework for school improvement to address the needs of pupils with SEBD.

2.3 The Education of Pupils within Specialist Provision

The focus of the current research is upon effective practice within SEBD special schools. It is therefore important to explore the issues relating to specialist provision.

2.3.1 Inclusion and Specialist Provision

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) is cited as the most influential paper in regards to SEN and inclusive practice within the UK. The Warnock Report emphasised the value of social integration within education; maintained mainstream schools were required to support students' SEN, facilitating integration within mainstream education, where this was judged feasible and where the efficient education of other pupils would not be compromised. The guidance outlined within this report appears to have underpinned subsequent government legislation regarding the education of pupils experiencing SEN, such as the 1993 Education Act and the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014; DfES, 2001; and DfE, 1994). The Education Act (1993) emphasised that under normal circumstances all children and young people were to be educated within mainstream settings.

Despite the emphasis upon inclusion within mainstream education over the past 35 years, there are exceptions. The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) identified the following conditions for placement in a specialist setting:

- the pupil has experienced significant difficulties forming social relationships with their peers;

- the pupil's behaviour is viewed as extreme and unpredictable; and

- the pupil's behaviour has hindered the progress of their peers

The 1981 Education Act highlighted three key conditions under which pupils experiencing SEN should be included within mainstream settings:

1) when the child's parents wish them to attend a mainstream school

2) when the child's presence within school does not adversely affect the efficient education of other children; and

3) when the child's attendance within the school does not inhibit the efficient use of the school's resources.

As previously highlighted the current emphasis of education policy in England is for pupils to attend mainstream schools, unless incompatible circumstances are present. Dix (2007) states that circumstances outlined within the Warnock Report and 1981 Education Act, which prevent a pupil from attending mainstream provision remain relevant within existing practice.

Drayne (2014) suggests that pupils educated within special schools are the most socially excluded, because pupils are often required to attend schools located away from their local communities. However Hick et al. (2009) emphasise that inclusion does not simply occur by educating pupils within mainstream settings, but should be viewed as a process in which pupils are included and their contribution is valued. In addition, Hick et al. (2009) highlight that the level of support a child may require to participate successfully in mainstream education may result in social isolation from their peers, due to the significance of adult support required.

2.3.2 SEBD Provisions – making a clear distinction

Children and young people experiencing SEBD may be educated within one of four types of educational setting:

1) mainstream school;

2) special school;

3) specialist unit attached to a mainstream school; or a

4) Pupil referral unit (PRU). PRUs provide temporary arrangement for pupils, in which pupils remain on roll at their mainstream school, but attend the PRU on a full- or part-time basis.

This research is focused on the education of pupils within one SEBD special school since currently restricted evidence is available regarding effective practice within special schools for pupils considered to express significant SEBD. This is particularly notable when one compares this to the guidance available regarding mainstream schools (or general guidance) (Taylor, 2011; DCSF, 2008*a*; Hayes et al., 2007) and PRUs (Hart, 2013; Taylor, 2012*a*). The needs of pupils educated within special schools are likely to be the most complex and severe (Rayner, 2007). Therefore it is important to ensure that guidance relating to this cohort accurately accounts for the severity and complexity of their needs, as simply applying the guidance designed for mainstream schools may prove to be ineffective. Within the current research I have explored effective practice within an SEBD special school, investigating the practice of a school which was judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

2.4   Describing the Role and Purpose of Ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is an independent, regulatory body, established to safeguard public expenditure and complete objective evaluations of current practice within all school settings (excluding independent schools) (Waldegrave and Simons, 2014). The Education and Employment Select Committee (1999) identified that Ofsted's primary objective is to enhance the education of children. However more specifically school inspections are designed to:

1) provide feedback to head teachers and teaching staff regarding their current practice, which includes strengths and areas to improve;

2) provide feedback to existing and prospective parents about the school; and

3) identify inadequate practice (Hussain, 2012).

Pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour are key elements of the current Ofsted inspection framework for schools (Ofsted, 2014*a*). The framework identifies the following four areas of focus for school inspections:

1) achievement of pupils;

2) quality of teaching;

3) behaviour and safety of pupils at the school (Including pupil attendance); and

4) quality of leadership and management.

These areas are evaluated during Ofsted inspections, in addition to the overall effectiveness of the school. In preparation for this external scrutiny, schools are likely to elect to incorporate these areas when establishing their whole-school development. At the conclusion of an inspection, schools receive a grade from 1 to 4:

Grade 1: Outstanding

Grade 2: Good

Grade 3: Requires Improvement

Grade 4: Inadequate

Ofsted inspections have been employed since 1992, in response to the perceived ineffectiveness of LA-led school inspections (Shaw et al., 2003). Consequently inspections follow a national framework, which should result in more consistent school inspections and subsequently more consistent experiences for pupils and parents in relation to their schooling across England.

2.4.1 'Outstanding' Practice

Dougill et al. (2011) conducted research to explore how schools previously judged by Ofsted as 'good' can progress in order to demonstrate 'outstanding' practice. Dougill et al.'s (2011) research consisted of an extensive review of existing research, close exploration of the Ofsted framework and consultations with head teachers at eight secondary schools recently judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding'. The authors concluded that 'outstanding' schools share five key qualities, outlined below.

1) Consistent and creative teaching : Lessons are closely monitored by senior leaders in order to ensure that lessons are memorable, enjoyable, challenging and provide opportunities for collaborative learning. Feedback is provided to students through formative assessment and students' work is shared through displays and oral presentations.

2) Personalised curriculum : School staff liaise with students and their parents and closely monitor attainment data in order to ensure that students are provided with a

curriculum which is appropriate for their current level of academic progress and to support the student to achieve their full academic potential.

3) Engaging students : Students are viewed as active partners, as opposed to passive consumers. The students' views are elicited and considered when important decisions are made, such as new appointments within the school. In addition, students are required to review their work and reflect on their academic progress. The views of students regarding the quality of the teaching they receive is also explored .

4) Engaging with parents, external agencies and local schools: In addition to the influence students have in the process of decision-making, the views of parents are also considered. Schools attempt to develop a relationship with parents which is mutually beneficial. Outstanding schools also provide a mentoring role to local schools who require additional support.

5) Inspiring leadership: Head teachers hold long-term aspirations for the school and make decisions and appointments which support the school to achieve its aspirations. Although creative approaches to teaching are encouraged, poor performance is addressed uncompromisingly. Head teachers maintain credibility with teaching staff by continuing to engage in classroom teaching.

Dougill et al. (2011) note the UK government's commitment towards ensuring schools achieve an 'outstanding' grade, as this not only reflects that each school is functioning as effectively as possible, but additionally 'outstanding' schools can act as 'change agents' for other school settings. This perspective was reinforced by Waldegrave and Simons (2014), who completed a review of school inspections within England and proposed that schools should no longer be judged as

outstanding, unless they provide meaningful support to enhance the practice of other schools.

2.4.2 Criticisms of Ofsted

The grade assigned at the conclusion of a school inspection may have positive and/or negative consequences for the school and its staff (Waldegrave and Simons, 2014). For example, enforced closure can occur if schools fail to demonstrate adequate improvement in areas of identified weakness (Shaw et al., 2003). It is perhaps the potential consequences of school inspections which contribute to teachers reporting that they experience high levels of anxiety during the period of Ofsted inspections (Case et al., 2000).

A second criticism of the Ofsted inspection process was raised by Leadbetter (2000), who argued that inspectors focus upon factors which are easier to measure, such as attainment and attendance levels and factors which are more challenging to quantify such as school culture and staff and student well-being are overlooked. Although pupils' attainment, attendance and behaviour can be described in quantitative terms, these statistics may not reflect the school's impact upon the emotional and social well-being of pupils. This criticism is particularly relevant for SEBD special schools, which support pupils who may encounter a range of barriers to learning and engagement.

Shaw et al. (2003) believe in order for school improvement to be successful, school evaluation and recommendations must account for contextual factors. One could argue that a generic inspection framework may inhibit Ofsted inspectors from fully

accounting for the contextual factors located within specialist provision, or the differing emphasis on priority outcomes for students.

2.4.3 Concluding Comments Regarding Ofsted and 'Outstanding Practice'

Despite the criticisms documented above, Ofsted inspections provide a relatively consistent framework for assessment of current school practice. The consistent inspection framework employed by Ofsted inspectors provides schools throughout England with a clear indication of the key areas in which schools will be evaluated and as result one could argue that schools within England strive to address broadly consistent standards. In addition, it can be argued that the consequences of Ofsted inspections lead all schools to strive to achieve 'outstanding' practice. These considerations contribute to the rationale for exploring the practice demonstrated within a maintained special school designated as 'outstanding', in its provisions for SEBD: it was anticipated that insight gained from this detailed scrutiny might lead to further understanding which can then be shared with other SEBD special schools.

2.5   School Improvement

2.5.1   Defining School Improvement

School Improvement can be described as a process which identifies: a) the factors which are believed to contribute towards effective schooling and b) how the factors identified are implemented within school (Chapman, 2012). The objective of researchers within this field is to identify what works, in order to develop an evidence

base for effective practice. As Spalding et al. (2001) identify *"There is no one school improvement process by which innovation in a school can be supported and developed; rather a repertoire of processes and elements of strategies can be applied according to need."* (p9). This is not to suggest that the evidence identified should be utilised prescriptively. However schools and practitioners can instead identify aspects of the evidence which is relevant to their setting.

2.5.2 School Improvement for Pupils with SEN

The Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009*a*) reviewed parental confidence regarding provision for pupils with SEN and Disability. Participating parents stated that they held concerns regarding the long term aspirations for their child, in addition to the educational achievements they attained. Lamb (DCSF, 2009*a*) also highlighted that a large discrepancy existed between pupils with SEN and pupils with no additional needs, within a number of areas:

- lower school attendance;

- higher number of exclusions;

- higher experiences of bullying; and

- reduced number of positive relationships (with peers and adults)

As a result of these findings Lamb (DCSF, 2009*a*) recommended that greater attention must be given to improving attainment, attendance, behaviour, relationships and the long term outcomes of pupils with SEN. Schools were encouraged to demonstrate greater ambition for their pupils' success, and advised that parents need to be central to this process. Lamb (DCSF, 2009*a*) recommended the Achievement for All (AfA) school improvement programme, as one way to enhance practice within schools and further support the needs of pupils with SEN.

Further information regarding the AfA programme is outlined within Appendix C. The AfA programme aims to support schools to enhance practice regarding pupil attainment and a number of 'wider outcomes':

- attendance;

- behaviour;

- reducing bullying;

- positive relationships; and

- pupil participation

Humphrey and Squires (2011) carried out a large-scale pilot of the AfA school improvement framework. This pilot study took place across 454 schools and resulted in a number of positive improvements for pupils with SEN (Humphrey and Squires, 2011). As a result the government advocates the AfA programme as an effective approach to raising standards (DfE, 2012*b*). However the reported impact of AfA was reduced for pupils experiencing higher levels of SEN, including pupils on the SEN register at the level of school action plus or pupils with a statement of SEN

More specifically the impact of strategies relating to the wider outcomes was reduced for pupils:

- eligible for free school meals (FSM);

- experiencing a primary need of SEBD; and

- who were older (secondary school age compared to primary school age)

(Humphrey and Squires, 2011). These variables hold particular relevance for pupils who attend secondary-aged SEBD special schools, as the proportion of students entitled to FSM is higher for students with a statement of SEN and primary need of SEBD (33%), in comparison to students with no identified SEN (12%) and students with a statement of SEN (25%), not taking their primary need into account (DCSF,

2009*b*). This suggests that the impact of AfA may be reduced for secondary aged pupils who attend SEBD special schools. Consequently an alternative approach may be required to meet the needs of this specific cohort.

2.5.3 Existing Guidance and Research Regarding Effective Practice within SEBD Special Schools

There are very few articles on improving practice within SEBD special schools. This is equally true for government guidance. This may be a result of the breadth of needs experienced by students with SEBD and that students' needs may be interwoven within a number of surrounding systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 1979). However research evidence and guidance is available regarding universal school improvement (Dimmock, 2012; West, 2012; Smith, 2011), school improvement relating to SEN (Gross and White, 2003) and school improvement strategies for mainstream schools located within challenging contexts (Chapman, 2008; Chapman and Harris, 2004).

Spalding et al. (2001) conducted a case study, within North West England in 1994. This took place within a secondary SEBD special school, with a population of 45 pupils. Spalding et al. provided a wide range of recommendations regarding school improvement, specific to SEBD special schools:

- staff must provide a curriculum which is highly differentiated and motivating, which fosters pupil autonomy. This should engage pupils and enhance their motivation.
- the feedback provided to pupils following assessment must be delicately balanced, thus ensuring that feedback is positive, whilst enabling the student to

progress, identifying areas for improvement. This aims to accommodate the high

risk that pupils designated as expressing SEBD may experience low self-esteem.

- staff must balance the academic curriculum with opportunities for pupils to develop their personal, social and emotional skills.

- a consistent approach by all staff is necessary, primarily in relation to behaviour management.

- to establish boundaries, maintain positive relationships and address undesirable behaviour.

- a highly flexible approach to the implementation of behaviour management strategies.

- staff must share an openness to evolve and move practice forwards. Challenges to existing approaches should be viewed as a potential indication of a requirement for change. Spalding et al. (2001) emphasise the need for a judicious balance between consistency and responsiveness flexibility to the changes in children's lives and government policy.

- building upon a theme for openness, is the need to develop a culture of openness, reflection and peer feedback.

West (2012) states the UK government has provided a number of school improvement initiatives within the past 20 years, such as National Challenge, Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities. However the impact of such initiatives has led to mixed results (Chapman, 2012; Ofsted, 2003). These initiatives were often targeted to support schools located within socially deprived areas and build upon the premise that by raising pupil attainment, the long term opportunities for children and young people would improve (West, 2012). However Chapman has

completed research specifically focusing on the factors which facilitate effective school improvement within challenging urban areas and identified six key principles (Chapman, 2008; Chapman and Harris, 2004):

1) the formulation of positive relationships between all members of the school community;

2) enhancing teaching practice and pupil attainment;

3) school staff being receptive to change and reflective practice;

4) schools and staff prioritising continuing professional development (CPD);

5) establishing a school community; and

6) utilising external support.

In addition, Chapman (2008) highlights that school collaboration was often advocated within a number of the Government's initiatives. However if one considers this approach in relation to SEBD special schools, one could argue that the approach may be less appropriate, due to the reduced proximity of other 'outstanding' SEBD special schools. At the time of writing (June, 2014) there are only two secondary SEBD special schools within inner-and outer-London which are judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Within more recent years Governments have encouraged schools to hold greater autonomy within the process of school improvement (West, 2012). Consequently the emphasis has shifted towards within-school improvement, in which schools complete self-evaluations and adapt practice as a result (Chapman, 2012). This strategy builds upon the perspective that support cannot be prescriptive and must hold relevance to the local context (West, 2012). In addition, this correlates with Spalding et al.'s (2001) emphasis on schools adopting a willingness to evolve and develop practice.

However Spalding et al. (2001) argue that schools may find it difficult to identify opportunities for change, when they are fully immersed within challenging circumstances (Spalding et al., 2001).

Smith (2011) conducted research with 15 'outstanding' mainstream schools, in order to identify the factors which contributed to their success. Smith (2011) identified that successful classroom practice, can be broken down into 6 steps and utilised the acronym BASICS:

- Belonging – Pupils feel included within the lesson and their views are valued

- Aspiration – Pupils identify personalised goals and work towards achieving these

- Safety – Pupils feel safe within school

- Identity – Pupils are supported to hold and share their own views

- Challenge – Learning tasks are challenging and appropriately supported

- Success – Successful outcomes are reinforced and celebrated

Aspects of Smith's (2011) guidance appear to correlate with guidance relating specifically to SEBD special schools (Spalding et al., 2001). However Spalding et al. (2001) emphasise that a delicate balance is maintained between providing pupils with challenging tasks and providing positive reinforcement, in order to maximise the pupils' self-esteem and engagement with learning.

Research regarding effective school improvement within mainstream schools, suggests that school leadership and classroom practice appear to be the two key areas which underpin effective school improvement (Dimmock, 2012; West, 2012; Smith, 2011). The impact of school leadership on the process of school improvement may be further enhanced by exploring research relating to school culture. Head

Teachers are believed to be crucial in the development of a positive school culture (Engels et al., 2008).

2.5.4 School Improvement and School Culture

Prosser (1999) describes a school's culture as an unobservable force and one could argue that as a consequence of its apparent obscurity there are contrasting perspectives within the existing research regarding the definition of school culture. However existing research literature indicates a school culture is demonstrated within four key areas (Zhu et al., 2011; Deal and Peterson, 2009; Prosser, 1999):

- relationships – including the quality of interactions between members of staff and the support provided by staff to their colleagues;
- shared ideology – the values and objectives held by members of staff. Including how objectives are established and shared within the school community;
- physical artefacts – the missions statements and displays which document the desired behaviour and objectives within the school; these may include documents such as the school's behaviour policy; and
- behaviour – the actions consistently carried out within school which help the school to achieve and reinforce the school's values and objectives.

Engels at al. (2008) identified five factors which they believe facilitate the development of a positive school culture:

1) a collaborative approach to decision making;

2) provision by the head teacher of support and strategies to school staff regarding behaviour management;

3) staff adaptability to change and commitment to the goal of improving existing practice;

4) the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships between members of staff; and

5) school staff formulating shared objectives and working collaboratively to achieve these.

Deal and Peterson (2009) argue that a school's culture underpins exemplary practice and/or its absence. It is notable that research relating to positive school cultures (Engels et al., 2008) and the factors which are believed to enhance school practice (Chapman, 2008; Spalding et al., 2001) both place great emphasis upon the school's willingness to change and improve upon existing practice. Roffey (2000) states that the following key features are reflective of a school culture which facilitates change:

- the school consistently seeks to improve upon existing practice

- all members of staff are responsible for implementing change

- staff engage in collaborative discussions when contrasting perspectives are held, in order to find an agreed resolution

- the head teacher accepts that mistakes will be made in the pursuit of excellence.

However Cartwright and Baron (2002) state that the process of making adaptations to existing practice can be constrained at both organisation and individual levels. At the organisational level, school leaders may strongly believe in their existing objectives and strategies, and this belief may compromise their willingness to change. At the individual level, school staff may have established habitual behaviours over a long period of time; therefore changing existing practice may be

more challenging, as this behaviour is ingrained and staff may also be anxious about moving away from their familiar practice.

The two barriers outlined by Cartwright and Baron (2002) may provide further reinforcement for Spalding et al.'s (2001) argument that at times, SEBD special schools may benefit from the guidance of an external consultant: a recommendation highlighted by Spalding et al. (2001) following their reflection upon the significance of interpersonal relationships within SEBD special schools. As a result, school staff may be too immersed within existing challenges to recognise opportunities for change. A fresh perspective from an external consultant may provide an objective and broader reflection on existing challenges. This appears to be a logical role for EPs to fulfil.

2.5.5 School Improvement and the Role of the Educational Psychologist

Fox (2009) reports that EPs began working at the organisational level in order to facilitate change and improve school practice in the 1970s. By supporting schools at the whole-school level as opposed to working with individual students, it is suggested that EPs can maximize the impact of their intervention (Stratford, 2000). Fox (2009) states that EPs can facilitate change at the whole-school level by conducting action research, holding consultations with school staff and through the delivery of in service training (INSET). However one must first consider the potential barriers EPs may encounter when attempting to facilitate change at the whole-school level. Stratford (2000) highlighted four such potential barriers (see Table 1). The barriers identified by Stratford (2000) relate to EP practice within all school settings

and are not exclusively related to special schools. One would anticipate that within

an SEBD special school all members of staff are actively engaged in supporting the

SEN of their students, since all students are subject to a Statement of SEN. As a

result EPs may liaise with a wider proportion of the school's staff and not exclusively

with the school's SENCo.

Table 1. *The potential barriers EPs may encounter when attempting to facilitate change through a whole-school approach (Stratford, 2000).*

Potential barriers EPs may encounter	Examples relating to each potential barrier
The type of input traditionally provided by EPs within the school over recent years	• EPs may have traditionally engaged in individual work with students. This may therefore become a barrier due to the learned expectation of commissioners and clients that EPs work at the individual level and that organisational development, school improvement and action research in schools are not areas of EP expertise and/or practice. • EPs may have traditionally provided support when challenges have emerged, as opposed to providing preventative support.
The school's philosophy in regards to SEN	• SEN may be viewed as reflecting limitations in a child's cognitive, social, emotional and/or physical capabilities, as opposed to within an ecological paradigm which views a student's needs within the context of their immediate surrounding and wider environments.
EP traditionally consults with the school SENCo regarding the SEN of students	• Head Teacher associates the role of the EP with the SEN department and more specifically the SENCo. As a result the EP's contact with the Head Teacher is restricted.
The additional involvement of external agencies, most notably when a school is placed into the category of 'special measures' (now categorised as 'inadequate') by Ofsted.	• The additional external agencies providing support to the school may hold alternative objectives and beliefs which may impact on the direction of change. • The involvement of additional external agencies may also impact on the availability of school staff to engage with the EP.

One way in which EPs can facilitate school improvement and address any potential

barriers to their contribution as external change agents, is through the application of

the Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) Approach. The RADIO Approach was originally developed by Knight and Timmins in 1995 at the University of Birmingham in order to support Trainee EPs to formulate a school's or organisation's presenting needs and develop an appropriate action plan when conducting organisational development, using collaborative action research methodology. The RADIO Approach was later shared with the wider EP profession within Timmins et al.'s (2003) article in the journal, *Educational Psychology in Practice*. Timmins et al. (2003) highlight that the RADIO Approach consists of 12 phases (see Table 2). Timmins et al. (2003) demonstrate an awareness of the potential challenges that may arise when attempting to facilitate change within an organisation. As previously stated, resistance can occur at the organisational or individual level (Cartwright and Baron, 2002). In anticipation of this potential barrier, the RADIO Approach consists of two key approaches. Firstly key sponsors are identified and conscripted as active partners within the intervention. Timmins et al. (2003) believe the involvement of sponsors should help to overcome any resistance within the process of change, encourage sponsors to take ownership of the problem and further enhance their engagement within the process of change. The second approach highlighted by Timmins et al.'s (2003) RADIO Approach also encourages the EP to revisit earlier phases as the intervention evolves to ensure that their interpretations of the presenting need are accurate and the planned response is appropriate. This may support the EP to identify and address any potential barriers which may inhibit the process of change, as the intervention evolves.

As indicated within Table 2 the RADIO Approach (Phases 1 to 5) emphasises the need for EPs to clarify the purpose of their input. Timmins et al. (2003) state that the strong emphases upon clarifying the needs of the organisation prior to conducting

further action and upon the collaborative action research paradigm are necessary to maximise prospects of the organisation utilising the outcomes of the research. Timmins et al. (2003) also emphasise that EPs should incorporate their knowledge of the local context when providing support to an organisation. Local knowledge can be utilised to support understanding of the organisation's needs and ensure that potential solutions are ecologically valid and so more effective. This final point is notable due to the fact that Ofsted (2014*a*) follow a national framework during the process of school inspection, which may not take fully into account the local context of the school when identifying where improvements can be made. As previously outlined, Shaw et al. (2003) believe that if contextual factors are taken into consideration during the evaluation of existing practice, the process of school improvement is enhanced.

Table 2. *The Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) Approach. Adapted from Timmins et al. (2006; 2003).*

	RADIO Phase	Typical Activity
1	Awareness of Need	EP's communication with school provides an indication that systemic (whole-school) support is required
2	Invitation to Act	EP liaises with key sponsor (for example the Head Teacher) to agree upon support required and clarify the EP's role
3	Clarifying Organisational and Cultural Issues	An initial exploration of the potential supporting and inhibiting factors which may impact upon the intervention
4	Identifying Stakeholders	EP identifies the key stakeholders relevant to the identified needs and planned developments. These key stakeholders are then included within the processes of decision making moving forwards (for example phase 5)
5	Agreeing the Focus of Concern	EP collaborates with key sponsors to identify the objectives of the research/intervention. This phase may include a form of needs assessment and this may lead to further reflection of the school's organisation and cultural issues (see phase 3)
6	Negotiating the Framework	EP collaborates with key sponsors in order to

		identify how the information required (that meets the needs of the school) can be gathered most effectively.
	for Data Gathering	
7	Gathering Information	The methods agreed by the EP and key stakeholders are applied in order to gather information.
8	Processing Information with Stakeholders	Information gathered is shared with key stakeholders.
9	Agreeing Areas for Future Action	Information shared with key stakeholders may result in the requirement for further input from the EP. For example, staff training. Any additional EP input must be planned, implemented and evaluated in collaboration with key stakeholders.
10	Action Planning	Key stakeholders prepare for the implementation of changes within the school.
11	Implementation / Action	Key stakeholders facilitate change within the school.
12	Evaluating Action	Key stakeholders review the effectiveness of the changes made to school practice and liaise with the EP if further adjustments or support is required.

Although Timmins et al.'s (2003) RADIO Approach incorporates the views of key stakeholders throughout the process of intervention, it does not fully address the potential resistance to change from those individuals within the school, who were not involved in discussions in order to establish the focus of the research. This is particularly important when one considers that barriers can emerge at organisational and individual levels (Cartwright and Baron, 2002). Hargreaves (1999) also argues that sub-groups operating below the leadership level may emerge, where teachers or teaching assistants, for example offer resistance to change and consequently inhibit the proposed changes agreed between the EP and key stakeholders. One way to overcome this challenge is by incorporating the views of all members of the school's staff. This comprehensive approach is adopted within Timmins' (2000) School Improvement Model for SEN (SIMSEN) which consists of seven stages:

1) develop a plan for EP input, including a timescale;

2) all members of staff are informed about SIMSEN, what staff are invited to do and the potential input the EPS can provide;

3) school staff complete a survey, outlining their perspectives regarding the strengths and needs of the school;

4) areas of need are identified in relation to school staff and pupils. Further exploration of the school's needs may occur through working groups;

5) the findings of the survey and any additional exploration are discussed with all members of staff. Within this discussion contrasting perspectives can be addressed and through further discussion, an agreement can be reached regarding the priorities for EP intervention;

6) the EP collaborates with school staff to identify the individuals responsible for facilitating EP input, the times and dates for EP input and how each aspect of the EP's involvement will be evaluated; and

7) the SIMSEN process is reviewed with all school staff. Within this meeting, staff are invited to share aspects of school practice which they feel have improved and identify any areas which they feel require further development.

SIMSEN invites school staff to identify potential areas in which existing practice can improve (Stages 3 and 4) and provides all school staff with the opportunity to discuss their contrasting perspectives (Stage 5). The activities highlighted above correspond positively with the characteristics Roffey (2000) states exist within a school culture which facilitates positive change. As the name implies this model focuses upon how schools can improve practice in relation to SEN; however I would argue that the activities which occur at each of the seven stages hold relevance to the process of overall school improvement.

The RADIO Approach (Timmins et al., 2003) and SIMSEN (Timmins, 2000) attempt to engage *all* school staff within the process of school improvement and as a result, this may enhance both the engagement of staff in the process of change and the identification of potential barriers to change. When utilising these approaches EPs may attempt to build upon the existing strengths of a school, in order to support the school to identify its own solutions to its needs, adopting a solution-focused approach to empower the school further (Stringer et al., 2006; O'Connell, 2003). However one may argue that challenges may arise where the needs of schools align poorly with their existing strengths and staff members' shared knowledge. Within this situation, schools may explore the EP's knowledge of existing research evidence regarding practice deemed most effective, in order to guide their adaptations to existing practice. Stringer et al. (2006) state that EPs can utilise existing evidence as part of their role in facilitating change; however currently the evidence which surrounds supporting pupils experiencing SEBD, specifically within the context of SEBD special schools appears restricted.

EPs have previously supported schools to improve upon existing practice through a facilitating role. One such approach is the Staff Sharing Scheme (SSS), a teacher peer-support group, which builds autonomy within a school, supporting schools to utilise their own resources to resolve difficulties and take ownership of the presenting problems (Gill and Monsen, 1995). The EP's role is therefore to support schools to understand the process of SSS and to be on hand to provide support during its introduction, before fading and withdrawing their services, enhancing the autonomy of the school moving forwards. Within an SSS, a member of the school's staff presents a dilemma or difficulty they wish to resolve. Members of staff, who form the

supporting group explore the difficulty presented, which will lead to further expansion by the problem owner – the individual sharing their difficulty. The supporting group then generates, discusses and critiques possible solutions in front of the problem owner. The problem owner then selects the possible solution they feel is the best response, which they are confident they can implement and then the group supports the problem owner to develop an action plan, to support the implementation of the solution (Gill and Monsen, 1995). Previous research conducted regarding the impact of SSS, has led to successful findings in relation to supporting pupil behaviour. Monsen and Graham (2002) identified that school staff reported greater confidence in supporting pupils' behaviour and reduced staffs' stress levels. Jones et al. (2013) reported that problem owners found the process enabled them to take a step-back from the problem and explore their own impact on the presenting difficulty. A number of problem owners also believed the process enabled them to access support from members of staff, with whom they had previously not discussed their professional concerns. However Jones et al. (2013) also reported that a small number of staff found it difficult to discuss their difficulties in front of staff with whom they did not share positive relationships. As the SSS relies upon the school to identify solutions to their own presenting challenges, this may provide EPs with an opportunity to facilitate positive change within SEBD special schools, despite the challenge of restricted research evidence regarding successful EP interventions within these settings.

2.5.6 School Improvement and the Current Research

Within the current research I decided to focus on the processes and strategies which:

a) can be adapted by schools to enhance practice (Spalding et al., 2001); and

b) exist at the conscious level.

Munn and Johnston (1992) are critical of attempts to identify generic strategies which can support the needs of pupils experiencing SEBD. The authors believe that this approach is ill-advised due to the fact that the needs of each individual are underpinned by unique life experiences and surrounding environments. However one could argue that providing wholly individualised support may result in schools operating in a reactive, rather than preventative manner. A reactive approach to supporting behaviour is believed to be detrimental for the needs of pupils (Hallam and Rogers, 2008). Ewen and Topping (2012) indicate that directing resources to improve attainment, behaviour and attendance holds justification for all school settings and specifically SEBD special schools.

2.6   Data on Attainment, Absence and Behaviour

2.6.1 Attainment

The English Government published statistical data regarding the number of pupils who achieved a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and Maths, during the 2011-12 academic year (DfE, 2013*b*). It was identified that when compared to national averages, the following pupil groups were at risk of significantly lower achievement:

- pupils with a Statement of SEN;

- pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM); and

- pupils experiencing a primary need of SEBD

In parallel 54.2% of boys achieved a minimum of 5 GCSEs grades A* to C, including English and Maths; a figure some 9.5% below the percentage of girls who achieved this national target (DfE, 2013*b*). Additional statistical data regarding the attainment of pupils within the UK are highlighted in Appendix D.

At the conclusion of Key Stage 4, the attainment of five A* to C grades at GCSE is considered the benchmark for academic success (Jackson, 2006). However, Ford's (1992) model of motivation, suggests that a shift away from such universal outcome measures is required. This adjustment would move away from the use of generic targets for all students (grades A* to C) and instead focus upon the rate of progress all pupils make. Ford (1992) identified that motivation can be determined by three components: mastery goals, emotions and personal agency beliefs. Mastery goals emphasise the individual's need to focus upon self-improvement, as opposed to competing with other pupils. Emotions refer to the feelings the individual experiences during the task in question. Personal agency beliefs are the individual's self-assessment of whether they are capable of achieving the desired objective. This theory would predict a pupil's level of motivation and consequently their aspirations may reduce if pupils:

- focus on achieving specific grades (A*-C), as opposed to self-improvement;
- experience negative feelings during the set tasks, for example frustration due to the complexity of the task; and/or
- begin to lose self-confidence in their capacity to achieve tasks, due to previous negative experiences.

Holding high aspirations for all pupils is clearly a positive philosophy for all schools to adopt. However providing unrealistic targets may serve to decrease pupils' motivation to learn and engage with education.

2.6.2 Attendance

The following table highlights the higher absence rates of pupils in special schools with a primary need of SEBD (see Table 3). The challenge of raising pupil attendance has existed for at least 140 years within the UK, with up to approximately 10% of pupils consistently failing to attend (Sheppard, 2010). Sheppard (2010) highlighted that between the 1997/98 and 2003/04 academic years, the UK Government has spent £885 million on initiatives to reduce absence.

Table 3. *Pupil Absence during the 2011/12 Academic Year (*DfE, 2013*c).*

	State Funded Secondary	Special School	Pupils with SEBD (SA+ and Statement)
Unauthorised	1.3%	2.0%	3.9%
Authorised	4.6%	7.6%	6.8%
Overall	5.9%	9.6%	10.7%

2.6.3 Behaviour

During the 2011/12 academic year the percentage of pupils who received a fixed-term exclusion (FTE) within Special Schools (15.39%) was almost double the percentage of pupils who received this sanction within mainstream secondary schools (7.85%) (DfE, 2013*d*). FTEs are indicative of undesirable behaviour; however one must take into account that undesirable behaviour may be interpreted differently depending on the individual school or LA in which behaviour is observed.

Specific data were not available regarding the primary SEN of pupils who received a FTE within special schools. Therefore it was not possible to explore the percentage of pupils who received a fixed-term exclusion who experience a primary need of SEBD.

2.7 Strategies Which Support Successful Attainment, Attendance and Behaviour; The Existing Evidence

2.7.1 Introduction

Watkins and Wagner (2000) outlined that pupil behaviour can be supported at three levels – the organisation, the classroom and the individual. However in order to explore the strategies which support successful attainment, attendance and behaviour, I have added an additional level (see Figure 2), focusing on universal strategies.

The strategies outlined within this chapter, have been identified by reviewing existing research and guidance (see Appendix E). Due to the restricted guidance explicitly relating to SEBD special schools, I have included evidence relating to a) pupils experiencing a primary need of SEBD and b) pupils with levels of attainment, attendance and behaviour which fall below the national average.

Figure 2. *The four levels at which support can be provided to raise pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour (adapted from Watkins and Wagner, 2000).*
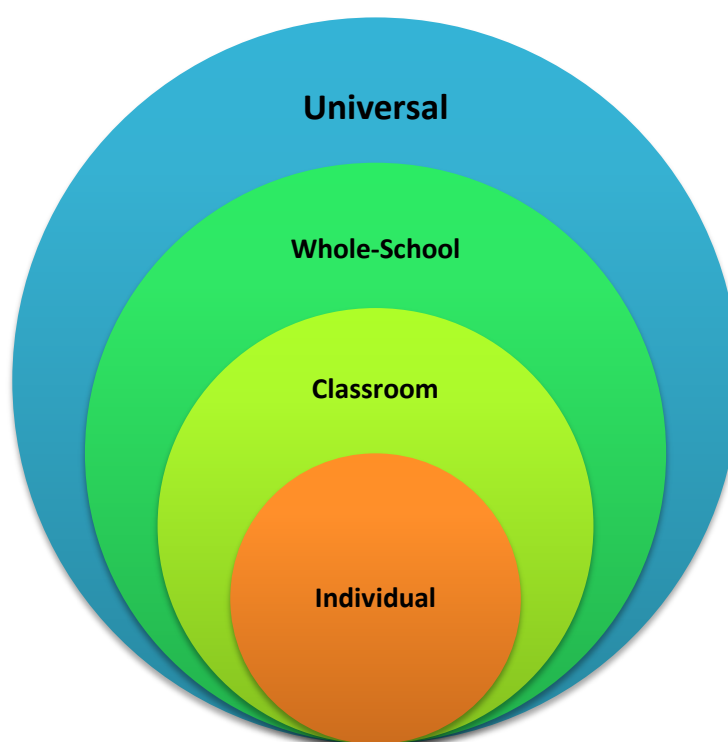
2.7.2 Existing Universal Strategies

The majority of strategies identified within the existing evidence can be considered universal, supporting pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour (see Table 4). This would appear logical when one considers that a high correlation exists between low attendance, low achievement and anti-social behaviour (Taylor, 2012*b*; DfES, 2004). Sheppard (2011) argues that this correlation should not be misinterpreted as a relationship of cause and effect. However it is apparent that in order to learn, pupils must be present and engaged within school (Taylor, 2012*b*).

'Quality First' teaching is cited by the UK government as the key factor in determining the effectiveness of school practice (DfE, 2010). Quality first teaching encapsulates a number of teaching skills and methods, including:

- clear lesson objectives;

- facilitating pupil participation and discussion;

- effective use of explanations, demonstrations and questioning;

- frequent praise and feedback to encourage and motivate pupils; and

- opportunities for pupils to complete independent learning tasks

(DCSF, 2008*b*). In order for pupils to work independently, teachers must provide learning tasks which are personalised, differentiating the curriculum to meet each pupil's needs and current level of understanding (Ewen and Topping, 2012).

Home-school collaboration is highlighted within existing research as a key factor in supporting the needs of pupils experiencing SEBD (Knowles, 2013). Collaboration can occur in a number of ways: for example through direct communication and by developing home-school agreements. Roffey (2002*a*) states that home-school communication is often reduced for pupils experiencing SEBD and instead communication often occurs at the point of crisis. As a result, schools and parents may become preoccupied with attributing responsibility for the difficulties experienced by the pupil (Miller, 2003). Alternatively if communication occurs at an earlier stage, the school will be in a position to share positive information with parents, which can enhance the parents' confidence and their willingness to engage with the school (Roffey, 2002*b*). Parents will therefore be in a better position to contribute to the decisions made regarding their child's education, as advocated within Lamb's recommendations (DCSF, 2009*a*). This is more likely to result in a successful partnership, where both parties work together to identify and address barriers for the pupil. Feiler (2010) highlighted that effective home-school collaboration should result in support for both parties. Feiler's (2010) argument builds upon the understanding that potential barriers may relate to the needs of the pupil's family. These holistic needs may be addressed through direct intervention from the

school, or through wider support such as a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) (Whitney, 2008).

In addition to establishing positive relationships with parents, Spratt et al (2006) emphasise that it is important to establish and maintain positive relationships with pupils who are exhibiting challenging behaviour. Evans (2010) identified that this can be challenging to accomplish within mainstream schools. Teachers identified that after challenging a pupil about their behaviour, it was then difficult to find an appropriate time to repair their relationship. Roffey (2011) states in order to establish a positive relationship with pupils, school staff must value the person, not simply the learner. This can be achieved by holding an interest in the pupil's life outside of the classroom, finding commonalities and providing regular, positive feedback (Roffey, 2011).

Extrinsic rewards are frequently employed to motivate pupils who experience SEBD and reinforce desirable behaviour (Roffey, 2011). However Kohn (1993) identified that rewards only lead to short-term positive change and fail to foster intrinsic motivation. Capstick (2005) conducted research regarding the perceived impact of extrinsic rewards, exploring the views of teachers and pupils within a secondary PRU in London. A significantly higher proportion of teaching staff believed that the use of rewards had a more positive impact on pupils' effort and behaviour, than the pupils themselves. However pupils and teaching staff were also asked to assign a value of 1 (very successful) to 4 (not successful at all) for a number of specific rewards, based upon their impact on pupils' effort within class. Pupils assigned very high scores for two specific strategies - 'trips out' and 'a positive phone call home'. This suggests that specific rewards were influential in enhancing pupil's engagement within class. However in order for rewards to be effective, they must be desirable for

pupils. Whitney (2008) highlights that incentives can be employed with groups and individuals, for example, inter-form competitions may be employed to enhance attendance, in which the class with the highest average attendance is rewarded. This strategy may lead pupils to receive additional reinforcement and encouragement from their peers.

Table 4. *A table which documents the universal strategies, identified within the relevant literature and government guidance.*

Level	Strategy	Source(s)
Collaboration with Parents and Outside Agencies	CAF	Whitney (2008)
	Home-School Communication	Knowles (2013);Taylor (2011); Feiler, (2010); DfES (2005);Roffey (2002*a*)
	Supporting Parents' Needs	DCSF (2008*a*)
	Seek External Guidance	Reid (2014); Taylor (2012*a*); Chapman (2008); Whitney (2008); Pellegrini (2007)
	Home-School Agreements	Hallam and Rogers (2008); Whitney (2008); Miller (2003)
Whole-School	Address Bullying	Hallam and Rogers (2008); Whitney (2008); Miller (2003)
	Student Voice	Hallam and Rogers (2008); Ruddock and Flutter (2004)
	Clear Policies	Reid (2014); DfE (2011*b*); Bennett (2005); Ruddock and Flutter (2004)
	Policies Consistently Followed	Taylor (2011); Hallam and Rogers (2008); Spalding et al. (2001)
	Rewards and Incentives	Reid (2014); Hart (2010); Hallam and Rogers (2008); Whitney (2008)
	Staff CPD	Dimmock (2012); Chapman (2008); Hallam and Rogers (2008)
	Holding High Expectations	Hart (2010)
	Monitoring Data	Hallam and Rogers (2008)
	Clear Rules and Expectations	Taylor (2011); Hart (2010); Hallam and Rogers (2008); Spalding et al. (2001)
	Collaborative Approach to Decision Making	Dimmock (2012); Engels et al. (2008); Hallam and Rogers (2008); Dix (2007)
	Effective Planning	Dimmock (2012); DCSF (2008*a*); Gross and White (2003)
Classroom	Quality First Teaching	DfE (2010); DCSF (2008*b*)
	Alternative Curriculum	Ewen and Topping (2012); Hallam and Rogers (2008)
	Positive Learning	Reid (2014); Taylor (2011); Cole

	Environment	(2007); Ofsted (2005)
	Smaller Groups	O'Brien (2005)
	Differentiated Curriculum	Taylor (2011); Hart (2010); Whitney (2008); Ofsted (2005); Spalding et al. (2001)
Individual	Mentoring	Reid (2014); Davis and Florian (2004)
	Therapeutic Support	Pellegrini (2007)
	Identify Underlying SEN	Taylor (2012*a*); Sheppard (2011); Tommerdahl (2009); Cole (2007)
	Developing Positive Relationships	Roffey (2011); Hart (2010); Cole (2007); Elton Report (DfES, 1989)
	Catch-up Sessions	Hallam and Rogers (2008)

2.7.3 Existing Strategies for Successful Attainment

In addition to the universal strategies, additional strategies were identified which explicitly support successful pupil attainment (see table 5). Research evidence suggests that pupils can become disengaged when the curriculum provided is incompatible with their interests (Hallam and Rogers, 2008). Therefore providing a stimulating curriculum, which encapsulates the pupil's interests, may enhance the enjoyment experienced within the classroom and foster intrinsic motivation (Spalding et al., 2001).

Table 5. *A table which documents the strategies utilised to enhance pupil attainment, identified within the relevant literature and government guidance.*

Level	Strategy	Source(s)
Whole-School	Raise Attendance	Taylor (2012*b*)
	Improve Behaviour	Hallam and Rogers (2008)
	Celebrating Success	Smith (2011)
Classroom	Stimulating Curriculum	Visser (2008); Spalding et al. (2001)
	Formative Assessment	Bennett (2005); Rayment (2006); Clarke (2008)
	Raising Key Skills	Ofsted (2005)
Individual	Enhance self-esteem	Spalding et al. (2001)

2.7.4 Existing Strategies for Successful Attendance

In addition to the strategies highlighted within table 4, a number of strategies are recommended to specifically enhance pupil attendance (see table 6). Breakfast clubs are believed to enhance attendance and punctuality and increase pupils' motivation to attend (Reid, 2002; Simpson, 2001). First day calling was originally endorsed by the government in 1998, primarily to ensure the safeguarding of pupils (Reid, 2002). This early intervention also provided schools with an opportunity to a) identify the reason for the pupil's absence (Whitney, 2008) and b) reinforce the importance of attendance (Reid, 2002). However this process can be time consuming and it can be difficult to contact parents who are not engaging with the school (Reid, 2002).

Schools may elect to take legal action, when recurrent, unauthorised absence occurs (Whitney, 2008). Charlie Taylor (2012*b*), the government's expert adviser on behaviour, identified that legal action should be utilised as a last resort, when attempting to address poor attendance. Alternatively schools should attempt to explore the underlying cause(s) of poor attendance and provide appropriate support.

Table 6. *A table which documents the strategies utilised to enhance pupil attendance, identified within the relevant literature and government guidance.*

Level	Strategy	Source(s)
Collaboration with Parents and Outside Agencies	First Day Calling	Reid (2014)
	Home Visits	Roffey (2002*a*)
	Parental Guidance	Reid (2014); Hallam and Rogers (2008); Heyne and Rollings (2004)
	Legal Action	Reid (2014); Whitney (2008); LA Guidance
	EWO Referral	Sheppard (2011); Hallam and Rogers (2008); Whitney (2008)
Whole-School	Breakfast Club	Reid (2002); Simpson (2001)

2.7.5 Existing Strategies for Successful Behaviour Management

The strategies identified within existing research and guidance which specifically relate to enhancing pupil behaviour are presented within table 7. Both Spalding et al. (2001) and Taylor (2011) identified that the rules and routines provided within day-to-day practice should be implemented consistently. A consistent approach will support pupils to develop clear expectations regarding their responsibilities and enhance the predictability of their surrounding environment (Spalding et al., 2001). Enhanced clarity regarding achieving and maintaining desirable behaviour is arguably more important within SEBD special schools, due to the potentially reduced opportunities for pupils to observe positive role models. However Spalding et al. (2001) also stress that at times a flexible approach to behaviour management is adopted. This is necessary when pupils are experiencing particular challenges which impact upon their ability to conform. Consequently, school staff must ensure that the needs of individual pupils are closely monitored, adapting their practice in response.

Table 7. *A table which documents the strategies utilised to enhance pupil behaviour, identified within the relevant literature and government guidance.*

Level	Strategy	Source(s)
Whole-School	Internal sanctions	Hart (2010); Bennett (2005); Davis and Florian (2005)
	Fixed-Term Exclusions	Hallam and Rogers (2008)
	Clear Routines	Taylor (2011)
Classroom	Develop Pupil's Personal, Social and Moral Values	Blimes (2012); Spalding et al. (2001)

2.8   The Current Research

2.8.1   Research Aim

The aim of the current research is to develop a greater understanding of 'outstanding' practice within an SEBD special school, with a prominent focus upon the strategies which are believed to enhance pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour. It is anticipated that this enhanced understanding will support the development of high quality practice within other SEBD provisions.

2.8.2   Rationale

There are three key motivating factors for conducting the current research:-

1) Limited guidance exists which explicitly relates to effective practice within SEBD special schools. This first point builds upon the premise that the needs of pupils educated within special schools are different from pupils who are educated within mainstream schools, specialist units or PRUs.

2) One secondary SEBD special school currently exists within the LA in which I am currently employed and this school was recently recognised by Ofsted as 'requiring improvement'. Therefore I wanted to explore the strategies which are associated with effective practice within relevant provisions, in order to develop a greater understanding of how the LA can best support the school to improve.

3) Extensive cuts have been made to the LA's Behaviour Support Service (BSS). These cuts are reflective of national cuts to services within the public sector (Elliott, 2014). As a result the EPS' role within the Borough appears to have extended, resulting in increased input regarding pupils' experiencing SEBD. Therefore

developing a greater understanding of effective practice within SEBD special schools will support the EPS to provide effective, evidence-based support.

This research builds upon two key objectives of the current Coalition Government. Firstly it was specified that special schools should share their expertise in supporting the SEN of children and young people with other special and mainstream schools (DfE, 2010). Secondly within the SEN Green Paper 'Support and Aspiration' (DfE, 2012*a*), it was identified that the government wanted to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable pupils were prioritised. Due to the complexity of pupils experiencing SEBD and the severity of pupils' needs who attend specialist provisions, it is logical to suggest that this research focuses on supporting pupils who are considered the most vulnerable.

2.8.3 Key Research Questions

I have identified the following four key research questions, following my review of the research literature:-

1) What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil attainment, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

2) What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil attendance, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

3) What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil behaviour, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

4) What factors do the senior leadership team and pupils believe are the most significant in achieving 'outstanding' practice within an SEBD special school?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As I have discussed within chapter 1, volume one of my thesis focuses on the research conducted with the participating school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and focus group interviews with year 10 and 11 students. However these two related strands formed a substantive part of a more wide-ranging, multi-method study, in which I explored the views of the school's teaching staff using Q-methodology. This additional strand within my research, which I have not reported within volume one of my thesis, has therefore impacted upon my epistemological orientation and my decision to utilise mixed-methods in order to gather data.

3.2 Epistemological Orientation

When conducting mixed methods research, one must acknowledge that in addition to the practical variances, there are also philosophical differences, between quantitative and qualitative research (King and Horrocks, 2010). Mixed-methods research has traditionally received criticism, due to the opposing philosophy which underpins quantitative and qualitative methods (Symonds and Gorard, 2010).

Stark and Torrance (2005) state social interactions underpin our construction of reality. These social interactions take place within specific contexts, within a specific moment in time. Therefore to understand the reality of a context or event, one must explore the perspectives of individuals who experienced that moment, through social interactions. Without interpretation from people, reality lacks meaning (Sarantakos,

2005). Within the current research, I have attempted to explore the perspectives of school staff and students who can draw upon their lived experiences within the context under investigation. Taking these points into consideration one could assume that the current study is therefore underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology. However this perspective fails to account for the fact that case study research is based upon the premise that the researcher must retrieve evidence which will enable them to answer the research questions effectively (Gillham, 2000). Therefore one may employ alternative methods which do not include social interaction.

As previously stated I have elected not to include the perspectives of the school's teaching staff within volume one of my study, however the views of teaching staff were included as part of a more wide-ranging, multi-method study. In order to answer the research questions within the wide-ranging research, I have employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. In order to elicit the perspectives of the school's teaching staff I employed Q-methodology, a method which requires the researcher to conduct statistical analysis of the subjective perspectives gathered (Ramlo and Newman, 2011).

Considering the key points highlighted above, I am adopting a pragmatic epistemological orientation for the current research. Pragmatists support the use of mixed methods research, in which the priorities of the researcher are to identify the methods which elicit the most functional information (Denscombe, 2007). Interaction between the data sets is not essential to enable understanding, however if the data is compatible it may facilitate a greater understanding (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). House and Howe (1999) criticise pragmatism, due to its lack of clarity

regarding the source of values attributed to research findings. I attempted to overcome this barrier, by identifying the source of my value-laden interpretations.

3.3   Research Design

Case study design involves the investigation of an existing phenomenon within its real life context, therefore providing strong ecological validity. This investigation occurs at multiple angles, therefore providing the researcher with greater insight into the phenomenon, which may be complex and distinctive (Yin, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Stake, 1995). Within the current research the case or focus of inquiry can be described as the factors which contribute to effective practice for pupils with a primary need of SEBD, with a particular focus upon pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour (Thomas, 2011). Thomas (2011) identifies that all cases must have an analytical frame, in effect a definable object which can be utilised by the researcher in order to explore the case effectively. In the current research, the SEBD special school is the analytical frame.

Case study design can be applied in different ways, in order to serve a variety of purposes. This flexibility enables the researcher to identify the evidence required to answer the research questions in the most accurate manner (Gillham, 2000). Thomas (2011) highlights that when planning case study research, the researcher must determine the subject, purpose, approach and process they wish to adopt. Thomas (2011) provides an overview of the various types of case studies which can be conducted (see appendix F). I have employed the following case study design within the current research (see table 8).

Table 8. *A table which outlines the type of case study design employed within the current research.*

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Key Case: 'Outstanding' practice for supporting pupils with a primary need of SEBD; with a particular focus upon strategies which support pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour.	**Instrumental**: The key case will be used to identify the strategies and factors which can support additional SEBD special schools. Leading to an analytical generalisation. **Exploratory**: Exploring participants' perspectives regarding the strategies which enhance pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour; and the factors which have led to outstanding practice. **Explanatory**: To gain an understanding of why these strategies and factors are successful	**Building a Theory**: The findings will be utilised to develop a model for outstanding practice. Minimal research currently exists which explicitly relates to pupils within secondary SEBD special schools.	**Single Case**: The school was judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Only one additional secondary SEBD special school within inner-and outer-London received an outstanding grade at the time this research was conducted.

By identifying and focusing upon an 'outstanding' SEBD special school, I view the context as an example of practice that currently works well. My decision to focus upon this particular context is reinforced by the fact that currently only 2 of the 7 secondary SEBD special schools within inner and outer London are judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Therefore the data gathered from this context can be utilised

to enhance understanding and further develop theory. Contrasting beliefs exist in regards to whether findings from case studies can be generalised beyond the research context. Yin (2014) argues that statistical generalisation cannot occur, however the results identified can be related to and expand existing theory (an analytical generalisation). This comparison may result in modifications to our current understanding regarding a phenomenon. However Denscombe (2007) argues that findings can be generalised if the context and finer variables are relevant to additional settings. Therefore Denscombe (2007) states in order for generalisations to be made, the researcher must explicitly outline the key features of the case and how it compares to other contexts and in this case, SEBD special schools.

3.4   Methods

3.4.1 Rationale for Employing a Mixed-Methods Approach

The rationale for employing a mixed methods approach was to expand upon existing research findings regarding the strategies which facilitate positive attainment, attendance and behaviour within SEBD special schools. This approach was also adopted to provide a more comprehensive picture regarding the factors which contribute towards an SEBD special school achieving a grade of 'outstanding' from Ofsted (Denscombe, 2007). However in order to achieve this one must use a wider range of methods, in order to explore the specific features of the context and this would enhance the plausibility of my research findings (Bassey, 1999). Within the wide-ranging research, I have gathered qualitative and quantitative data to explore the school's perspective regarding the strategies which are judged to be most effective in raising attainment, attendance and behaviour. However within volume

one of my thesis, I will only discuss the qualitative data gathered from the SLT and participating students.

3.4.2 Phases of Research

This research was carried out sequentially, as I explored what strategies were adopted by the school at a strategic level prior to exploring the views of the wider school staff and pupils (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). The second phase of data collection was conducted simultaneously. Miller and Crabtree (1994) have referred to this approach as a combination design, as the data was gathered in sequence and simultaneously (see figure 3).

Figure 3. *A diagram which demonstrates the sequence in which data was collected and analysed.*
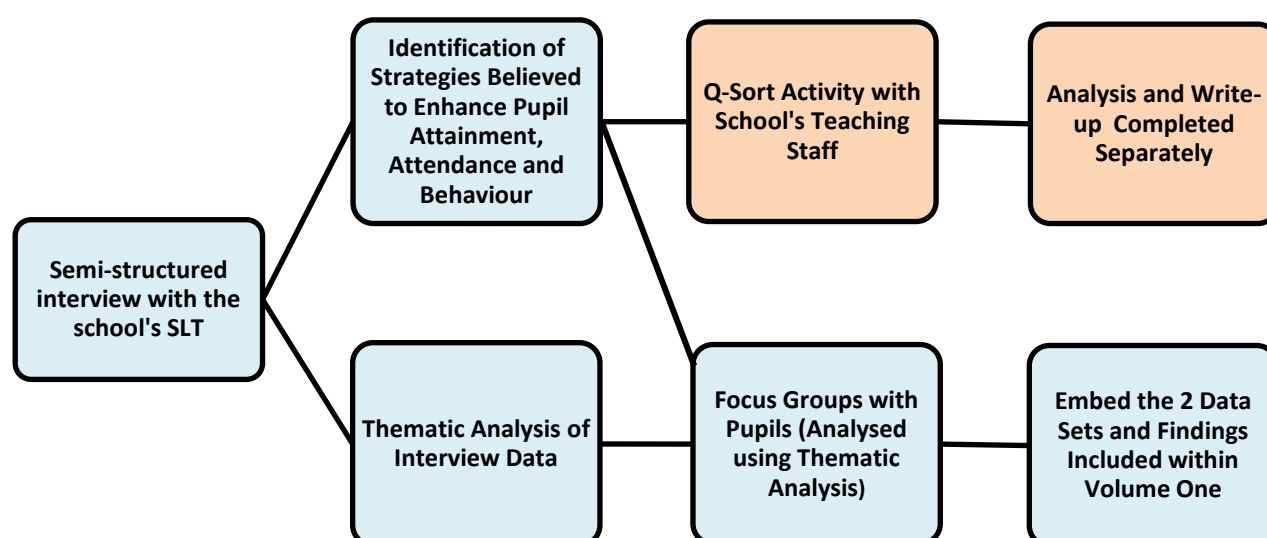
It was anticipated that the school's SLT held the greatest insight regarding strategies which were utilised within the classroom and in the wider systems, as identified within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model, most notably the

microsystem and mesosystem. Therefore the data elicited from the school's SLT, formed the primary data set, however the different sources of data were given equal weighting (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). This acknowledges that each of the participating groups provides a unique and valuable perspective regarding the focus of the research.

In addition I attempted to embed the research findings. Creswell (2009) describes embedding as the process in which one data set is used to support another. Creswell (2009) states that when attempting to embed the data one must look to support a primary data set with additional data. Comparisons between the data sets were not completed until all data was collected.

I elicited the SLT's views (primary data set) qualitatively for two key reasons:-

a) the restricted literature regarding strategies utilised within 'outstanding' SEBD special schools currently available in the public domain
b) I understood that the school's SLT provide guidance about the strategies they wish all school staff to employ.

3.4.3 Semi-structured Interviews

I utilised a semi-structured interview to explore the SLT's perspective about the strategies they have shared. It was anticipated the semi-structured interview would enable me to conduct further exploration of points raised by the SLT which were unanticipated and not reflected within the existing research evidence and research questions (Kvale, 2007). The semi-structured interview also allowed me to explore

the strategies identified in depth, from the perspective of the individuals who shared this guidance (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This was important as it enabled me to explore what the strategies were and specifically how they facilitated progress within the school.

3.4.4 Focus Groups

Pupil's views were elicited through focus groups. Focus groups were utilised, as I believed data would be less accessible without group interaction (Morgan, 1997). In addition the school's head teacher advised me that students would be more likely to participate and share their perspectives within a group setting. I also believed this approach may help to reduce the effects of the power dynamic which can occur when adults work with pupils (Krueger and Casey, 2000). This was particularly notable within the current research due to the vulnerability of pupils, due to their SEN.

Krueger and Casey (2000) state that focus groups provide pupils with a chance to listen to the perspective of others. This may support the pupil to formulate their own perspective and consequently lead them to contribute within the discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Existing research findings regarding the employment of focus groups with students experiencing SEBD is limited and contradictory (Sellman, 2009). In contrast to the strengths I have highlighted, concerns have previously been raised regarding the tendency for boys' behaviour to become more animated within focus groups (Wright, 1994). Nevertheless Sellman (2009) reported that the employment of focus groups proved successful and I felt the positive attributes of such an approach was justified.

3.5   Data Collection Procedures

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview with the Senior Leadership Team

This interview took place between myself and the two senior leaders at the school –
the head teacher and deputy head teacher. The interview took place in an office
which was quiet and free from disruption. The interview was recorded onto audio
cassette, in preparation for transcription. The interview lasted for 75 minutes.
Interviewees were encouraged to ask any questions they had throughout the
interview process. Prior to initiating the interview I shared my adaptation of Watkins
and Wagner's multi-level model (see figure 2). This was not to lead the direction of
the participants' responses. However I wanted to clarify that I was interested in all
aspects of school improvement and the various levels at which this can occur.

Interpretations by the interviewer can occur both during the interview itself and
during data analysis. In order to reduce researcher bias, I adopted a position of
qualified naïveté to ensure my prior experiences did not influence my interpretations
(Kvale, 2007; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Approaching the interview in this manner
ensured that I clarified my understanding of abstract terms with the interviewees and
explored the strategies further by using open probes. Additionally the transcript (see
appendix G), the prospective 'strategies' (see appendix H) and interpretations from
my data analysis, were shared with the school's SLT. These two approaches helped
me to develop a mutual understanding with the interviewees and enhances reliability.

3.5.2 Focus Groups with Pupils

When preparing to conduct a focus group, one must consider a number of variables.
For example when determining group size, one must consider that larger groups

may result in a loss of attention and smaller groups may reduce the range of beliefs generated (Field, 2000; Krueger and Casey, 2000). In addition Sellman (2009) highlights that pupils may feel more comfortable when working in a group which is reflective of the size of their class size. For these reasons, up to 8 students were included within each group, reflecting the reduced group size within the classroom (maximum of 8 pupils per class). Pupils were interviewed within their year groups, enhancing familiarity between participants.

I facilitated group discussions regarding the pupils' experiences during the 2013-14 and 2012-13 academic years within school, specifically focusing upon the strategies and factors which they believed best supported their attainment, attendance and behaviour. Each focus group lasted for approximately 50 minutes. I recorded the two focus group discussions onto audio cassette and transcribed the data (see appendix I and K). Cohen et al. (2011) believe transcripts do not reflect the social interactive nature of focus groups. I overcame this criticism by recording my observations of non-verbal communication and my reflections during each focus group within a reflective journal (see appendix K). A reflective journal was recommended by Sellman (2009) who completed focus group research with pupils experiencing SEBD. Robson (2011) highlights that the group dynamic may lead certain individuals or sub-groups to dominate the discussions. In order to overcome this barrier during the research, I asked pupils questions directly, if they appeared unforthcoming with their opinion. However the vast majority of pupils contributed their views freely within the group discussion.

A Learning Support Assistant (LSA) from the school accompanied me when facilitating the focus groups. Whilst the presence of the LSA may have impacted upon the pupils' openness during the discussions, it was advised by the Head

Teacher as a precaution due to the behaviour of the pupils. The LSA was responsible for behaviour management during the research. I met the LSA prior to carrying out the research, in order to explain their role, as well as their ethical responsibilities. I also carried out a debrief with the LSA at the conclusion of each focus group – checking on the LSA's well-being and answered any questions they had. Although I encouraged pupils to talk honestly within the focus group, students were encouraged to consider the feelings of others when contributing. Ground rules were developed following consideration of Sellman's (2009) guidance regarding conducting focus groups with pupils experiencing SEBD. Ground rules were developed in collaboration with the students:-

- Listen to others when they are talking

- Everybody has a chance to speak

- Do not interrupt others

- Do not swear or be rude to others

- Keep and hands and feet to yourself

A timeline of the current research is outlined within appendix L.

3.6   Context

The current research took place within a secondary SEBD special school within a South East London borough. The school is a mixed-gender school however currently only boys attend the provision. I identified the school as a potential setting to conduct my research after exploring data regarding 'outstanding' secondary SEBD special schools located on the Ofsted website. The school was located within a borough

neighbouring the borough in which I am currently employed. This particular context was selected to carry out this research as the school was judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in March 2011. At the time of conducting the research in January 2014, 56 pupils were on roll.

All pupils on roll are subject to a Statement of SEN, with a primary need of SEBD. However it should be noted that the pupils within the current context experience a range of additional SEN. For example approximately 30% of the students have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

The percentage of pupils attending the school entitled to free school meals (FSM) was 46.3% at the time of conducting the research, in comparison to significantly lower figures within the borough overall (19%) and national levels (21%) (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans, 2012). Pupils who are eligible for FSM are more vulnerable to negative outcomes at school than peers who are not in receipt of additional funding. For example, during the 2011/12 academic year, 23.14% of pupils eligible for FSM who attended a Special School, received a fixed term exclusion. This compared to 10.97% of pupils who attended a Special School but were not eligible for FSM (DfE, 2013*d*).

During the 2013-14 academic year there were 29 members of teaching staff within the school, which included:-

- 2 Senior Leaders
- 5 Middle Leaders
- 6 Teachers
- 4 Higher Level Teaching Assistants

- 12 Learning Support Assistants

An average adult to pupil ratio of 1:2 was identified. The school follows the National Curriculum, however learning is differentiated where appropriate.

The Head Teacher was appointed at the school in January 2013. This followed a period of 6 months of fulfilling the role of Acting Head Teacher due to the long term illness of the previous Head Teacher. The current Head Teacher had previously fulfilled the Assistant Head Teacher role. This change within the senior leadership team is significant particularly when one considers the potential impact of the Head Teacher upon the school's culture (Engels et al., 2008).

The school received support from the charity, AfA during the autumn term of 2011. This support was provided as part of the AfA pilot study. However one should note that this support was provided after the school were judged to be outstanding by Ofsted.

3.6.1 Statistical Data Relating to Attainment, Attendance and Behaviour

Statistical data was collected anonymously from the school, relating to pupil attainment (see appendix M), attendance (see appendix N) and behaviour (see appendix O). This data provides a point of reference for the reader. Attainment data retrieved was compared to all of the secondary SEBD special schools within inner and outer London (see appendix P). National data regarding attainment, attendance and behaviour was also retrieved from the government's Office of National Statistics.

3.6.2 Ofsted Report

Information from the current Ofsted inspection is included within appendix Q. This provides an external overview of the school's strengths and areas of improvement, in a format which other special schools can identify with.

3.7 Participants

There were 3 groups of participants within the research– the SLT, the school's teaching staff (including teachers and LSAs) and pupils who attend the special school. However as previously stated the data gathered from the school's teaching staff will not be included within the current paper. Participants were selected through a purposive sample – prospective individuals were identified for the research on the basis of their relevance to the research objectives and their presence within the research context (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

3.7.1 Senior Leadership Team

I made initial contact with the head teacher over the phone in order to arrange an initial visit. I met the head teacher and deputy head teacher to explore whether they were willing to participate within the research and provided a copy of the participant information sheet (see appendix R). The SLT consisted of 2 female adults. I interviewed the head teacher and deputy head teacher together. This interview took place on the school premises.

3.7.2 Pupils

Initially a parental information sheet was sent to the parents of the prospective pupils (see appendix S). The parental information sheet was accompanied by the parental

consent form. After parental consent was retrieved from parents, I met with the pupils whose parents had provided consent in their year groupings (years 10 and 11). During this meeting I outlined the purpose of the research to pupils and discussed the key aims of the research and what I required participants to do. In addition a participant information sheet was provided for pupils to read (see appendix T). An LSA was on hand to support pupils who experience literacy difficulties, in order to read the information to the pupils.

Pupils were asked to volunteer within the project. In order to participate, the pupils were required to have attended the SEBD Special School for the full duration of the 2012-13 academic year. It was felt that this would provide students with an adequate experience within the school, which would enhance the accuracy of their interpretations. In total 13 pupils participated within the research, from a potential 43 who met the required selection criteria. All participants were boys and were aged between 15 and 16 years.

3.7.3 Including the Pupils' Perspectives

Due to the complexity and variety of the pupils' needs, I recognised that it was important to retrieve informed consent from their parents in addition to pupil consent. Pupils with a primary need of SEBD are widely recognised as a vulnerable group (O'Brien, 2005). Sellman (2009) identified that minimal research currently exists which incorporated the views of pupils with SEBD. Sellman (2009) suggests that pupils' views may have been excluded historically, due to the fact that pupils with SEBD require a highly structured environment, which may be difficult to achieve within an explorative discussion.

However although I acknowledge the potential complexities of attempting to elicit the perspectives of pupils who experience SEN it is important to provide pupils with an opportunity to contribute their views within the research. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF UK, 2012) documented that all children have the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them and their views must be taken seriously. The inclusion of pupils' perspectives is also advocated within the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014), in which professionals working with children and young people, are encouraged to adopt a carefully planned, person centred approach to ensure all pupils can contribute towards decisions and discussions which affect them.

3.8   Instrument Design

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to explore the views of the SLT (see appendix U). The interview schedule was designed after exploring key literature and identifying the key objectives of the research. When developing my interview questions I referred to guidance from Arksey and Knight (1999), who provided the following strategies to reduce interviewer bias:-

- Clear vocabulary

- Avoid leading or emotive language or questions

- Precise and explicit wording

- Avoid assumptions

It was not possible to complete a pilot study of the interview schedule as I completed this research within one school setting.

A questions and prompts form was developed in order to explore pupils' views within the focus group (see appendix V). This form was designed after exploring the key literature and considering the research objectives. It was not possible to complete a pilot study of the focus group, due to the reduced numbers of participating pupils. However I clarified the wording and content of my questions and prompts with school staff, prior to conducting the research. I asked staff to pay particular attention to whether the questions were accessible, taking the pupils' SEN into account.

3.9   Ethical Considerations

To ensure that this research was ethically sound, I referred to guidelines provided by the University of Birmingham (n.d), the British Psychological Society (2010; 2009) and literature relevant to my research methods. Prior to initiating my research, I received ethical approval from the University of Birmingham's Research Ethics Team. The University's Research Ethics Team, explored an in-depth proposal of what I intended to do and also explored my research instruments. All participant details will be destroyed after 10 years, in line with the University of Birmingham's (2012) 'Code of Practice for Research 2012-13'.

Kvale (2007) identified 7 stages at which ethical considerations must be addressed when conducting research (see table 9).

Table 9. *Kvale's (2007) 7 stages of ethical considerations*.

Research Stage	Ethical Consideration
Formulating the Research Plan	I anticipated that the research outcomes would have implications for school staff and pupils, in addition to enhancing scientific knowledge. Consequently this provided greater justification for requesting participants' time and resources.

Research Design	Informed consent was retrieved from all participants prior to collecting the data. Consent forms were designed specifically for each group. Consent forms were presented to the school's SLT (see appendix W), pupils (see appendix X) and pupils' parents (see appendix Y). I referred to Gillham's (2005) guidelines regarding what to include within the information sheets and consent forms. I therefore ensured that information provided was clear, jargon free and accounted for the needs of the prospective audience. It was not possible to ensure full-confidentiality within the school, due to the fact that a) school staff knew the identity of the SLT b) focus groups involved pupils working together and c) A LSA accompanied me during the focus group activity with pupils. Confidentiality outside of the school setting was emphasised to participants. It was believed that by doing so, participants may have been more willing to express their true feelings. Identity codes were assigned to the completed Q-Sorts – therefore they could not be anonymous. Pseudonyms were also assigned to the SLT's data. This enabled me to identify participant's data, if participants wanted to withdraw. Participants were provided with my contact details in order to express their wish to withdraw.
Interviews	I established what Arksey and Knight (1999) described as a 'climate of trust', therefore ensuring that participants could ask questions, explicit information was used and I was sensitive to the response of the participants. Prior to conducting the focus groups I consulted with the LSA regarding the school's protocol for responding to safeguarding concerns. An agreement with the LSA was made that the focus group would cease if it was believed that the well-being of any of the pupils was marginalised by a disclosure made by a student. However no safeguarding concerns were experienced within the research
Transcribing	Confidentiality was ensured for pupils and school staff within the research report and interview transcripts, as pseudonyms were used when referring to all named individuals.
Analysis	I completed the process of analysis independently, however the SLT were asked to verify my interpretations and challenge any misconceptions.
Verification	The SLT were asked to verify the content of the interview transcript, my themes and the identified

	strategies.
Reporting	The names of participants, the school and any individual named during data collection were not included within the research report. I was mindful that the description of the context did not reveal the identity of the school.

3.10   Data Analysis

3.10.1 Analysis of Semi-structured Interview with the School's SLT

Interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used in place of any genuine names referred to within the interview. The transcript for the interview with 'Ruth' (Head Teacher) and 'Mary' (Deputy Head Teacher) is included in appendix G. Transcribed data was analysed at two levels:-

1) I identified the strategies explicitly shared by the SLT relating to attainment, attendance and behaviour.

2) I conducted a thematic analysis of the transcript in its entirety.

3.10.2 Thematic Analysis of the SLT Interview Transcript

I elected to use thematic analysis to analyse the data elicited from the school's SLT. Thematic analysis can be described as a systematic process in which patterns are identified within the research data. These patterns symbolise meaning, relating to the topic area (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001). I utilised thematic analysis based upon the understanding that this approach would enable me to explore both the explicit and implicit ideas within the data (Guest et al., 2012). I felt

this would enhance my ability to explore the factors which have led to the school demonstrating 'outstanding' practice.

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that prior to conducting thematic analysis, the researcher must decide whether they wish to analyse data at the inductive or theoretical level and whether their analysis will occur at the semantic or latent level (see table 10). Within the current research, inductive analysis was completed at the latent level. Therefore the themes identified related to the data gathered and not my pre-existing understanding of the research topic. I made this decision due to the restricted research evidence which currently exists, in relation to 'outstanding' practice within the context of SEBD special schools. I elected to explore the participants' implicit and explicit responses, as I believed this approach would enable me to explore the factors which are believed to have led to the school achieving 'outstanding' practice in greater depth.

Table 10. *Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance regarding the type and levels of analysis which can be employed when conducting thematic analysis.*

	Inductive Analysis	**Theoretical Analysis**
Semantic Level	The researcher focuses on what the participant has said explicitly and does not take previous research into account.	The researcher focuses on what the participant has said and explores how the data relates back to the research questions and previous research.
Latent Level	The researcher explores what the participant has explicitly said and what they imply, without taking previous research into account.	The researcher focuses on what the participant's explicit and implicit responses, relating data back to the research questions and previous research.

I have utilised thematic analysis on a number of occasions within my academic and professional career. However to further enhance the accuracy of my analysis, I

closely referred to guidance by Braun and Clarke (2006), conducting my analysis of

the SLT interview transcript in six phases (see table 11).

Table 11. *A table which describes the six phases at which thematic analysis of the SLT interview transcript was conducted; as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).*

	Phase of Analysis	**Description with Examples (if applicable)**
1	Familiarise oneself with the data	• Transcribe the data • Read over the data • Record initial ideas
2	Generate initial codes	• Codes enable the analyst to identify small segments of the transcript which are of interest to the researcher and highlight features of the data, in a meaningful way. **SLT Interview Example 1** *'..this detention will happen if he steps out of mark and he will work with me. So it's not a punishment, it's about an hour where we can catch up on the curriculum and find out what the problems are.'* Ruth (Head Teacher) Code assigned: Reframing detentions as a second chance **SLT Interview Example 2** *'To me if we don't get the curriculum right, we can't expect their behaviour to be right.'* Mary (Deputy Head Teacher) Code assigned: Curriculum underpins behaviour **SLT Interview Example 3** *'That's the danger with our schools. They all talk about behaviour, behaviour, behaviour, they don't talk about learning and that's what the children are here to do. We're supposed to teach these children, they're supposed to learn and however they learn, we've got to create an atmosphere of learning in the classroom..'* Mary (Deputy Head Teacher) Code assigned: Too much focus on behaviour
3	Explore the data for themes	• Themes capture meaning within the data. • Themes broadly capture the features across the data and in contrast to codes do not focus upon small segments of data. • Within the initial exploration of the data for themes, the researcher explores how the codes can be

		grouped together in order to develop themes.
		• The researcher must consider themes which are overarching and capture large features of the data and sub-themes which relate to the overarching themes.
		• A thematic map may be developed which outlines how the over-arching themes and sub-themes relate to one another.
		Example
		After exploring my initial codes outlined within the 3 examples above from the SLT interviews, I developed a sub-theme entitled 'curriculum focused'
4	Review identified themes	• When reviewing the initial themes, the researcher must explore whether a) there is enough data to support the themes identified and b) whether the supporting data is too diverse in order to be grouped together. As a result of this exploration, the researcher may decide to merge or separate initial themes.
		• The researcher's objective within phase 4 should be to develop themes which are coherent, in which the themes accurately capture the data and data extracts are relevant to the theme.
		• At this stage the researcher must also reflect upon the data as a whole, in order to evaluate whether the thematic map accurately reflects the data and provides a clear overview.
5	Define the themes	• At this stage the researcher reviews and refines the names assigned to each theme.
		• The names of each theme should attempt to capture what is interesting about the data and why, as opposed to simply paraphrasing what the participants have said. As a result, themes should provide the reader with an indication about the content of the theme.
		Example
		During the process of refining my over-arching themes and sub-themes, I made an alteration to the sub-theme entitled 'curriculum focused'. I subsequently referred to this sub-theme as 'Central Focus on Learning'. I believed this adjustment provided further clarity to the reader about the content of the data captured within this sub-theme.
6	Report the findings	• The researcher utilises data extracts in order to support the reader to understand the logic of their themes. A clear and logical analysis, supported by data extracts, will enhance the merit and validity of the researcher's report.

3.10.3   Analysis of Focus Group Discussions with School Students

Focus groups discussions were recorded onto tape cassette. The group discussions were then transcribed verbatim. Focus group transcripts were produced for the year 10 (see appendix I) and year 11 focus groups (see appendix J). Student's names were not included within the transcripts, instead pupils were referred to by a letter, for example 'pupil A'. Pseudonyms replaced any genuine names which were referred to by the pupils during the group discussion.

I employed thematic analysis to analyse the data, exploring themes across both transcripts. I elected to use thematic analysis to analyse the focus group data, as this approach enabled me to explore perspectives which were unanticipated and not reflected within existing research evidence (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was particularly important given the fact that there is currently minimal research evidence relating to the perspectives of students within SEBD special schools. Analysis was again conducted at the inductive and latent levels. This was important due to the limited existing research within this area. I again followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis in order to conduct my analysis. Examples of the generation of initial codes (phase 2), initial exploration of themes (phase 3) and defined themes (phase 5) are presented in table 12.

Table 12. *Examples from the thematic analysis of the focus group interview transcripts.*

Generation of Initial Codes (Phase 2)	Initial Exploration of Themes (Phase 3)	Defined Themes (Phase 5)
Student C (Year 11) *'..it's hard to get any work done, I've been told I can achieve pretty high and there's other people in my class that can do that as well, but other people in my class are smart but*	Group dynamics	

they don't want to show it..' **Code Assigned: Difficult to focus in class due to the behaviour of others**		
Student E (Year 10) *'Some people like to annoy each other and that affects behaviour and there is a visible rivalry in the class and the kids are just trying to out-do each other..'* **Code Assigned: Peer disagreements**	The domino effect	Group Dynamics: The Domino Effect
Student E (Year 10) (in the response to the question what helps behaviour to be good?) *'when some of the students aint here'* **Code Assigned: Group dynamics and the impact of specific students**	Group dynamics	
Student A (Year 10) *'..there are not a lot of rich people around here and you will laugh and then you realise that could be you if don't listen in school'* **Code Assigned: Not wanting to end up like the public outside of school**	Considering one's future	
Student A (Year 10) (In response to the question is there anything that motivates you to learn?) *'..we might be able to go to a good sixth form or college'* **Code Assigned: Considering the next steps increases motivation**	Considering the next steps	Considering the Future
Student E (Year 11) *'The more I focus, the more opportunities I will have when I leave school, if I achieve 5 A to C's I can pursue the career I want when I'm leaving school.'* **Code Assigned: Focus upon grades and future opportunities**	Future opportunities	

3.11   Validity and Reliability of Data

Conflicting beliefs exist amongst researchers regarding the importance of validity

and reliability when conducting case study research (Thomas, 2011). Case study

investigation occurs within the real-life context. Consequently exact conditions

cannot be replicated (Thomas, 2011). However I have taken steps to enhance the reliability and validity of my research, referring to guidance by Robson (2011) and Yardley (2000).

3.11.1 Validity

Validity can be described as the extent to which an indicator measures the concept in question (Bryman, 2012). Robson (2011) states that when one employs a flexible research design, such as a case study, validity can be enhanced at three levels (see table 13). Yardley (2000) states that in order to enhance the validity of their research, qualitative researchers should include excerpts from the research interviews conducted and copies of the interview transcripts.

Table 13. *A table which outlines the three levels at which validity can be enhanced within case study research.*

Level	Measures Taken to Enhance Validity
Description - the techniques used to describe what was found	Both the semi-structured interview and focus groups were recorded onto tape cassette. Therefore I had the opportunity to revisit the verbal discourse, in order to produce more accurate transcripts. I listened to the interview and focus group recordings, whilst reviewing the accuracy of my transcripts on two additional occasions.
Interpretation - the techniques used to interpret the data	Thematic analysis involves the exploration of data at the explicit and implicit level (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore this relies upon the interpretation of the researcher. In order to enhance the transparency of my analysis and interpretations I have followed Yardley's (2000) guidance and I have included copies of the interview transcripts within the appendices and provided extracts to accompany my interpretations within the results section. I have attempted to further enhance the transparency of my interpretations within the research by providing examples of how I completed the process of thematic analysis, in relation to the SLT interview transcript (see table 11) and focus group transcripts (see table 12).
Application of theory - the theory utilised	The construct validity of the semi-structured interview with the SLT and focus groups was

to understand the data	enhanced by using an interview schedule and questions and prompts sheet which were developed from the key research questions and existing literature.

In addition Robson (2011) highlights that validity can be enhanced by embedding the data; a process I have conducted within the current research.

3.11.2 Reliability

Reliability can be described as the level of consistency regarding the measurement of a concept (Bryman, 2012). Robson (2011) states that the reliability of case study research can be enhanced by considering how data is collected and transcribed (see table 14). Yardley (2000) states that when conducting qualitative research, the researcher must reflect upon their presence during the process of data collection and the impact this may have had upon participants' responses; this includes the power dynamic between the researcher and the participants. Within the current research this was particularly important, due to the fact that I explored the views of young people. As previously indicated the employment of focus groups is believed to be beneficial in terms of encouraging students to talk more openly in front of the researcher, instead of providing what the student believes to be the adult's desired response (McQuillan, 2005; Krueger and Casey, 2000). Within this research I was also mindful of the impact of group dynamics upon the breadth of perspectives elicited within the group discussions. As a result I developed ground rules with the two participating groups, to help ensure that all participants had an opportunity to share their perspectives. I anticipated that this strategy encouraged students to feel comfortable in sharing their personal perspectives, further enhancing the reliability of the data elicited.

Table 14. *A table which outlines how the reliability of the research was enhanced.*

Consideration	Measures Taken to Enhance Reliability
Clarity regarding instructions and the purpose of the research	Instructions were provided consistently to members of the two participating groups. Instructions were provided in written form and read aloud to participants. This enhanced clarity about the role of the participant and the topics I was hoping to explore. Therefore this increased the likelihood that the participants' responses would be the same if the activity was repeated. However I acknowledge that the responses provided within the interview and focus groups are subjective and represent the beliefs of participants at a single point in time.
Conditions for data collection	I developed rapport with the participants and made it clear that they could ask questions or stop the interview at any point. This approach was adopted to enhance ethical practice but also increase the participants' willingness to express their personal views honestly. The focus group was conducted within a room located away from the main school building. Therefore participants were not distracted by the movement of other students.
Transcription and researcher bias	On completion of transcribing and analysing interview data retrieved from the SLT, I sent a copy of the interview transcript, my themes and the strategies to the head teacher and deputy head teacher. Both individuals were asked to verify the content of the transcript and the themes and strategies identified. This reduced the degree of researcher bias, as my interpretations could be challenged and removed by either member of the SLT. However both senior leaders were happy with the content of the interview transcript, themes and the strategies, consequently no changes were made. The questions presented within the semi-structured interview and questions and prompts form, were broad and open. This minimised the chance I could influence responses by participants, due to my prior knowledge.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1   Strategies Shared by the School's SLT

A number of strategies were identified within the transcribed data. These strategies were believed to be the most effective in raising pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour within the school (see appendix H). The Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher were happy with my interpretations, therefore no adjustments were made. In total there were 25 strategies relating to attainment, 17 strategies relating to attendance and 20 strategies relating to behaviour. However there was notable crossover between the three areas, suggesting a number of the strategies supported all three areas.

4.2   Thematic analysis of the data gathered from the SLT interview

Within the second element of my analysis of the SLT interview transcript, I conducted thematic analysis. I identified 4 overarching themes and 12 sub-themes, which I have presented in the thematic map below (see figure 4).

Figure 4. *A thematic map presenting the overarching themes and sub-themes I identified, as a result of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview transcript.*

Overarching Themes and Sub-Themes

Collaboration
- Forming Positive Relationships
- Listening to Students
- Collaborative Approach

Embracing Growth
- Reflective Practice
- Analysing Data
- Investing in Change

Supporting All Needs
- Identifying Students' Needs and Strengths
- Supporting the Whole Family

Engaging Students
- Motivating Students
- Central Focus on Learning
- High Expectations
- Preparing for the Next Steps

4.2.1 Theme 1: Collaboration

Ruth and Mary frequently highlighted the school's efforts to work collaboratively with students, families and outside agencies. Effective collaboration appeared to be underpinned by positive relationships.

- Sub-theme: Forming positive relationships

Ruth and Mary discussed how relationships were both established and maintained. These relationships were fostered during the parents' initial visit to the school.

'From right back to the pre-admission interviews, they come in and they get a tour of the school and they sit down with mainly you (Ruth) but occasionally it's one of the others. We have a chat and we make sure it's a pleasant chat. It's meeting and greeting and finding out the information that we need. It's a very pleasant, nice situation.' (Mary)

In addition to the support provided by the school to both pupils and families, Ruth and Mary outlined factors which contribute to the formation of positive relationships. One of which was the creation of an open and honest dialogue. Ruth reported that during initial meetings, Ruth acknowledges that the school may make mistakes, however emphasises the importance of parents maintaining an open dialogue with the school if they feel aggrieved.

'We really try to work hard to be transparent and open and honest with our parents. The thing I always tell them is that I will make mistakes.. they are not always going to be happy with me but please try and have that conversation with me and we have it between us and not in front of the child..' (Ruth)

- Sub-theme: Listening to students

Ruth and Mary frequently referred to the student voice. The SLT encourage members of the student voice (student council) to elicit the views of their peers, so they provide a perspective representative of their peers. The student voice is consulted before decisions are finalised.

'They've all got a say in everything that we do, because the student voice is a big part of it. We're a community, we can't just railroad something through, we sit and discuss it.' (Mary)

In addition students were consulted regarding rewards and incentives. One could argue this would enhance the desirability of rewards and incentives. For example, in order to motivate students to come into school on time, alternative options at breakfast were currently being considered. This followed on from the students' feedback.

'..we've done an audit on our breakfast club because one of the things that I think brings the kids in is because we feed them..We've just reviewed it and we're debating whether to do something else for breakfast club. Something that will get them here on time as well because punctuality can be an issue.' (Ruth)

'..we're debating whether to offer them a bacon sandwich.' (Mary)

- Sub-theme: Collaborative approach

The school's SLT work collaboratively with staff, students, parents and external agencies. As previously stated decisions are made after consulting with students, however the views of parents and wider school staff are also elicited beforehand.

'We might make a decision as senior leaders but nothing is changed without going through the student voice and staff team and parents and everybody is in agreement and then we go ahead with it.' (Ruth)

Mary stressed that the SLT attempt to provide all staff with an equal say within discussions about practice and proposed changes within the school. Mary believes this supports staff to feel empowered and creates a team atmosphere.

'If you met all of our team, you wouldn't be able to identify who is the head, the deputy, who is the new LSA, you wouldn't know the difference between a teacher, a HLTA and a LSA because we have empowered everybody..The reason we are outstanding is the team and the team being everybody.' (Mary)

4.2.2 Theme 2: Embracing Growth

Ruth and Mary indicated that the school engages in a continual cycle of self-improvement. This process is underpinned by staffs' openness to new ideas.

- Sub-theme: Reflective practice

Ruth and Mary highlighted that the SLT and wider school staff engage in self-reflective practice. This involves evaluating both if and why initiatives employed are effective or ineffective.

'..we have to be very aware in terms of monitoring what's effective and what's working, why it's working and why it's not.' (Ruth)

One example provided by Mary was regarding the employment of the 'Assessing Pupils' Progress' APP initiative, in order to develop more precise learning objectives and it supported staff to determine pupils' needs more specifically. The APP initiative was previously a government-led initiative, supporting schools to make greater judgements regarding the academic progress of pupils (Ofsted, 2011).

'Using APP we are able to break each statement down into very small steps and you can see 'that was the objective of the lesson, that was the focus of the lesson..his objectives were too wide. This way we're down to very small steps, everything was broken down so we could really monitor and drill down deeply to what the root problem was and move the children forward.' (Mary)

- Sub-theme: Analysing data

Ruth and Mary highlighted that the school closely monitors data. Data monitoring is used as a key tool for staff to identify areas of strength and need.

'..using data to identifying areas of strength, but particularly areas to target and then work with that as a team to think about how we are going to move the school forwards.' (Ruth)

One example of how data monitoring supports practice is the employment of the 'Sleuth' system. This system supports staff to identify patterns within undesirable pupil behaviour. Consequently potential barriers can be identified. Again this relates back to the school's objective to identify areas for improvement.

'We have a system called Sleuth which records behaviours. So if you are a parent and come in, I can tell you exactly what behaviours your child has been in, what lessons he has done it in, what members of staff he has done it with, what time of day he's done it, so we can be quite specific and catch bullying.' (Ruth)

The focus upon data monitoring was at first a barrier for several members of teaching staff. However training and support was provided to ensure greater confidence. By doing so this approach was then conducted by all teaching staff.

'Getting staff to keep records was initially a problem. To keep records and to use data..but they are now.' (Mary)

- Sub-theme: Investing in change

As previously stated Ruth and Mary report that staff are open to adapting current practice and engaging in new approaches. This openness to change is championed by the SLT.

'All the staff are very willing to take in anything that we try.' (Mary)

At times this may include partaking in pilots, despite restricted evidence regarding the effectiveness of the initiative. Therefore there is an element of risk involved. However the SLT explore whether the initiative is relevant to the school's objectives, if this is the case they feel this justifies the risk.

'Well the team are creative and we do take risks. Going back to when we were completing the assessment pupil progress pilot, we were the only special school on that pilot, no other special school was willing to go onto it.' (Mary)

The process of engaging with initiatives and research supports the school to further reflect upon their current practice and identify areas of need.

'Yes if there is an initiative that we think will benefit us, then we will go for it. If anybody wants to come in, like yourself, they can come in because from it, it makes us think about what we do and evaluate where we are.' (Mary)

4.2.3 Theme 3: Supporting All Needs

- Sub-theme: Identifying students' needs and strengths

Ruth and Mary highlighted that students will often arrive at the school with unidentified needs. Although assessment has previously occurred, a comprehensive understanding of their needs is often absent. This is believed to have a notable impact on their ability to access the curriculum. External agencies support the school to identify the unidentified needs.

'The biggest barrier is the fact they have lots of speech and language difficulties, which haven't usually been identified before they come here and that prevents a lot of what we do..Their basic needs are identified but the really smaller needs, the things that are preventing their learning haven't..' (Mary)

Ruth stated that staff collaborate to identify the students' strengths. This enables staff to build upon the success students experience in one area, in order to raise attainment in subjects they find more challenging.

'..we're really, really focused on work scrutiny and whole school work scrutiny, so that all the staff are very involved in looking at the children's work in all areas because sometimes some of the children.. are working at a really incredible level at reading, writing and spelling in one subject and then they get to another subject and they are barely picking up a pen. It's about..making sure they are confident and able to generalise those skills.' (Ruth)

At times the student's emotional well-being may provide a barrier to learning. However the school attempt to identify these needs and provide therapeutic support within school.

'We have a counsellor or Reiki healing. That helps them to refocus and move forward.' (Ruth)

- Sub-theme: Supporting the whole family

'We deal with any of their problems, they know we deal with any of their problems.' (Mary)

The school attempts to identify and address the wider needs of students and their families at an early stage. One could describe this support as holistic. One way in which this is achieved is through the CAF process.

'..we are very much involved in..CAF, in terms of early identification of need and working very closely with families..putting in interventions for the family which will then make a difference to the kids. So for example in the past we had one boy whose father had died and whose mother was getting into a lot of debt..we got very involved with mum and the family and with the bereavement issues, the debt issues and the housing issues and mum's depression. For this young man, he was then able to come back into school and do what he was supposed to be doing.' (Ruth)

The examples provided by Ruth and Mary often related to direct support for parents. The support provided appeared extensive. However the SLT believed factors such as financial and housing difficulties and parental mental health were a barrier to engagement for both parents and students. A home-school liaison team is employed within school, consisting of two members of staff, who play a significant role in supporting the needs of parents.

'I often introduce them to the home-school liaison officer, because we find there are often housing issues or there are benefits issues, we help them with that. We have people who we move forward with their DLA or benefits advice.' (Ruth)

The school also facilitates networking to occur between parents. Therefore additional support and empathy can be accessed.

'We have monthly meetings, where they can come and, like a drop-in cafe for all our parents. We have one for our autistic spectrum parents and the networking is about helping each other, giving each other ideas and also getting some help.' (Ruth)

4.2.4 Theme 4: Engaging Students

A key theme which emerged throughout the interview was the school's focus around learning. Although I am aware that I was attempting to explore how the school raises student attainment, the SLT referred back to student learning throughout the interview. Ruth and Mary identified a number of factors which support students to engage and maximise their achievements within school.

- Sub-theme: Motivating students

Although Ruth and Mary were eager to stress the importance of learning, extra-curricular activities remained important. These activities are believed to motivate students to attend and engage with staff. A broad range of activities are provided.

The school also highlighted the extrinsic rewards available to students. However students who did not achieve their targets still received opportunities to participate in self-selected activities at the end of the week. However they will receive less time to

participate in their chosen activities. This strategy moves away from an all or nothing approach.

'.. throughout the week they have a traditional token economy system and on a Friday afternoon if they've met their target they can choose from a range of options, food tech, design and technology, ICT, art and sometimes we go bowling. Or there is football or there is trampolining or there is golf. So we offer these things and if they haven't made it they do work. So there is either double options or there is work and an option. So they are not completely kept out of it, but if they want to do the double option then they earn their points.' (Ruth)

- Sub-theme: Central focus on learning

Ruth and Mary appeared eager to emphasise the school's determination to focus upon learning. This appears to be the school's primary focus. Although they report that extensive support is needed to remove potential barriers to learning, it is anticipated that this process will support students to refocus their attention on achievement. However Mary states that an appropriate curriculum underpins positive behaviour. Therefore the SLT appear to view this as a two-way relationship.

'To me if we don't get the curriculum right, we can't expect their behaviour to be right.' (Mary)

One example of how learning is emphasised is the detention process. Although detentions are issued, the school's message to students and parents, is that detentions are simply an opportunity for students to catch-up with work they have

missed due to inappropriate behaviour. Therefore that time is spent constructively. One could view this approach as providing students with a second chance to learn.

'So it's not a punishment, it's about that hour where we can catch up on the curriculum and find out what the problems are.' (Ruth)

Following her discussions with leaders from other SEBD special schools, Mary concludes that schools can become preoccupied with behaviour. This preoccupation appears to be itself a barrier to achievement. Mary identified that supporting the school to focus upon learning, led to their grade of 'outstanding'.

'Their focus, because their children had behaviour problems they focused on behaviour. They didn't focus on the curriculum. .That's the danger with our situation, with our schools. They all talk about behaviour, behaviour, behaviour, they don't talk about learning and that's what the children are here to do. We're supposed to teach these children, they're supposed to learn and however they learn, we've got to create an atmosphere of learning in the classroom..' (Mary)

- Sub-theme: High expectations

Building upon the school's focus on learning, is their expectation that students will achieve and fulfil their potential. Mary's comments implied that students must be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential. Additionally providing greater opportunities to achieve should enhance the student's motivation to engage.

'You can't expect them to do basket weaving and for them to feel the same. We've got to raise their expectations, their self-respect. If they can go out and meet their friends and curse and swear about we've done Charles Dickens at school, well so

have they. But a lot of schools don't do it..Their children are the same as ours, but they are doing entry level exams. Whereas ours we just expect, we do GCSEs and we do higher GCSEs as well, because we just expect that they will achieve. To give them the same opportunity as every other child out there, every child matters, so therefore they should be given the same education and we give them that education. ..That's what makes us successful, that's what makes them want to come' (Mary)

- Sub-theme: Preparing for next steps

Although Ruth and Mary were mindful that students often experience SEN in addition to SEBD, they also stated that the school aimed to ensure that students have the best chance to succeed when moving onto college or employment.

'I don't think some of these children are learning enough to be marketable for when they leave school. Our children all are marketable, they either go to college, or they get a job, they come back to write their new CV for a job. In the last few years I think we've only had one NEET [Not in Education, Employment or Training]. *He wasn't NEET for long.' (Mary)*

Again this builds upon the theme of high expectations, as staff share an expectation that students will move onto college and achieve their aspirations.

'..it's about keeping them in education and being very focused upon college and aspirations and where they want to go.' (Ruth)

4.3   Thematic Analysis of the Data Gathered within the Two Student Focus Group Discussions

My thematic analysis of the two focus group interview transcripts, led to the identification of four overarching themes and 10 sub-themes, which I have presented in the thematic map below (see figure 5). I will now discuss the overarching themes and sub-themes, using interview extracts to enhance the reader's understanding of my interpretations.

Figure 5. *A thematic map presenting the overarching themes and sub-themes I identified, as a result of the thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts.*
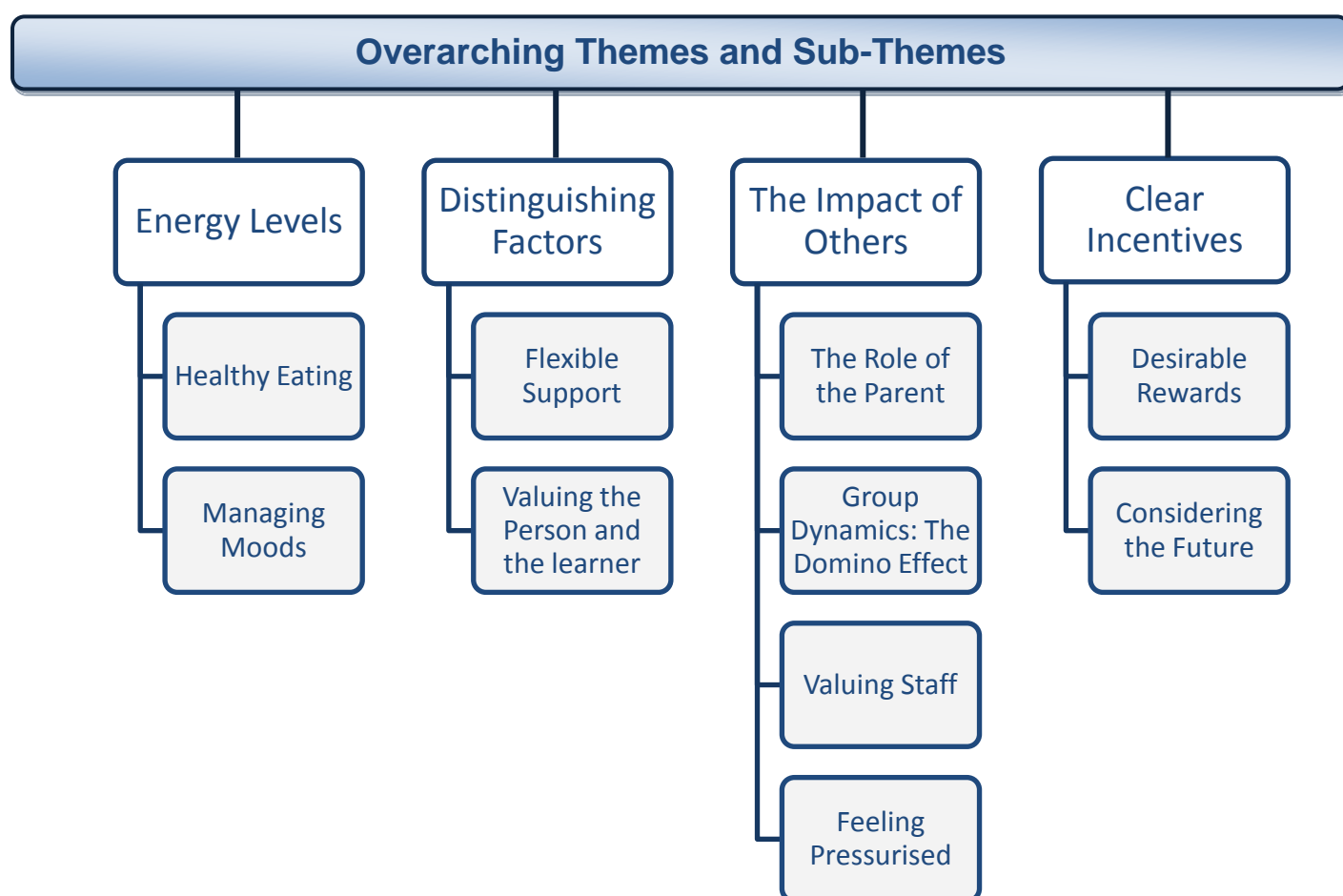
4.3.1 Theme 1: Energy Levels

- Sub-theme: Healthy eating

Year 10 and 11 students identified that their diet impacted upon their energy levels. For most students it appears that their diet can have a detrimental impact upon their behaviour.

'I don't understand yeah, you go through a whole morning, you eat bare crap at lunch time and then you just be hyper for the rest of the afternoon.' (Student A, Year 11)

Students also reported that they feel lethargic in the morning and identified that this may be due to the fact they do not eat breakfast.

'Most of us in this school, I doubt we have breakfast in the morning..' (Student A, Year 10)

'So our brains aren't as active as they should be.' (Student D, Year 10)

- Sub-theme: Managing moods

Students also acknowledged that their mood and the mood of other pupils can impact on classroom behaviour.

'How everyone's reacting.' (Student A, Year 11)

'What mood everyone is in.' (Student B, Year 11)

'Well say like after break, everyone is hyper because we've been playing football and having a joke with their mates, then it can get a bit rowdy.' (Student C, Year 11)

If students observe boisterous behaviour, this appears to directly impact upon on their own levels of arousal.

'If someone sees a fight, they get adrenaline.' (Student D, Year 10)

4.3.2 Theme 2: Distinguishing Factors

- Sub-theme: Flexible support

Pupils reported that the reduced number of students within each class was advantageous. School staff were consequently on hand to provide support, whenever it was required. This was highlighted as a noticeable difference to the students' experiences within mainstream school.

'Because there is less people in the class and there's more help, you're basically getting one to one.' (Student G, Year 11)

Staff are perceived by students as providing a flexible approach in terms of how behaviour is managed within school. Staff will investigate what has happened, as opposed to rigidly enforcing the school's behaviour policy.

'Well we get given a pink slip because we have walked out of class, but normally if you tell them you are going outside to calm down or that it's too noisy they normally just get rid of the pink slip and send someone from around the school to help you' (Student C, Year 11)

- Sub-theme: Valuing the person and the learner

Students reported that they felt staff held a genuine interest in their lives, not simply focusing upon their academic progress.

'..most of the staff here, they will come and talk to you, they will not just say get on with your work, they will have a full conversation with you, how was your weekend? What did you do in the holidays? It doesn't feel like a school all of the time, it feels more like a youth centre.' (Student A, Year 11)

Students' responses implied that staff demonstrated unconditional positive regard towards all students. This was particularly evident when students made mistakes within school.

'No matter what you do they will always give you another chance.' (Student A, Year 11)

4.3.3 Theme 3: The Impact of Others

- Sub-theme: The role of the parent

Students from both years 10 and 11 discussed the parental influence upon their behaviour and attendance. Students highlighted that they were motivated by calls home to their parents highlighting their achievements.

'Say if you get good grades yeah, they will help us tell our parents about how well we are doing.' (Student A, Year 10)

However they were also motivated to attend, due to the fact they did not want the school to contact their parents. Therefore increased parental involvement, appears to act as an incentive and a deterrent.

'They call your mother.' (Student G, Year 11)

- Sub-theme: Group dynamics: The domino effect

Students' behaviour and their capacity to learn are impacted upon by the behaviour of their peers. This factor was unanimously reported by both years 10 and 11.

'..the only one reason I don't really like being in school, it's hard to get any work done, I've been told that I can achieve pretty high and there's other people in my class that can do that as well, but other people in my class are smart but they don't want to show it..' (Student C, Year 11)

'Some people like to annoy each other and that affects behaviour and there is visible rivalry in the class and the kids are just trying to out-do each other for behaviour. (Student E, Year 10)

Pupils also reported that the distractions in class were often caused by particular individuals. When these individuals were absent, the classroom dynamic improved.

- Sub-theme: Valuing staff

Students discussed the caring nature of staff. This was clearly valued by a number of students. Again students emphasised how this support was greater than their

experiences within mainstream schools. Staff were readily available and their support appeared genuine to students.

'So say if you have something that's really important to you but it's not important to the staff, the staff will go out of their way to help you' (Student A, Year 11)

'The teachers are much nicer, in a mainstream school they don't really care as much but the teachers here they really do care.' (Student C, Year 11)

Student A (Year 11), believes the staff are central to the school's success and implied that student behaviour would be extremely challenging if the staff were less skilled.

'Without the staff the school would be nothing, for me personally.' (Student A, Year 11)

'Well that's what makes a school.' (Student C, Year 11)

'No but what I mean by that is, if we didn't have good teachers like we do, it would just be a mad house.' (Student A, Year 11)

- Sub-theme: Feeling pressurised

Year 10 students reported that they felt pressurised to achieve by teaching staff, older students and the government. They were conscious that without good GCSE grades, their future opportunities would be reduced.

'I think it's the pressure of the government..cause you know you are going to do shit because you are at this school, there is a pressure on you to get better grades.' (Student E, Year 10)

Pupils reported that peer mentoring, a strategy designed to support and motivate pupils, can have negative consequences. Pupils felt that the encouragement and guidance provided by staff and pupils could be taken too far. However the students did not elaborate on how excessive pressure impacted upon their attainment or engagement.

'The thing is even if they don't do their work, they [Year 11 students] bully us into doing our work, so we have to do it anyway.' (Student A, Year 10)

'Some teachers allow you to do it in your own time, but other teachers will push you too far.' (Student E, Year 10)

4.3.4 Theme 4: Clear Incentives

- Sub-theme: Desirable rewards

The students spoke positively about the rewards available within school. Students were able to select from a number of rewards. Therefore this enhanced the chance that rewards available were of interest to the students. Food appeared to be a popular incentive for the participants.

'If you get a certain amount of points, if you get 100 per cent, then you are able to do options like computers, food tech, DT or art or something like that.' (Student D, Year 10)

'Yeah we have a tuck shop as well, we can get free snacks and stuff.' (Student A, Year 10)

- Sub-theme: Considering the future

Students were asked to identify the factors which motivated them to engage in learning activities, attend and behave. Participants from both years 10 and 11 highlighted that they were motivated to do well, as they wanted to progress onto FE college or have greater employment opportunities.

'..so we might be able to go to a good sixth form or college.' (Student A, Year 10)

'And to get a good job.' (Student D, Year 10)

'The more I focus, the more opportunities I will have when I leave school, if I achieve 5 A to C's I can pursue the career I want when I'm leaving school..' (Student E, Year 11)

Students also identified that they were motivated by the circumstances of individuals they have observed both inside and outside of school. The participants appeared to interpret individuals' circumstances, as a consequence of reduced engagement within school.

'You will look at someone on the street when you are going back home.. there are not a lot of rich people around here and you will laugh and then you realise that could be you if you don't listen in school.' (Student A, Year 10)

4.4   Embedding the data

In order to answer the four key research questions, I will embed the data retrieved from the school's SLT and participating pupils. At this stage it is important to note that the participating pupils primarily focused on the strategies which support their behaviour within school. In addition the pupils often discussed on-going barriers, in

addition to the successful strategies. Consequently this may impact upon the process of embedding the data.

4.4.1 What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil attainment, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

When asked about the features which enhanced pupil attainment, the majority of the discussions shared by pupils often referred to features which improved or reduced their engagement levels. I will therefore discuss these features when focusing upon pupil behaviour (within section 4.4.3). However there were two points of discussion within the two focus groups which relate to the strategies shared by the SLT, the content of this section will therefore largely refer solely to the responses provided by the SLT.

Although the SLT did not refer explicitly to the term 'Quality First' teaching within the semi-structured interview, they did refer to a number of strategies which are highlighted within existing research evidence as enhancing teaching practice and pupil attainment. For example the SLT highlighted that the school engaged within a pilot study of the assessing pupil progress (APP) initiative and due to the positive outcomes from the pilot, have now adopted APP within day to day practice. The SLT believed APP has supported staff to provide a curriculum for students which is more appropriate for their current levels of understanding, therefore enhancing the quality of differentiation taking place by staff. By providing a curriculum which is more precisely differentiated, the SLT believed that students would experience greater

success within the classroom, which would have a positive impact upon the students' self esteem.

The SLT stated that in addition to providing a differentiated curriculum, teaching staff also provide a curriculum which is intellectually stimulating, where staff attempt to provide a curriculum which is age-appropriate and reflective of the topics covered by the students' peers within mainstream schools. As a result of the commonalities between the curriculum offered within the SEBD special school and the mainstream secondary schools within the Borough, students could participate more in discussions with their peers outside of school regarding their educational experiences. For example, the SLT reported that students studied similar texts within English literature, to their peers who attend mainstream schools. The SLT believed this would reduce the potentially negative impact of educating students within a specialist setting away from their wider peer group, such as feeling different from others.

The SLT also highlighted the school focused upon providing a curriculum which captured the interests of students. The SLT stated that the pupils' interests were incorporated within day-to-day teaching but also during lessons in which students could select activities they wished to complete, the school refers to these sessions as options. In order to gain the opportunity to select from a series of optional sessions on a Friday afternoon, students must accumulate points during the week, which they receive for positive behaviour and academic achievement. Students referred to the options reward scheme during the two focus group discussions. It appeared that both focus groups referred positively to the activities provided for students on a Friday afternoon therefore enhancing the students' motivation to acquire the required points to select from the activities available.

The SLT highlighted that one to one tutoring has a prominent impact on raising pupil attainment, as this strategy enabled staff to support the specific learning needs of the pupil, such as dyslexia. The SLT stated one to one tutoring occurred outside of the classroom, as students could at times become self-conscious of the support they received within class. Although students did not explicitly refer to timetabled sessions of one to one tutoring, the students did refer to the enhanced staff to pupil ratio which was present within the school. As a result students spoke positively about the availability of staff to provide more intensive support within the classroom. This staff to pupil ratio compared favourably to their prior experiences within mainstream schools. In addition students also reported that support staff often provided additional help when students found the classroom too noisy and chose to complete learning tasks outside of the classroom.

During the semi-structured interview the SLT emphasised that pupil attainment was central to the school's practice and decision making. The school's emphasis upon pupil attainment was also reflected within the school's levels of expectations for student achievement. The SLT emphasised the school staffs' expectations and desire for all students to progress onto college or employment at the conclusion of their education within the school. The school staffs' high expectations appeared to have been communicated to the pupils who participated within the focus group discussions. A number of pupils shared an understanding of the grades they required in order to make a successful transition onto employment of further education. However at times the pupils felt pressurised by staff and their parents to achieve C grades at GCSE. Although pupils appeared to view this perceived pressure negatively, it remained unclear as to whether this impacted pupil attainment positively or negatively.

As previously stated significant crossover occurred between the strategies shared relating to pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour. The SLT emphasised the school's appreciation that a number of barriers experienced by students could impact upon their ability to both access learning tasks and concentrate within the classroom. These barriers could relate to the students' SEN and the additional needs of the student's family, outside of school. The SLT identified that a large proportion of students arrived at school experiencing unidentified SEN. As a result further assessment was conducted by school staff in order to develop a greater understanding of students' needs and subsequently provide more extensive and appropriate in-class support and interventions. However the SLT also stated that they were aware of the complex difficulties experienced by students outside of school, relating to their emotional well-being and their family's financial needs. A number of participating students highlighted that school staff demonstrated an interest in students' lives and their overall well-being, as opposed to simply focusing upon their academic achievements. The SLT initiated CAFs in order to provide a framework of support for families who appeared to be experiencing difficulties.

4.4.2 What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil attendance, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

The SLT reported that a key strategy for enhancing pupil attendance within the school was first day calling, where school staff contact parents or carers when it becomes apparent that a student has failed to arrive at school. The SLT highlighted the key role of the home-school liaison team who conduct this task. In addition, home-visits were also deemed important by the SLT. This strategy is employed

when parents do not answer or return phone calls made by staff. It therefore appears that the school's collaboration with parents is believed to be highly significant in improving attendance. Although the pupils did not explicitly refer to these strategies by name, pupils stated that they were motivated to attend as they did not want the school to contact their parents. This suggests that home-school collaboration, acts as a deterrent for pupil absence.

A further deterrent for pupil absence referred to by students within the two focus groups, was the potential threat of legal action and financial sanctions. Students were aware that low attendance could result in financial sanctions for their parents; a sanction they were keen to avoid. However legal action was not referred to by the SLT. Within the interview with the SLT, a broad theme of supporting families was evident and the use of legal action may conflict with this philosophy.

The breakfast club was highlighted by the SLT as a key factor in motivating pupils to attend and arrive on time. The students highlighted breakfast as a valued incentive provided by the school. The SLT also identified that they were in the process of adapting the food available within breakfast club, in order to heighten this incentive. This adjustment followed on from feedback elicited through the student council, as it became evident to school staff that students were buying food on the way to school, delaying their arrival.

4.4.3 What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil behaviour, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

Students within the two focus groups believed that student behaviour was enhanced by the emotional warmth of staff and the establishment of positive relationships within school. A number of students identified that the emotional warmth provided by staff was particularly notable in comparison to their previous experiences within mainstream schools and prior to their arrival at the SEBD special school. The SLT also referred to the importance of relationships between members of staff, staff and students and staff and parents. The SLT strongly believed students within the school were aware of the support available to them and that school staff would always strive to support students' academic and wider needs relating to their welfare and emotional well-being. The SLT also emphasised the importance of establishing positive relationships with parents from the onset of their child's placement at the school, demonstrating awareness that parents may have encountered difficulties with their child's previous school. Therefore the SLT were eager to establish a positive start with new parents.

An overarching theme of consistency emerged across the data. The SLT emphasised the regular reinforcement of the schools' four key rules, which they believed were clearly understood by all pupils. Pupils identified that staff consistently provided support within class, even when they were disruptive earlier within the lesson. Similarly the SLT also highlighted that the students understood that their needs would always be supported within school.

The school's rewards and options scheme was identified by the students and the SLT as an influential strategy for enhancing behaviour. A wide range of rewards were obtainable and staff consulted with the student council to enhance the desirability of the rewards available.

Within the focus group discussions, students often highlighted barriers in addition to the strategies which enhanced pupil behaviour. The students stated that the behaviour of their peers was inconsistent and impacted negatively upon both their own behaviour and their ability to focus in class.

4.4.4 What factors do the senior leadership team and pupils believe are the most significant in achieving 'outstanding' practice within an SEBD special school?

The SLT and students were asked to discuss the factors which contributed to the school achieving an 'outstanding' grade from Ofsted. The support provided by school staff appeared to be the key factor for both the students and SLT. This support was holistic and recurrent. The students stated that the on-going support provided by the school staff was central to the school's success. However the SLT also highlighted that staff were supportive of each other. This enabled the SLT to develop a collaborative team, particularly during the process of decision making.

The SLT also believe that the school's success was underpinned by their central focus upon learning. The SLT acknowledged that the behaviour of students could be challenging at times. However they hold the perspective that undesirable behaviour is not a sufficient excuse for a student failing to a) access an age-appropriate curriculum and b) achieve their academic potential. The SLT believe their focus on learning helps to foster high expectations throughout the school. The SLT identified that a key objective of the school is to provide all students with an opportunity to go on to further education or training and make a positive transition into adulthood. This focus upon the future was also evident within the focus group discussions. Students

stated that they wanted to achieve good grades and secure employment in the future. This appeared to have a positive influence on the students' levels of engagement within school and effort within class.

In addition the SLT highlighted that the school engage in a process of reflective practice. Consequently staff are aware of their strengths and shortcomings and are eager to engage with schemes or initiatives which will help them to achieve their objectives for improvement.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1   Introduction to Discussion

The objective of the current research was to explore effective practice within a secondary SEBD special school judged to be 'outstanding', in order to identify the factors believed to be most effective in enhancing pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour. Additionally, I also attempted to identify the key factors which were believed to be most significant in the school achieving 'outstanding' practice. Within this chapter I will discuss the results of the research in relation to the existing literature outlined within chapter 2 and the 4 key research questions.

5.2   What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil attainment, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

The strategies frequently referred to by the SLT, related to effective teaching practice. Teaching practice has previously been identified as a key factor in ensuring effective practice within mainstream schools (Dimmock, 2012; Smith, 2011).

Spalding et al. (2001) previously conducted research regarding effective practice within an SEBD special school. They identified that the school must provide a curriculum which is both stimulating and appropriate for the pupil's current level of understanding. As a consequence, it is believed pupil's levels of engagement will increase and their self-esteem will be protected. The SLT emphasised the importance of providing a curriculum which was intellectually stimulating, engaging and age-appropriate. The SLT emphasised that pupils were entitled to a school

curriculum which included a broad range of subjects and similar topics to those provided to students attending mainstream schools. For example, Mary (SLT) stated that the students study Charles Dickens within English lessons, in preparation for their GCSE examinations.

Differentiation was identified by the SLT as an effective strategy for raising pupil attainment. As a result adaptations are made to the learning task, the level of support provided, learning materials and resources and/or the outcome of a task, in order to help ensure that the learning task is achievable (Dunne et al., 2007). Previous guidance regarding how to support pupils experiencing SEBD highlights the importance of differentiation (Ewen and Topping, 2012; Taylor, 2011). By providing achievable learning tasks, teaching staff support the development and preservation of pupils' self-esteem. Appropriate differentiation appears to be further enhanced within school, through Assessing Pupil Progress (APP). APP is a structured approach to assessment, which supports teachers to make more accurate assessments and consequently identify the appropriate next steps in learning for individual pupils (DCSF, 2009*c*). APP was identified by the SLT as an effective strategy utilised within school.

The focus upon protecting pupils' self-esteem is particularly notable when one considers the negative school experiences pupils may have experienced prior to attending the SEBD special school. The SLT highlighted that a large proportion of pupils arrive at the school with unidentified SEN. As a result teaching staff at the pupil's previous school may not have fully accounted for the pupil's SEN within their planning and teaching. Consequently the pupil's academic difficulties may have been further exacerbated. This supports previous research conducted by Barnardo's (2012) who highlighted that pupils experiencing SEBD may also experience

recognised and unidentified underlying needs. The most common unidentified need was reported to be speech and language difficulties. One may have anticipated this finding, if one considers Benner et al.'s (2002) finding that 71% of pupils with SEBD were found to experience a clinically significant language deficit. As a result, the school conducts further assessments in order to develop a greater understanding of the pupils' needs. This may again support the school to provide effective support and an appropriate curriculum (Ofsted, 2010). Participating pupils identified that they have received significantly greater support in comparison to their experiences within mainstream school. This may be due to the higher staff to pupil ratio.

Within this section, I have largely discussed the perspectives of the SLT. Although I attempted to explore the pupils' perspectives regarding the most effective strategies in raising pupil attainment, the pupils often focused upon the barriers they experienced within the classroom. This largely revolved around the undesirable behaviour of their peers, a factor I will discuss further within section 5.4. One could argue that the pupils' tendency to recurrently focus upon this topic indicates that the behaviour of peers has a significant impact on pupils' abilities to concentrate within class.

A large proportion of strategies the SLT believe impact positively upon pupil attainment appear to fall within a traditional cycle of planning, teaching and assessment (Haydn, 2013). However within the current school it appears that in order for planning to be effective, teachers must account for three additional factors:-

- Provide engaging content
- Account for the SEN of pupils
- Aim to protect the pupils' self-esteem.

5.3 What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil attendance, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

Responses from the SLT and pupils indicated that effective communication with parents has the most positive impact upon attendance. This was predominantly achieved through first day calling and home visits. Although first day calling has been advocated by the government as an effective strategy for almost two decades, it is a time-consuming process (Reid, 2002). The school employs two full-time members of staff to conduct home-school liaison and monitor attendance and therefore has greater capacity for these tasks. Participating pupils indicated that first day calling discouraged them from truanting, as they wanted to avoid the potential consequences of their parents finding out. Additionally the SLT reported that home-school communication is further enhanced through the early establishment of positive home-school relationships. This approach reflects Roffey's (2002*a*) recommendation that schools who engage in positive communication with parents at an early stage, will enhance parents' receptiveness to engage with schools when challenging situations arise, such as low attendance.

A number of students also discussed the potential impact of poor attendance upon their parents. More specifically students demonstrated an awareness that if students consistently failed to attend school, this could result in financial sanctions for parents. Therefore the threat of legal action appeared to act as a deterrent for a number of students within the group. Taylor (2012*b*) recommends legal action is employed to address poor attendance as a last resort. The SLT did not refer to the employment of

legal action within the interview and instead focused on strategies which were fundamentally supportive.

As previously reported by Reid (2002) and Simpson (2001), the school's breakfast club appears to have a positive impact on the pupils' motivation to attend. This was indicated by the SLT and participating pupils. The school have traditionally provided food which is healthy and corresponds with guidance within the School Food Plan (Dimbleby and Vincent, 2013). However in recent months the SLT have explored the views of pupils through the school council, in order to identify if the food provided is desirable for a wider proportion of students. The student council recommended that bacon sandwiches would appeal to students who currently purchase such food on their way to school, contributing to their late arrival. Students were reported to purchase bacon sandwiches and energy drinks on the way to school from the local shop. Due to the length of time it has taken the SLT to implement the suggestion put forward by the school council, one could question the degree to which the SLT is prepared to act upon the suggestions put forward by the students. However due to SLT's commitment to healthy eating, one could also argue that the suggestion for bacon sandwiches to be included within the breakfast menu, may have led the SLT to search for alternative solutions in raising student punctuality and attendance. The SLT's response within the interview would suggest that they may now be willing to compromise their stance upon healthy foods and provide food which the pupils have requested, in addition to the healthy foods which were already provided. Despite acknowledging the negative impact unhealthy food can have on their behaviour, it appears that pupils either continue to eat unhealthy foods for breakfast or do not eat breakfast due to time constraints.

5.4 What specific strategies do the senior leadership team and pupils feel are the most effective at raising pupil behaviour, within an 'outstanding' SEBD special school?

All participating pupils agreed that the key barrier to pupils' engaging in desirable behaviour within class was the presence of disruptive pupils. A number of pupils within each of the two focus groups reported that disruptive behaviour reduced their concentration levels within the classroom. The participating pupils from year 10, all agreed with student D's opinion that disruptive peer behaviour enhanced the pupils' levels of adrenaline, which impacted upon both their own behaviour and their attention within class. Within the 1981 Education Act, a pupil's place within a specialist setting received enhanced justification if their behaviour impacted upon the education of their peers. Therefore it is anticipated that the behaviour of pupils within SEBD special schools may at times have a negative impact upon the learning of their peers. Within the current research the SLT and pupils highlighted a number of strategies which are believed to enhance pupils' behaviour within school. However undesirable behaviour demonstrated by pupils within the school appears to be an on-going difficulty, which impacts upon their peers' ability to concentrate and engage within class. The impact of a pupil's behaviour on the behaviour of their peers, was not discussed within the interview held with the SLT. Within existing guidance the impact of undesirable behaviour upon peers predominantly focuses upon the impact of bullying as opposed to the distraction behaviour can cause (Hallam and Rogers, 2008).

The responses provided by the SLT and participating pupils indicate that the primary strategy for engaging pupils within the school appears to be the establishment of positive relationships with pupils and their parents. This supports previous findings

by Spalding et al. (2001) and Chapman (2008). Pupils also reported that staff adopted a caring approach towards individuals, as opposed to simply focusing upon their academic achievements. They believed this caring approach was significantly higher than the care experienced within their previous mainstream setting. Evans (2010) previously identified that teachers within mainstream schools find it difficult to find opportunities within the school day to repair fragmented relationships with pupils. Due to the higher staff to pupil ratio, staff may have greater capacity within the current setting to reconnect with pupils. However alternative interpretations could be made; for example, one could also argue that staff within the SEBD special school, recognise the importance of positive relationships.

The SLT also emphasised the importance of establishing positive relationships with parents. Roffey (2002*a*) states that home-school communication is often reduced for pupils experiencing SEBD, as schools may often contact parents when the pupil has engaged in undesirable behaviour. Campbell (2011) identified that it may be difficult for secondary schools to re-engage with parents who have previously experienced negative experiences with their child's previous school. The SLT also highlighted the geographical location of parents was a potential barrier for home-school communication. A large number of pupils travelled to the school via transport. The school addresses these barriers through 3 key approaches:-

1) Establishing positive links with parents at the earliest opportunity

2) Supporting the needs of parents

3) Home visits

The SLT meets with parents prior to the pupil starting at the school. The objective of this meeting is to establish positive links with parents at the earliest opportunity and

a culture of honesty is promoted. The SLT appear mindful that parents' experiences within the pupil's previous school may have been challenging. This positively framed meeting may enhance parents' willingness to engage with their child's new school (Roffey, 2002*a*; 2002*b*).

The school also works with families to identify barriers for the family as a whole, in addition to the SEN of the child. Parental engagement has been found to be reduced for parents who experience low self-esteem (Campbell, 2011). The SLT identified that the school works with parents at an individual level to support a range of needs. This may include the implementation of a CAF. However the school also facilitates parenting groups, which are designed to empower parents and enhance their parenting skills. One could argue that this also provides parents with an opportunity to communicate and share ideas with other parents, who may have experienced similar needs and challenges. This holistic support, builds upon Feiler's (2010) belief that effective home-school collaboration will result in support for families and the school. By supporting parents' own needs, this may further enhance parents' willingness to engage with the school to support the needs of the child.

Finally the school overcomes potential barriers to positive home-school communication by employing pastoral staff, who focus exclusively upon home-school liaison. Drayne (2014) has highlighted that pupils who attend special schools are often the most socially excluded, as they are required to attend schools which are located outside of their local community. Home visits are regularly conducted by the home-school liaison and this may help to overcome the fact that parents are not located within walking distance from the school.

A theme of consistency emerged within the data. The SLT reported that the school's four key rules were understood by all pupils and applied by staff:-

1) Nobody touches or hurts anybody

2) Nobody says mean or nasty things

3) Nobody takes or touches anyone else's things

4) Everybody works in lessons

A number of pupils stated that the support they received within school was consistent, irrespective of their prior behaviour. Additionally the SLT believe that pupils are fully aware that the school will always do their best to meet the needs of the pupil. Therefore it appears this consistency has supported the development of a trusting relationship between staff and pupils. Previous guidance advocates the employment of a consistent approach within SEBD special schools (Taylor, 2011; Spalding et al., 2001). However Spalding et al. (2001) also highlighted that school staff must consider the evolving needs of their pupils. Within the current research the SLT emphasised that their success was partly due to their ability to reflect on current practice and address shortcomings. Therefore school staff appear to carefully balance consistency and flexibility; ensuring that practice which is deemed successful is employed consistently and ineffective practice is revised.

The employment of rewards has previously received criticism due to their short-term impact (Kohn, 1993). However within the current research, pupils identified that rewards were a key factor in motivating them to engage within lessons. The SLT also emphasised the significance of rewards and incentives within school. They reported that a number of rewards are available for pupils to achieve and regular consultation with the school council is conducted, in order to identify more desirable rewards. This

finding builds upon Capstick's (2005) research findings, in which pupils' assigned significant value to specific rewards. This suggests that desirable rewards do enhance pupils' motivation to engage within schools; however schools must identify what rewards pupils' desire.

5.5 What factors do the senior leadership team and pupils believe are the most significant in achieving 'outstanding' practice within an SEBD special school?

The SLT identified 3 key factors which they believe are paramount in supporting the school to achieve 'outstanding' practice:-

1) Engaging in reflective practice

2) Developing a collaborative approach

3) Maintaining a central focus upon learning

Participating pupils also identified that the extensive support they receive from school staff was the key factor which made the school outstanding.

The SLT state that they adopt an autonomous approach to school improvement and consistently reflect upon their current practice in order to identify areas in which they can improve. This proactive approach to school improvement is currently advocated by the coalition government (West, 2012). However despite the emphasis upon independent school improvement, Spalding et al. (2001) believe that schools may find it difficult to identify opportunities for change. Instead they believe that schools may become too immersed within areas of difficulty and subsequently external consultants may provide new insights. The SLT highlighted that the school engages with LA agencies, in order to further understand the underlying needs of the pupils. Supporting agencies within the LA such as the EPS were not reported to support the

school to recognise areas of potential development or improvement. However the school have frequently engaged in a range of pilot initiatives, such as APP and have also engaged with the national agency Achievement for All, which has supported the school to reflect upon and develop existing practice.

The SLT emphasised that the school's staff were a collective team. The SLT reported that there was a collaborative approach to decision making. All members of staff were included when proposed changes to current practice were deliberated. Everard et al. (2004) state that individuals included within the process of decision making, will often demonstrate greater commitment within the implementation of changes to practice. In addition, the SLT also emphasised that school staff provided extensive support to each other. This is particularly important when one considers the potential impact pupils with SEBD can have upon staffs' emotional well-being (Nelson et al., 2001). As well as the support provided to each other, the support provided to pupils was recognised by the pupils as a central factor within the schools' recognised success. They identified that the recurrent support they receive from staff distinguishes this school, from the mainstream schools they have previously attended.

The SLT reported that within their experience, SEBD special schools they have liaised with and located elsewhere within England can allow undesirable behaviour to become a justification for reduced learning opportunities and low expectations. However within their school, all pupils are expected to achieve their full academic potential. Consequently all staff are reported to hold high expectations and aspirations for pupils within school; providing the support and learning opportunities which will enable pupils to progress onto further education or employment. A number of participating pupils identified that their motivation to engage within school was

enhanced by the fact that they wanted to achieve good grades within their GCSE examinations. However at times pupils' reported that they felt pressurised to achieve, as a result of the high expectations of school staff and their parents. Nevertheless pupils believed that by achieving higher grades, they would enhance their opportunities within further education and employment. Holding high aspirations is particularly important due to Lamb's (DCSF, 2009*a*) findings regarding the restricted attainment and long term outcomes for pupils experiencing SEN. Within his inquiry, Lamb (DCSF, 2009*a*) also identified that parents believed that schools often held low aspirations for pupils with SEN. Research suggests that holding high expectations for pupils is beneficial in raising pupils' engagement within school (Hart, 2010). As previously stated, the pupils themselves should believe they can achieve in a task, in order to enhance motivation to attempt a learning task. Therefore school staff must carefully balance high expectations for pupils and identifying objectives which are attainable.

5.5.1 'Outstanding' Practice and School Culture

Deal and Peterson (2009) state that a school's culture is central to exemplary practice. Engels et al. (2008) and Roffey (2000) have outlined a number of factors which underpin a school culture which best facilitates change. These factors were documented within chapter 2. The factors raised by Roffey (2000) hold particular relevance to the findings within the current research. When asked to identify the factors which have contributed to the school achieving 'outstanding' practice, the SLT identified that school staff reflect upon their own practice in order to identify opportunities for improvement. It was also noted that the perspectives of all staff, students and parents are explored. This collaboration was reported to occur during

the process of decision making. An example of which was the school's breakfast club menu, in which students indicated through the school council that they would like bacon sandwiches to be made available. The SLT indicated that the school are currently considering whether to introduce bacon sandwiches onto the menu, which may prove to be an agreed compromise. The SLT also reported that they have engaged in a range of government pilots, in order to improve upon existing practice, such as APP. Due to the reduced evidence supporting the pilot schemes at the onset of the school's engagement within each project, there was an element of risk. However the SLT stated that they were prepared to engage within the pilot projects, as they believed they could support the school to improve further. However despite the comparisons which can be made between the findings within the current research and existing research evidence, the SLT did not explicitly refer to the school's culture during the research interview.

5.6   Exploring the Research Findings in Relation to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

A number of sub-themes and individual responses provided by the SLT and participating students relate positively to five systems outlined within Bronfenbrenner's (1988) earlier work regarding the ecological systems theory (see table 15). Responses from the SLT were reflective of a key underlying principle of Bronfenbrenner's later work outlined within the bioecological systems theory – that in order for a student's behaviour to change, change must occur within the contexts within which the pupil interacts (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). This was reflected within the overall theme of the SLT's responses, in which school staff

attempt to support both the educational and wider needs of students in order to

enable students to focus upon learning tasks when they are inside the classroom.

Table 15. *Examples of the support and strategies employed to support students to succeed within school, which can be related back to the five systems described within Bronfenbrenner's (1988) ecological systems theory.*

System	Examples Provided by Research Participants
Microsystem	• The SLT demonstrated awareness that students are active within a number of microsystems and subsequently hold relationships with other individuals outside of school and fulfil a number of roles within their lives. The SLT acknowledged that the challenges students may experience outside of school, for example within the family home, may impact upon their ability to focus within the classroom. • A number of students engaged in discussion regarding the wider support school staff provide to students within school. Within this discussion the participating students indicated that staff demonstrated a genuine interest regarding the student as a person, as opposed to only viewing the student as a learner.
Mesosystem	• The SLT collaborated with parents in attempt to further understand the needs of the students. The SLT stressed the importance of developing positive and honest relationships with parents at the onset of their child's school placement. • Students reported that the communication between school staff and parents, encouraged students to attend school. • Students reported that the behaviour of their peers had a significant impact upon their own behaviour and their ability to concentrate within the learning context.
Exosystem	• The SLT provided examples regarding the support they have provided to parents, most notably through the CAF process. The SLT acknowledged that the needs of parents can impact upon students' concentration and readiness to learn.
Macrosystem	• The SLT highlighted that the school places high value upon listening to the views of students, for example through the student council. Listening to the views of student is advocated within a range of UK government policies, including the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014; DfES, 2001) and within the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF UK, 2012). • A number of participating students referred to the value placed by colleges, employers and the government upon their GCSE grades. The skills and qualifications desired by FE colleges and employers was also referred to by the SLT who reported that school staff aim to provide the students with marketable skills.

	• The SLT stated that school staff have high expectations for all students in attendance. The UK government emphasised the need for all schools to hold high expectations for students who experience SEN within the SEN green paper 'Support and Aspiration' (DfE, 2011*a*).
Chronosystem	• Aspects of the SLT's responses were reflective of the principles which underpin Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem. The SLT engage with school, staff and pupils regarding current practice in order to explore how improvements can be made. In addition the school has made additional adjustments to practice after engaging with AfA and national pilot schemes, such as the APP pilot scheme.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications for Professional Practice and Future Research

6.1   Conclusion

The current research was designed to:- a) identify the strategies which were believed to be the most effective in enhancing pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour and b) Identify the factors which the school believes underpins their outstanding practice. A wide range of strategies and factors were identified by the SLT and participating pupils, which can be incorporated within 5 key themes:- curriculum focused, holistic and recurrent support, collaboration, engagement and adaptive practice.

6.1.1   Curriculum Focused

The school's SLT believe that a key factor which has enabled the school to achieve outstanding practice, is the central focus upon learning within the classroom. The SLT report that teaching staff engage students within the classroom by providing a curriculum which is age-appropriate, intellectually stimulating and carefully differentiated. Differentiation must account for the pupil's SEBD and the additional underlying needs they experience. In doing so, this appears to support staff to protect the pupils' self-esteem. In addition school staff have utilised APP to conduct structured assessments of the pupils' work, enabling staff to provide appropriate feedback regarding the next steps in pupils' learning.

The SLT report that extensive support is provided for pupils and their families, at the onset of the pupil's placement within school. This support is believed to enhance pupils' abilities to focus upon learning tasks.

6.1.2 Holistic and Recurrent Support

As identified within previous research, a large percentage of pupils are often found to experience additional and previously unidentified SEN upon arriving at the school. Therefore when pupils arrive at the school further assessments of the pupils' needs are conducted. Assessments are often completed with the support of external agencies. The SLT identified that SLCD is the most common unidentified SEN prior to the pupil's arrival, which reflects existing research findings (Law, 2005; Benner et al., 2002). The identification of underlying SEN enables staff to provide more appropriate support, such as more precise differentiation. Additionally one to one tutoring is provided for individual pupils, taking place outside of the classroom. This strategy was believed to be important in supporting pupil's specific needs, such as dyslexia.

Extensive support is also provided for parents. The SLT identified a wide range of parental needs for which the school has provided support. The school appears to adopt a pragmatic approach to supporting parental needs, acknowledging the potential impact their needs can have upon the welfare of the pupils and the pupils' readiness to learn.

6.1.3 Collaboration

The SLT identified that the collaboration between staff was a key factor which supported the school to achieve outstanding practice. The SLT frequently referred to the development of a collective team, in which all members of school staff participated in training and decision making. Previous research suggests collaborative decision making, may enhance staffs' commitment during the process of implementing changes (Everard et al., 2004).

The responses provided by both the SLT and pupils suggest that the school's collaboration with parents is a key factor for enhancing pupil attendance. The key strategies identified by the SLT were first day calling and home visits. The school employs 2 full-time members of staff to fulfil these potentially time-consuming tasks. Participating students identified that they did not want school staff to contact their parents, therefore this strategy appears to deter students from truanting.

6.1.4 Engagement

The SLT reported that effective home-school collaboration was established at the earliest opportunity, through the establishment of an open and honest relationship. The SLT identified that this initial meeting was important, as it ensured initial communication occurred under positive circumstances.

Participating pupils identified that undesirable, externalised behaviour was frequently demonstrated by a small number of pupils within class. This factor appears to have a significantly negative impact upon the concentration levels of peers within lessons. Therefore it appears that further strategies and support must be identified to support the needs of pupils demonstrating this challenging behaviour. One could argue that a school judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted should not experience notable, on-going challenges in relation to students' behaviour. Reflecting more broadly about the precision of Ofsted inspections, one could also argue that Ofsted inspectors are required to make a judgement regarding a school's effectiveness over a short period of time and therefore inspectors may observe behaviour which does not reflect day to day conduct. In regards to the inspection in question, Ofsted inspectors completed their assessment during a single day visit. Due to concerns raised by parents regarding the behaviour of students within schools across the country, Ofsted have

introduced no-notice visits, which were introduced in 2014 (Ofsted, 2014*b*). No-notice visits are completed when concerns regarding pupil behaviour are either raised by parents or were identified by inspectors during their previous visit to the school (Ofsted, 2014*b*). Despite these criticisms and recent adaptations to practice, within the Ofsted school inspection report, it was acknowledged that a number of students engaged in undesirable behaviour. However the lead inspector praised the school for their response in supporting challenging behaviour and was of the belief that students were clear about how they were expected to behave within school. This perspective indicates that it is the response of the school staff to undesirable behaviour, not the behaviour itself which was judged to be outstanding. One should also highlight that within the description provided within the Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2014*a*) it does not state that 'outstanding' practice must be flawless.

Positive relationships were also believed to hold significant importance between the school staff and pupils. Pupils believed the perpetual warmth and emotional support they received from staff was crucial to the school's success and distinguished the school from their previous experiences within mainstream schools.

A large number of rewards and incentives were provided for pupils in order to increase their motivation to attend, engage and achieve. The SLT consulted with pupils to identify the incentives or rewards most desired by pupils. Previous research suggests that the desirability of extrinsic rewards is important in order to achieve the desired impact (Capstick, 2005).

One clear example of an incentive, cited by the SLT and pupils for enhancing pupil attendance, was the employment of the school's breakfast club. However despite the reported success of this strategy, the SLT were consulting with staff and pupils to

identify how the food provided could be more appealing to a wider audience. One could argue that this demonstrates the school's commitment to improve and reflect upon existing practice.

6.1.5 Adaptive Practice

The SLT identified that the school adopts a self-evaluative approach to school improvement. However the SLT also believe that their participation in government- and locally- led initiatives has played an instrumental role in the school's ability to identify further areas for improvement. The school's engagement within self-reflective practice appears to be a continuous process. Although the SLT emphasised that routines and schools rules are followed consistently within school, at times flexibility is required. One example, is the requirement for teaching staff to provide pupils with a curriculum which is intellectually stimulating and age-appropriate, yet remains achievable and consequently protects the pupil's self-esteem.

The school's commitment to on-going self-reflection and flexible adaptations to practice may be partly in response to the behaviour of pupils experiencing SEBD, which can at times be unpredictable (O'Brien, 2005). One could argue that the requirement to adapt and fine-tune practice frequently, is the key reason why Spalding et al. (2001) stated that school improvement cannot be conducted in a prescriptive and holistic manner within SEBD special schools.

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6.2   Implications for Practice

Spalding et al. (2001) argues that the process of school improvement is not a specific and prescriptive process but instead relies upon schools to draw upon the strategies or processes relevant to the needs of the school. Within the current research I have identified a number of strategies and factors perceived to be most effective within an individual secondary SEBD special school, which was judged to be demonstrating 'outstanding' practice. Building on from Spalding et al.'s (2001) argument, I would anticipate that other SEBD special schools will be able to explore the strategies and factors which are believed to be successful within the current setting and adopt elements of these strategies or factors within their own practice. In order to do so, other secondary SEBD special schools must assess the relevance and feasibility of adopting the strategies and/or factors in relation to their specific school. For example, when attempting to implement greater home-school collaboration, schools may not have the required resources to complete regular home visits. However the early establishment of positive relationships may still be possible by inviting parents to meetings at school, prior to the onset of a student's attendance at the school.

The secondary SEBD special school located within the borough in which I am currently employed was adjudged to 'require improvement' by Ofsted. As a result the LA are required to provide additional support to the school, in order to ensure the school improves their existing practice. Findings from the current research will enable me to support the LA to provide evidence-based support to the SEBD special school to identify potential areas for change. This may include suggesting how the school approaches the process of evaluating and improving practice. Within the current research the SLT indicated that school improvement is a continual process

therefore when providing support to the school the LA should support the school to develop systems which will enable the school to critically monitor and evaluate their own practice. This may support the school to maintain successful practice when additional support from the LA is reduced.

Within the current setting, responses from the participating pupils suggest that further improvements can be made to ensure that pupils are engaged and are able to concentrate within the classroom. The key barrier identified by pupils appears to be the undesirable and externalised behaviour of a small proportion of the school cohort. As Spalding et al. (2001) suggest this challenge should be viewed as an opportunity for further change.

The SLT's observation that a large number of pupils arrive at the school with unidentified SEN is a cause for concern. This may impact upon the school to effectively meet the needs of pupils upon arrival at the school. Barnardo's (2012) previously identified that pupils experiencing behavioural difficulties, may experience underlying SEN which have not been identified. The SLT identified that the pupils' speech and language difficulties were most commonly overlooked, which again is reflective of the high prevalence (approximately 75%) of pupils found to experience SLCD in addition to SEBD (Law, 2005; Benner et al., 2002). The high prevalence of SLCD has clear implications for classroom practice; for example, teachers may adopt a multi-sensory approach when teaching, as previous research suggests that secondary school teachers rely heavily upon verbal instruction (Pittman and Morley, 2009). However due to the fact that all pupils in attendance at the school are subject to a Statement of SEN, one would assume that a thorough assessment of their SEN has been conducted. This finding appears to suggest that either a) the underlying needs of a pupil exacerbate over time or b) the assessments previously conducted

within the borough failed to recognise the full extent of the pupil's needs. Returning to SLCD, Bercow (2008) identified that pupil's access to speech and language therapy services varies significantly across England. Pittman and Morley (2009) suggest that one way to overcome the challenge of identifying the presence of SLCD is for school staff to administer screening assessments. I would extend this further and recommend that simple screening assessments are conducted for all pupils for whom concerns are raised regarding SEBD. Pittman and Morley (2009) fail to include the names of specific assessments which could be administered by teaching staff within their recommendations. However the children's communication charity 'I Can' provides an online speech, language and communication screening tool, in addition to a developmental chart documenting children's typical speech, language and communication development at ages 4 to 5, 5 to 7, 7 to 9 and 9 to 11 (I Can, 2013). The screening tool is designed to provide school staff with an indication of when additional assessment and guidance is required from a Speech and Language Therapist. It would therefore be appropriate to complete the online assessment when a pupil begins to exhibit challenging behaviour within school. This screening assessment will therefore occur prior to pupils arriving at SEBD special schools.

The SLT indicated that they participated in government-led initiatives which supported the school to identify areas in which further improvements could be made. This process appeared to support the school to reflect upon their current practice. Consequently the school did not appear to rely on the support of local outside agencies, to support the identification of potential shortcomings and opportunities for change (Spalding et al., 2001). However for additional SEBD special schools, EPs may hold the appropriate skills and experience to facilitate a critical reflection of school practice.

6.2.1 Implications for the Practice of Educational Psychologists

EPs advocate the exploration of behavioural needs at different levels within school (whole-school, classroom, individual) (Hart, 2010). This is a particularly important approach when supporting pupils experiencing SEBD, due to the high prevalence of underlying needs (DCSF, 2008*a*).

Within the current research the SLT did not refer explicitly to input received from the Educational Psychology Service. They did however identify that external agencies conducted assessments which supported the school to identify pupils' underlying needs. Within the LA in which I am currently employed, the work conducted within the LA's secondary SEBD special school also focuses upon assessment. However the designated EP for the LA's secondary SEBD special school also provides regular therapeutic support for pupils. However one could argue that there are opportunities for EPs to provide further support within both LAs. In recent months extensive cuts have been made to the LA's Behaviour Support Service. As a result this may lead to increased requirement for EP support due to concerns relating to SEBD.

It appears that EP practice relating to pupils experiencing SEBD can be categorised into seven main areas of activity (see table 16). These 7 areas were identified within research which a) explicitly relates to EPs' involvement with SEBD pupils (Rees et al., 2003; Farrell, 1995) and b) the relevant tasks outlined within more general reviews of EP practice (Boyle and Lauchlan, 2009; Ashton and Roberts, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006). The current research findings provide clear opportunities for EPs to provide further support for SEBD special schools in order to support schools to reflect upon current practice and identify opportunities for change implement changes to practice. These two tasks may be facilitated by an EP through the

employment of the RADIO Approach (Timmins et al., 2003) or by applying the

SIMSEN (Timmins et al., 2000) more broadly to support whole-school needs as

opposed to simply providing support regarding SEN. As previously stated within

chapter 2, one could argue that the advantage of utilising the SIMSEN in order to

facilitate school improvement is that SIMSEN enables all members of school staff to

contribute to discussions regarding the needs of the school and how these needs

can best be supported (Timmins, 2000). This whole-staff approach to school

improvement may prevent resistance from individuals or groups during the process

of change, which can develop when EPs only collaborate with school leaders

(Cartwright and Baron, 2002; Hargreaves, 1999).

Table 16. *A table which documents the seven categories of activities conducted by EPs within the field of SEBD.*

Activity	Example
Assessment	Cognitive; Attainment; Observation
Intervention	Therapeutic support; Social skills group work
Consultation	With parents and/or school staff
Training	INSET, parent groups
Collaborative Discussion	Multi-agency meetings such as CAFS
Research	Developing the evidence-base
Strategic Support	Policy development

The current school participates in a recurrent process of reflective practice. However

one could argue that this process of reflection may be more challenging for other

SEBD special schools and in particular in schools in which current practice is judged

to be requiring improvement. Bettle et al. (2001) argued that Head Teachers may be

more willing to engage with EPs in the process of change if Ofsted inspectors have

identified that the school must improve upon existing practice. This enhanced

willingness to engage may occur, as the feedback provided by Ofsted may

encourage Head Teachers to acknowledge areas for improvement within existing

practice, having previously held strong beliefs regarding the quality of their personal approach.

As previously discussed EPs can employ frameworks such as the RADIO Approach and SIMSEN in order to facilitate whole-school improvement. However these approaches to school improvement require significant commitment from school staff and in the specific case of the SIMSEN may take place during the full duration of an academic year (Timmins, 2000). However EPs can provide more short-term support to school staff regarding current practice through the process of consultation (Fox, 2009). EPs may also fulfil the role of facilitator through the Staff Sharing Scheme (SSS) (Gill and Monsen, 1995). One could argue that the SSS could prove to be an effective use of EP time within the current setting, when one takes into account that the school makes recurrent adaptations to practice. Therefore if an EP was to provide support in establishing SSSs within the school, this sustainable approach could be utilised on subsequent occasions independent of EP support. The SSS was previously identified by staff as supportive in reducing teacher's stress levels (Monsen and Graham, 2002). One would anticipate that staff within the school experience stressful situations due to the presence of undesirable behaviour and the challenges students' discuss with staff in relation to their personal lives. Jones et al. (2013) found that a number of participating school staff who were the problem owner during the SSS process, found it difficult to share their difficulties in front of staff with whom they had not established positive working relationships with. However within the current setting, the SLT reported that a positive working relationship was established between all members of staff. Therefore staff may feel more confident to disclose their on-going difficulties in front of their colleagues.

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Within the current research both the SLT and participating students reported that students within school frequently reflected upon their future life opportunities. Students reported that the requirement to achieve in school, in order to progress onto further education and employment is a key incentive for students to attend and engage in the classroom. Building upon this finding, EPs could facilitate further exploration of a student's future goals or aspirations through PATH. PATH is a person-centred, creative planning tool which can be utilised to develop a shared vision for students and the key individuals who can support them in achieving their goals (O'Brien et al., 2010). PATH requires the young person to engage with individuals important to them and two professionals - a facilitator and graphic illustrator. Within the exercise, the student's goal or aspiration is identified and together, the participants within the room work backwards to describe and illustrate how this aspiration can be achieved, clarifying the immediate and subsequent steps which need to be taken (O'Brien et al., 2010). O'Brien et al. (2010) state that the PATH process is designed to support the engagement of individuals who can support the young person to achieve their aspiration, including the young person themselves. The PATH process may be a particularly effective approach for EPs to utilise given its relevance to the guidance outlined within the revised SEN Code of Practice. Within this guidance it states that practice should be developed in order for children and young people to '..participate fully in decisions about the outcomes they wish to achieve.' (DfE, 2014, p33). The PATH process focuses upon the young person's future aspirations, using a process which is person-centred. This should therefore ensure that the young person has the opportunity to participate fully within decisions which occur during this process.

6.2.2 Concluding Comments Regarding the Future Role for EPs within the Context of SEBD Special Schools

An argument can be made for EPs to provide further or more wide-ranging support within SEBD special schools. This involvement may include facilitating the process of school improvement through processes such as the RADIO Approach (Timmins et al., 2003) or the SIMSEN (Timmins, 2000), which will enable schools to identify areas to improve and implement changes to then enhance existing practice. The DfE (2012*a*) reaffirms the need for professionals to work with the most vulnerable pupils. This would appear to include pupils who attend SEBD special schools, as it is believed that their needs are the most complex and severe (Rayner, 2007).

6.3 Relating the Research Findings to the revised SEN Code of Practice

Within the introduction of my thesis, I outlined that this research was conducted during a period of significant change in relation to the processes and legislation which underpins the assessment and support for SEN within the UK. A key change which will impact upon students within the SEBD special school is the introduction of Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans. EHC Plans will be introduced nationally from 1st September 2014, replacing the Statement of SEN and Learning Difficulty Assessments (DfE, 2014) and all students who attend the SEBD special school will be subject to an EHC Plan due to the complexity and severity of their needs. In 2013 the UK government published the Children and Families Bill (DfE, 2013*e*) and a number of key principles included within the Bill underpin the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) including:-

a) Both the child and their parents should participate as fully as possible when decisions are made regarding the child, including their education.

b) Young people and their parents should receive the support they require in order to prepare the young person effectively for their transition into adulthood.

A number of findings within the current research relate positively to the key principles outlined above and the key changes outlined within the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014). This includes:- the school's collaboration with students and parents; identifying students' SEN and barriers to learning; and supporting students to make a positive transition into adulthood.

6.3.1 The School's Collaboration with Students and Parents

Cheminais (2008) states that pupils who are consulted by school staff and feel listened to are found to demonstrate enhanced levels of engagement within the classroom and reflect more upon their academic progress and aspirations. In addition Cheminais (2008) also states that schools who explore the views of their pupils are in a greater position to ensure that learning tasks are more personalised. The revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) outlines the requirement for schools to collaborate closely with students and parents, regarding their academic progress, the student's aspirations and their views regarding barriers which may impact upon their capacity to both engage and achieve. The SLT within the participating school identified that the views of students are explored through the student council, this includes eliciting the student perspective regarding decisions which are made within school. Parents are also consulted regarding the key decisions made within the school.

The SLT documented that regular, informal conversations were held with students regarding their academic progress and in regards they may experience. This perspective was also shared by the students within the focus group discussions.

Moving forwards school staff may conduct more formal consultations with students regarding their perspectives and specifically in relation to their goals and aspirations. This may emerge through person-centred planning which is advocated by the DfE (2014) within the revised SEN Code of Practice. Person-centred planning places the pupil at the centre of meetings which are held during reviews of the students SEN or during key points of transition (Taylor, 2007). Taylor (2007) states that through person-centred planning, it is anticipated that a greater understanding of the student's strengths, interests, aspirations and needs will emerge and as a result more effective action points can be developed.

6.3.2 The Identification of Students' Special Educational Needs and Barriers to Learning

The revised SEN Code of Practice states that additional SEN may emerge as a child matures (DfE, 2014). Within the current research the SLT identified that students often arrive at the school with unidentified SEN. The SEN Code of Practice again reinforces that schools must listen carefully to concerns raised by parents and students, in order to develop a further understanding of students' SEN (DfE, 2014). The SLT outlined that students have regular opportunities to share any challenges they are experiencing both inside or outside of the classroom. This perspective was also shared by a number of students within the focus group discussions.

Although the SLT state that they arrange for further assessments to take place in order to identify students' underlying SEN, this still raises a question regarding the quality of assessments which have previously taken place, prior to students arriving at the school. This is particularly concerning given that all students in attendance are subject to a Statement of SEN and consequently a comprehensive assessment of

the student's SEN should have taken place. Following my exploration of existing research evidence regarding this matter, it remains unclear as to why students with a primary need of SEBD, experience additional needs which are unidentified during the assessment process (Barnardo's, 2012). One could argue that it may be more challenging to complete a more accurate assessment of a student's SEN if the student experiences a primary need of SEBD, due to the restricted levels of engagement they may exhibit (DCSF, 2008a). This challenge may be further exacerbated by the fact that students experiencing SEBD are believed to respond more positively to adults with whom they have established a positive relationship (Hart, 2010). It may be more problematic to develop rapport with students during the assessment process due to the restricted availability of external agencies, including EPs within a number of LAs (Annan, 2005). The introduction of the EHC Plan is designed to enhance collaborative practice between professionals within education, health and social care. This enhanced collaboration may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of a student's needs prior to their arrival at a special school. However there remains uncertainty regarding both how and the extent to which services will collaborate, when the guidance outlined within the SEN Code of Practice is in full operation.

As discussed earlier within the thesis, the revised SEN Code of Practice no longer refers to the term SEBD to describe students exhibiting undesirable behaviour. This is replaced by the term Social, Mental and Emotional Health (DfE, 2014). This alteration was made in order to encourage school staff and professionals to explore both the needs and barriers to learning students may experience, which in turn impacts upon their behaviour. As I have already discussed, the SLT documented that they initiate additional assessments in order to explore whether students

experience unidentified SEN. However it should also be noted that school staff also attempt to explore and support additional barriers to learning. This includes examples raised within the SEN Code of Practice such as housing and domestic issues. The school also initiates CAFs in order to address the wider needs of students, an intervention recommended by the DfE (2014). The SLT stated that by adopting an holistic approach to supporting the needs of students, they believed the undesirable behaviour reduced and therefore students were further supported to focus upon learning tasks and achieve their academic potential.

Developing a greater understanding of a student's SEN should enable the student to receive appropriate support when they transition onto further education or employment. This enhanced understanding can then be included within the student's Education, Health and Care Plan.

6.3.3 Supporting Students to Make a Positive Transition into Adulthood

A key change within the revised SEN Code of Practice is that students are now eligible to receive support from birth to age 25. As a result it is anticipated that young people will receive more consistent support during their transition into adulthood. This consistency is further enhanced by the fact that the strengths and needs of students will be documented within each student's EHC Plan (DfE, 2014). Within the current research the SLT reported that school staff hold high aspirations for all students and aim to ensure that students leave the school having developed skills which are desirable within the areas of employment or further education. Within the focus group discussions a number of students demonstrated an awareness of the qualifications they required in order to achieve their aspirations and it appeared that the students had reflected upon their future. Cheminais (2008) states that children

and young people reflect more upon their academic progress and aspirations when their views are explored and taken into account by adults.

6.4   Limitations

During my initial meeting with the school's Head Teacher, I explicitly outlined:-

- The focus of the research.

- The rationale for conducting the research.

- The methods I wanted to use in order to gather the research data.

- The time commitments and contribution from participants.

This information is outlined within the BPS' (2010) Code of Human Research Ethics, in which it is stated that in order to gain valid consent, sufficient information must be provided to all prospective participants.

The Head Teacher demonstrated an understanding of these key points before providing her consent to participate within the research. However after completing the semi-structured interview with the SLT, the Head Teacher's availability notably decreased. As a result I was unable to communicate with the Head Teacher for over three months. After securing contact with the Head Teacher in January 2014, it was evident that the school were happy to continue to participate within the research. However following my telephone discussion with the Head Teacher, it became apparent that the staff and students were not easily available. Although the Head Teacher indicated that the school's reduced availability was unanticipated, this appeared to be due to staffing issues and the school's commitments to additional projects, such as AfA. The reduced availability of the participating school, prevented me from conducting the following tasks:-

- Feeding back to participating students regarding my interpretations of the data gathered during the focus group discussions.

- Eliciting the views of the school's 5 Middle Leaders.

- Feeding back to the school staff and students directly regarding the research findings.

I will now discuss these challenges in greater detail.

6.4.1 Limitations Relating to the Availability of Participants

In order to enhance the reliability of my research, I had intended to meet with the pupils who attended the focus groups, in their original groupings. This meeting was designed to provide the students with an opportunity to discuss the interpretations I had made within my thematic analysis. This discussion was also designed to provide students with an opportunity to challenge any of the interpretations made, resulting in a more accurate reflection of their views. However the school's SLT were reluctant for students to miss further time from their lessons, therefore it was not possible to conduct the meetings.

I had anticipated that the views of the school's Middle Leaders would be gathered through the Q-sort activity, which was conducted with the school's teaching staff. However I was informed by the Head Teacher that the school's 5 Middle Leaders were not available to complete the Q-sort activity, as they were required to attend an after-school meeting on the day on which data collection had been planned. The Head Teacher also stated that the Middle Leaders shared a similar understanding to the SLT regarding the strategies deemed most effective in raising student attainment, attendance and behaviour. Although this assumption may be accurate, one could argue that the Head Teacher had failed to account for the fact that:- a)

Middle leaders may have held an alternative perspective to the SLT and b) The duties fulfilled by the middle leaders, are different to those fulfilled by the SLT, for example the middle leaders' have larger teaching requirements. As a result the Middle Leaders may have held greater or different insights regarding the strategies employed within the classroom.

The third limitation which arose from the reduced availability of both staff and students within the school, was the process of feeding back the research findings and recommendations to participants. Cohen et al. (2011) suggests that in order to conduct ethical research the researcher must identify how their research will impact the lives of participants in a meaningful way and participants are not simply viewed as individuals who provide the researcher with data. Prior to initiating the research it was my objective to feed back to all participants regarding the outcomes of my research. I believed that this feedback would provide school staff with an objective exploration of the factors and strategies which has led to the school achieving 'outstanding' practice. I believed that information would support the school to reflect on their practice. In addition the research findings would enable school staff to develop further insight regarding the views of their pupils.

I am mindful that by failing to feedback directly to both school staff and pupils regarding the research findings, one could argue that the positive impact of my research on the lives of the participants is reduced. However I was also conscious of the Head Teacher's right to withdraw either partly or entirely from the research and therefore I felt obligated to continue with the research project, whilst making the required adjustments.

6.4.2 Additional Limitations

At the request of the Head Teacher, I interviewed the Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher together. The Head Teacher believed this approach would enable the SLT to provide more comprehensive responses, as the Head Teacher held greater responsibilities regarding behaviour and attendance, whilst the Deputy Head Teacher held greater responsibility regarding pupil attainment. However interviewing the SLT together is also a limitation of the current research. Newby (2010) identified that pair interviews hold the following limitations:-

- One participant may rely upon the responses of the other interviewee and therefore withhold their own perspective.

- One interviewee is dominant within the interview, impacting upon the second interviewee's opportunities to share their perspective.

- Participants may be unwilling to share their full perspectives in relation to more sensitive topics, in the presence of their colleague.

Within the current research neither the Head Teacher's or the Deputy Head Teacher's views appeared to dominate the interview. However I acknowledge that there is a hierarchical difference between the positions of Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher, which may have impacted upon the Deputy Head Teacher's willingness to provide a contrasting perspective to the Head Teacher.

The responses from the SLT suggest that a key strength of their practice and contributing factor towards their success, relates to their willingness to embrace change and evolve. This may be viewed in turn as a shortcoming of the current research. Walker (1983) states that a shortcoming of case study design, is the

tendency for researchers to provide a frozen picture of what takes place within a case, when in fact practice constantly evolves.

Sellman (2009) previously highlighted that by asking pupils to volunteer, this may skew the research data. Pupils who volunteer in the research may be more engaged within the school. However within the current research, one could argue that my objective was to identify the strategies which are deemed successful in enhancing pupil engagement. Therefore working with engaged pupils, may have further enhanced my ability to identify the effective strategies.

The employment of focus groups to elicit the pupils' views presented notable strengths and shortcomings. As previous researchers have suggested, the pupils were forthcoming with their views and extended upon the points their peers had made (Krueger and Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997). This provided me with a richer understanding of the strategies and factors discussed. However a number of pupils' views were more prominent within the discussion. This shortcoming was previously highlighted by Robson (2011). To overcome this barrier I asked individual pupils if they wanted to respond to the question I had asked. However my direct questioning was not designed to force the pupils to respond, but to simply provide them with an opportunity to have their say. However one could also argue that the pupils that were more forthcoming within the group discussions may not have had adequate time to express their views. As a result an alternative approach, such as one to one interviews, may have enabled certain pupils to answer the questions in greater detail.

A further limitation of the current research was the exclusion of parents' views. One could argue that parents may not have held insight regarding the school's classroom

practice. However the parental contribution may have enhanced my understanding

regarding a number of strategies and factors raised, for example the establishment

of positive home-school collaboration. I elected not to elicit the views of parents

within the current research due to a) time-constraints for completing data collection

and b) the geographical location of parents. The majority of parents do not live in

close-proximity to the school, therefore SLT anticipated that this would impact upon

parental participation.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Within the current research I have attempted to extend current understanding

regarding what constitutes effective practice within SEBD special schools and the

strategies which have underpinned this school's success. However as highlighted

within my literature review, currently very few articles exist regarding how to improve

practice within SEBD special schools. Spalding et al. (2001) previously identified that

school improvement cannot be prescriptive but instead schools should draw upon

the strategies relevant to their context. Therefore further exploration will help to

identify whether the findings within the current research reflect the views of other

outstanding SEBD special schools and enhance the range of strategies and factors

that schools can draw upon. This may support schools to identify the strategies and

factors which hold greater relevance to their school and surrounding community. The

requirement for further research and the development of an extended evidence base

is particularly important due to the Governments' emphasis for schools to:-

a) Adopt a more autonomous approach to school improvement (West, 2012)

b) For outstanding schools to collaborate with neighbouring schools and share good

practice (DfE, 2010). This strategy appears more challenging for SEBD special

schools due to the restricted number of schools within close proximity and the relative numbers of outstanding SEBD special schools.

Within the current setting, further exploration is required to identify how the school can support the pupils who demonstrate more extensive, externalised behaviour. The behaviour of particular pupils within school appears to be a key barrier for participating pupils, reducing their ability to concentrate upon learning activities and adversely affecting their educational opportunities. If one reflects back on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development, the reduced engagement of particular pupils within the school may be partly explained by their personal characteristics (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). For example, pupils may be less responsive to activities led by adults or may be more distractible, traits which Bronfenbrenner referred to as distractive force characteristics.

When LAs consider whether a student's needs could continue to be met within a mainstream school, the three conditions outlined within the 1981 Education Act remain relevant within current practice:

1) When the child's parents wish them to attend a mainstream school;
2) When the child's attendance within the school does not inhibit the efficient use of the school's resources; and
3) When the child's presence within school does not adversely affect the efficient education of other children.
Within the current provision it was indicated by participating students that the behaviour of a small proportion of the students remains disruptive, despite the specialised support implemented within the school to address their SEN. When one

considers that the impact of a student's behaviour upon others, is a determining factor as to whether they should continue to be educated within a mainstream school, it appears almost contradictory not to prioritise the needs of other students at the SEBD special school into account; students who are responding to the SEBD special school's strategies. Therefore one could argue that students who consistently disrupt the learning of others should be supported within school but outside of the regular classroom setting, until a) a greater understanding of the provision and support they require is achieved and b) the development of what Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) referred to as 'generative force characteristics' emerge, which will enhance the pupil's willingness and capacity to engage in a wider range of adult-led activities.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Key UK government policy & legislation published since The Elton Report (1989) regarding pupil behaviour within schools.

Policy / Legislation	Key Outcomes / Recommendations
1997 Education Act (DfEE, 1997a)	• Schools required to develop whole-school behaviour policy • Policy must be shared with all parents, pupils and staff • Increased flexibility when issuing detentions • Staff may restrain pupils if their behaviour puts themselves or others at risk
White paper 'Excellence in schools' (DfEE, 1997b)	• Focused around supporting students *within* mainstream schools • Highlighted need for unambiguous rules, continuous positive feedback and employing a hierarchy of sanctions • Induction year for newly qualified teachers introduced (no explicit reference to classroom management however) • Schools advised to increase links between home and school to enhance student behaviour
Green paper 'Schools building on success' (DfEE, 2001)	• Additional funding pledged in order for schools to implement interventions identified as effective such as mentoring and in-school behaviour units
The 'Steer Report' (Learning behaviour)(DfES, 2005)	• Parental role highlighted as critical for achieving good behaviour • Teachers must be allocated time to share effective classroom management strategies and contact parents • DfES encouraged to identify ways in which EPs can 'add value' to education • Training and Development Agency encouraged to explore ways in which trainee teachers can demonstrate their understanding of effective classroom management strategies and incorporate these into training programmes
Learning behaviour: Lessons learned (DCSF, 2009c)	• Found that trainee teachers received varying degrees of support with behaviour management (dependent on their school placement) • Found home-school contracts were used inconsistently
White paper 'The importance of teaching' (DfE, 2010)	• Highlights current impact of pupil behaviour on teacher retention

	- Identifies requirement to improve alternative provision due to poor academic attainment - Recommends greater autonomy for alternative providers - OFSTED will require evidence that student behaviour is consistently positive
Behaviour and discipline in schools (DfE, 2011*b*)	- Head teachers advised about what their behaviour policy should consist of. - Stresses the importance that policy is consistently applied and understood by all parents, pupils and staff

Appendix B

Emailed response from the DfE regarding the change from SEBD to Social, Emotional and Mental Health in the draft SEN Code of Practice.

Thank you for your email dated 17 March about the use of the Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) category in the new SEN Code of Practice.

The change to the BESD category follows up from a commitment in paragraphs 3.34 and 3.35 of the Support and Aspiration Green Paper 'Progress and Next Steps' document and has been one of the most widely welcomed changes to the Code amongst SEN practitioners. It is about getting a better identification of need, and therefore more appropriate support. The 2010 Ofsted SEND review 'A statement is not enough' had identified that children and young people were too often not being given appropriate support with, for instance, behaviour interventions being given where they had specific communication needs. The Green Paper consultation confirmed that the BESD category was being used inappropriately, meaning that some children missed out of the right support to deal with presenting behaviour issues.

The introductory section on pages 69 - 70 makes clear the context for the change to the area of need. There has been strong support from the sector for making it clear that behaviour issues are not in and of themselves a special educational need and that schools should seek to identify underlying causes. These can include mental health problems, which is why we have included them in the Code for the first time. They might also include problems that do not require special educational provision, such as domestic and family issues. So in future we would expect to see pupils being identified as having SEN according to any underlying issues rather than simply according to behaviour. Whether this specific change reduces overall identification in a school or local authority will depend on the approach they take at present. But it should lead to better identification of need and it is possible that some underlying issues will see an increase in identification as a result.

Overall, we are not changing the definition of SEN or the considerations that need to be applied to making formal assessment of need. The key consideration will remain the needs of the individual relative to the mainstream provision available to them. In line with the issues identified in the Ofsted report and by Brian Lamb's review, we would expect the reforms as a whole to lead to better adapted 'whole school' provision with mainstream services meeting the needs of more children and young people. This in turn would mean fewer children overall identified as needing special educational provision and therefore as having SEN. But this should go hand in hand with the needs of each child and young person being met more effectively and their achievement of better outcomes as a result.

Appendix C

Further information regarding the Achievement for All Programme

The AfA Programme

Achievement for All (AfA) is a national charity. The charity's core goal is to raise the access, aspirations and achievement of children and young people.

The AfA programme is provided for schools through self-selection and is delivered over two years. Each school is assigned an AfA Coach. After an initial needs analysis, completed by the AfA Coach, a bespoke programme of support is provided to the school (Blandford and Knowles, 2013). This support includes the donation of strategies to the School Champion (nominated member of staff at the school). It is then the School Champion's responsibility to disseminate this information to all school staff.

AfA's targeted support is broken down into three strands of support:-
1) Assessment, tracking and intervention
2) Structured conversations with parents
3) Provision for developing wider outcomes
Assessment, tracking and intervention involves the rigorous tracking of assessment data, to ensure that progress is achieved by all pupils. When adequate progress is not achieved, interventions are initiated (DfE, 2012*b*).
During the pilot study, schools frequently involved teachers and parents to review pupil's targets. They used a comprehensive range of interventions to enhance attainment (Humphrey and Squires, 2011). Unfortunately the authors did not identify the specific interventions utilised or how they corresponded to specific cases.

Home-school liaison was frequently achieved through structured conversations. Structured conversations form a significant part of the AfA approach, in which a structured meeting is held with all parents during each academic term. These meetings are designed to establish the parents' aspirations and concerns, set clear goals and identify the responsibilities of each individual (parent, teacher and pupil). In doing so, it is anticipated that the relationship between parents and staff will evolve and become more effective (DCSF, 2009*d*). School staff receive training from the AfA Coach to develop their skills such as active listening, paraphrasing, target setting and reviewing the discussion (DCSF, 2009*d*).

AfA uses the term 'wider outcomes' to collectively describe a pupil's progress with attendance, behaviour, bullying, relationships with school staff, peer relationships & participation in extended service provision e.g. after school clubs (Humphrey and Squires, 2011). The wider outcomes encapsulate a tremendously broad range of needs. Therefore the AfA Coach will often focus on specific wider outcomes, relating to the needs of the specific school in question (Humphrey and Squires, 2011).

The following achievements were identified within Humphrey and Squires (2011) original pilot study:-

- 36.9% of pupils achieved or exceeded the governments' anticipated levels of progress in English (two national curriculum sub-levels)
- Pupils with SEN made significantly more progress in English than pupils with SEN nationally
- 41.5% of pupils achieved or exceeded the governments' anticipated levels of progress in Maths (two national curriculum sub-levels)
- The average amount of progress for all pupils in English and Maths fell just below three national curriculum sub-levels.
- Pupils with a primary need of SEBD made relatively greater progress in English compared to pupils with a primary need of moderate learning difficulties (MLD)
- Pupils with a primary need of SEBD made relatively greater progress in Maths compared to pupils with a primary need of MLD.
- The attendance levels of pupils classified as 'persistent absentees' (80% or below), increased by an average of over 10%.
- A 10% reduction in school staffs' reports of behaviour problems for pupils overall. This was identified through a teacher survey and found to be significant when compared to 193 comparison schools.

Appendix D

Statistical data documenting the attainment of pupils within the UK during the 2011/12 academic year (DfE, 2013*c*).

Percentage of Pupils who Achieved a Minimum of 5 GCSEs, Grades A* to C, Including English and Maths. 2011/12 Academic Year.

All Pupils:-	
No SEN	69.2%
Statement of SEN	8.4%
SEN no Statement	25.2%
Boys:-	
No SEN	66.4%
Statement of SEN	8.8%
SEN no Statement	23.9%
Girls:-	
No SEN	71.8%
Statement of SEN	7.4%
SEN no Statement	27.2%
FSM:-	
Eligible for FSM	36.3%
Pupils not Eligible	62.6%

Percentage of Pupils, Eligible for Free School Meals and Achieved a Minimum of 5 GCSEs, Grades A* to C, Including English and Maths. 2011/12 Academic Year.

	Boys Eligible for FSM	Boys Not Eligible for FSM	Girls Eligible for FSM	Girls Not Eligible for FSM
No SEN	48%	68.5%	52.6%	74.4%
SEN without a Statement	16.4%	26.1%	18.3%	30.4%
Statement of SEN	4%	10.9%	3.3%	9.3%

Percentage of Pupils, who Achieve Expected Levels of Progress* within English and Maths, between KS2 and KS4. 2011/12 Academic Year.

	All Pupils English	Boys English	Girls English	All Pupils Maths	Boys Maths	Girls Maths
No SEN	74.6%	69.3%	79.5%	76.7%	75.9%	77.4%
SEN no Statement	48.3%	44.1%	54.3%	43.9%	44.7%	42.6%
Statement	25%	25.4%	24.1%	21.6%	23.7%	15.9%
FSM	52.3%	45.3%	59.3%	49.6%	47.4%	51.9%
Not FSM	70.6%	64.3%	77.2%	71.8%	69.7%	74.1%

*Expected Levels of Progress refers to the level of attainment each pupil is expected to make at the end or Key Stage 4, in correspondence to their level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. For example, a pupil who achieves a Level 4 at Key Stage 2 is expected to achieve a minimum of a GCSE grade C.

Appendix E

An outline of the search strategy employed to explore the recommended strategies which enhance pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour.

I conducted a search of existing literature within journal articles, books and websites.

Journals

- Educational Psychology in Practice
- British Journal of Special Education
- British Journal of Research
- Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
- British Journal of Educational Psychology
- British Educational Research Journal
- Journal of Child Psychology
- International Journal of Special Education
- DECP Debate
- Psychological Bulletin
- Review of Educational Research
- Electronic search using 'Google scholar'

Books

- University of Leicester library catalogue
- Institute of Education library catalogue

Websites

- Department for Education
- EP Net
- General search utilising the search engine 'Google'

Additional Literature

- The Psychologist

- Special magazine (NASEN)

The following terms were included within my search of the existing research and guidance:-

- School improvement within SEBD special schools
- Improving pupil behaviour
- Improving pupil attendance
- Improving pupil attainment
- Effective practice within SEBD special schools
- Strategies to support pupils with SEBD
- Strategies to support pupil attainment
- Strategies to support pupil attendance
- Strategies to support pupil behaviour
- Supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties
- Behaviour and attainment
- Raising attendance
- Raising attainment
- Improving behaviour
- Effective practice within SEBD schools
- School improvement frameworks
- Supporting pupils with SEBD
- Outstanding practice within SEBD special schools
- Effective strategies to enhance attainment
- Effective strategies to enhance attendance
- Effective strategies to enhance behaviour
- Pupil behaviour
- Pupil attainment
- Pupil attendance
- SEBD
- BESD
- EBD
- Improving challenging behaviour
- Supporting challenging behaviour
- Effective practice for SEBD

Appendix F

A table which outlines the various ways in which case study designs can be conducted, subject to decisions at 4 key levels (adapted from Thomas, 2011).

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Key Case: A classic or exemplary example **Outlier Case**: A case which is different from the norm **Local Knowledge Case**: A case relevant to the researcher's personal experience, which they want to find out further information about	**Intrinsic**: Researcher explores an area due to their personal interest	**Testing a Theory**: Occurs when an explanatory framework already exists, the focus of the study is to therefore test this theory	**Single**: An individual case, in which its characteristics will elicit particular interest.
	Instrumental: The case study acts as a tool, in order to fulfil a wider objective		**Multiple**: Researcher explores a number of cases. However the focus is primarily around the phenomenon and is explored within several cases. There are various types of multiple case studies:- Nested, Parallel, Sequential, Retrospective, Snapshot & Diachronic.
		Building a Theory: No explanatory framework exists, therefore the study occurs in order to provide a model to further understand the phenomenon	
	Evaluative: Study looks to explore the effectiveness or impact of something		
	Explanatory: Case study looks to explain a phenomenon and enhance understanding	**Drawing a Picture**: Illustrating or demonstrating the distinctive aspects of a phenomenon. Helping us to comprehend and make sense of the phenomenon under investigation	
	Exploratory: Conducted when a problem or issue occurs and minimal understanding already exists; therefore objective is to identify how and why		
		Experimental: To explore the impact of a new approach or variable, with a greater focus on the impact of the approach within the natural, social	

|			
		world, as opposed to scientifically precise conditions. **Interpretative:** Considered the classic approach to case study research. The researcher will attempt to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon and immerse themselves within the environment. Interpretative approach aims to explore the phenomenon in its completeness.	

Appendix G

A copy of the interview transcript from the interview I conducted with the school's senior leadership team (SLT). The interview transcript was analysed using thematic analysis.

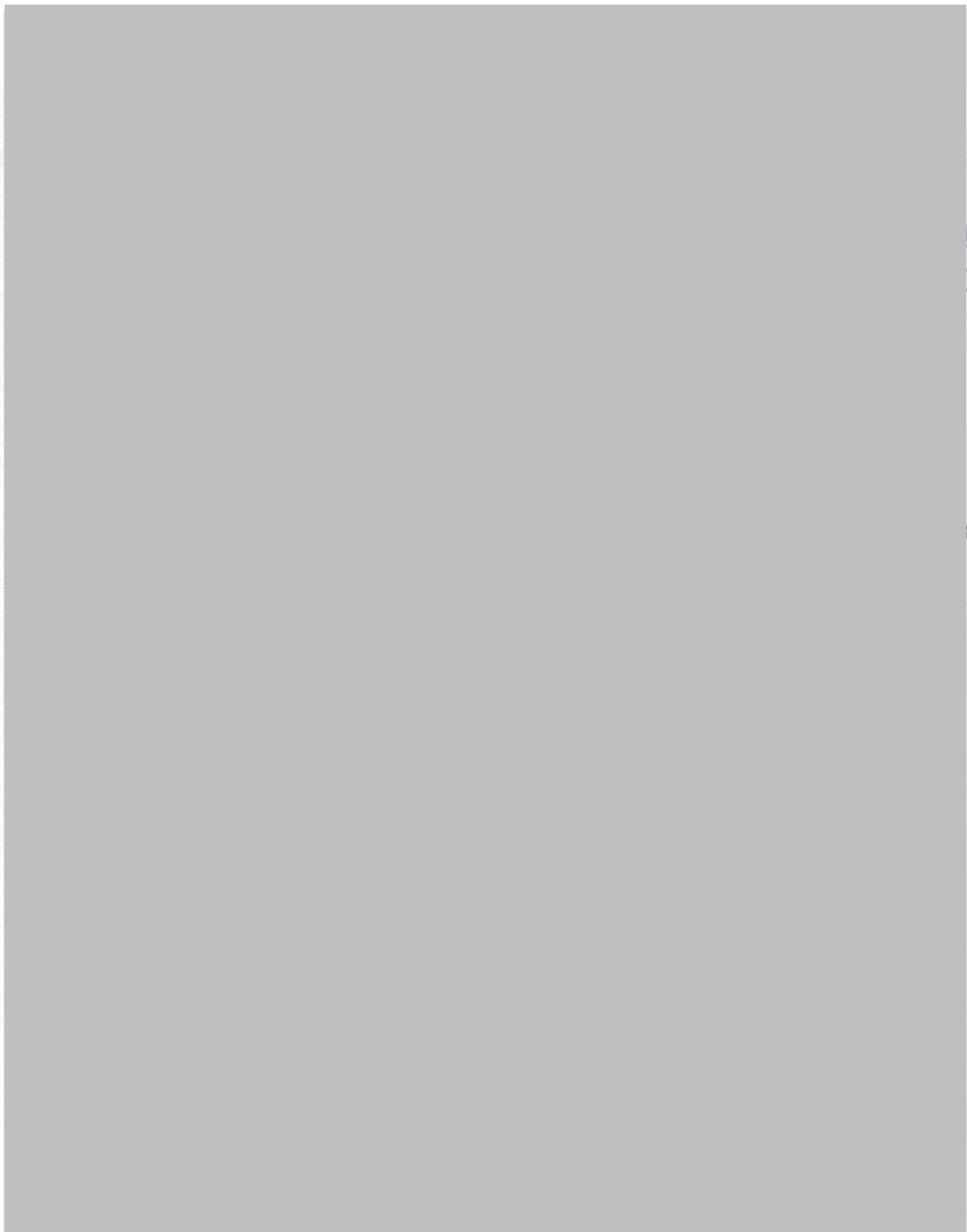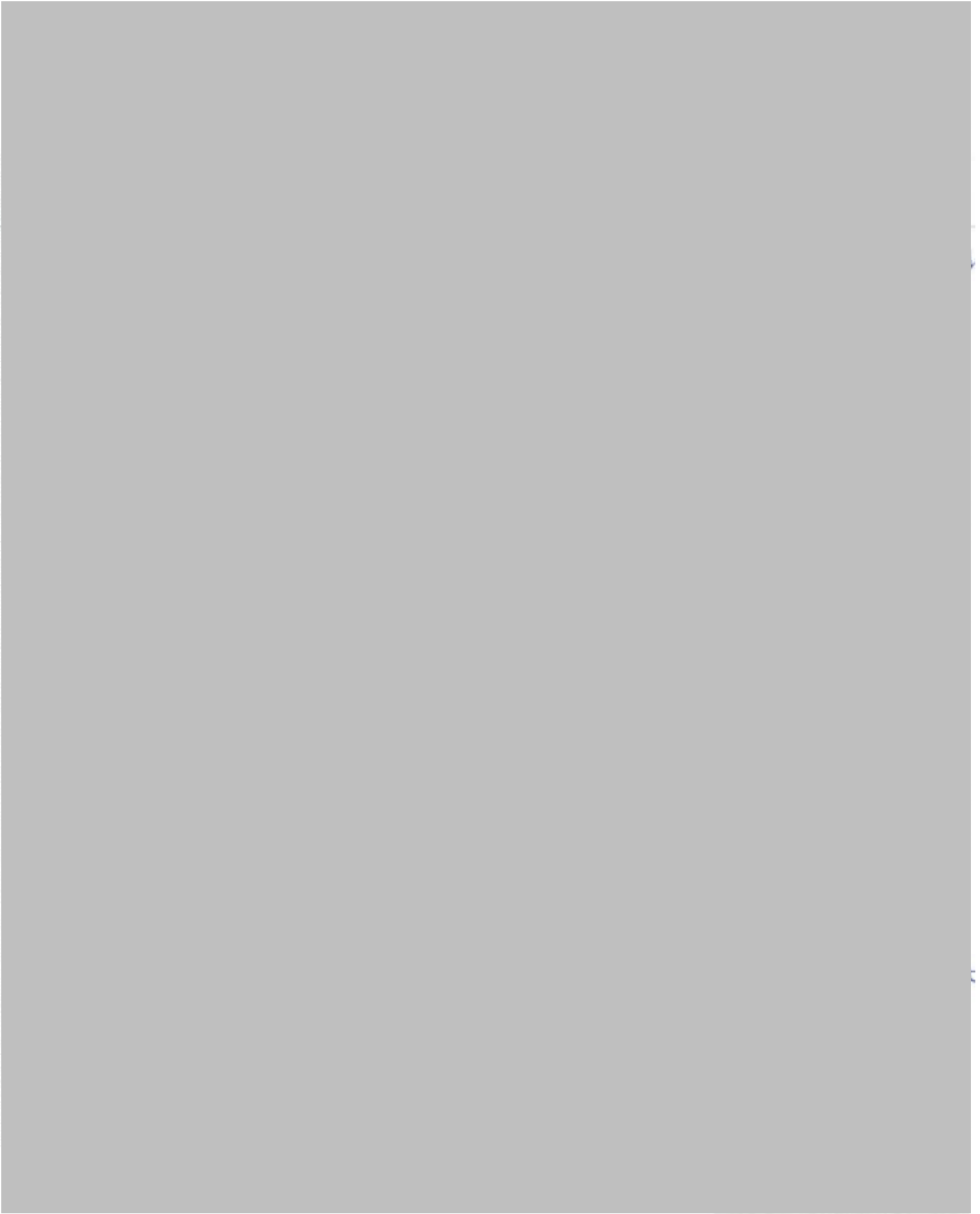Phase ② Generating initial codes.
Phase ③ Searching for themes.

179
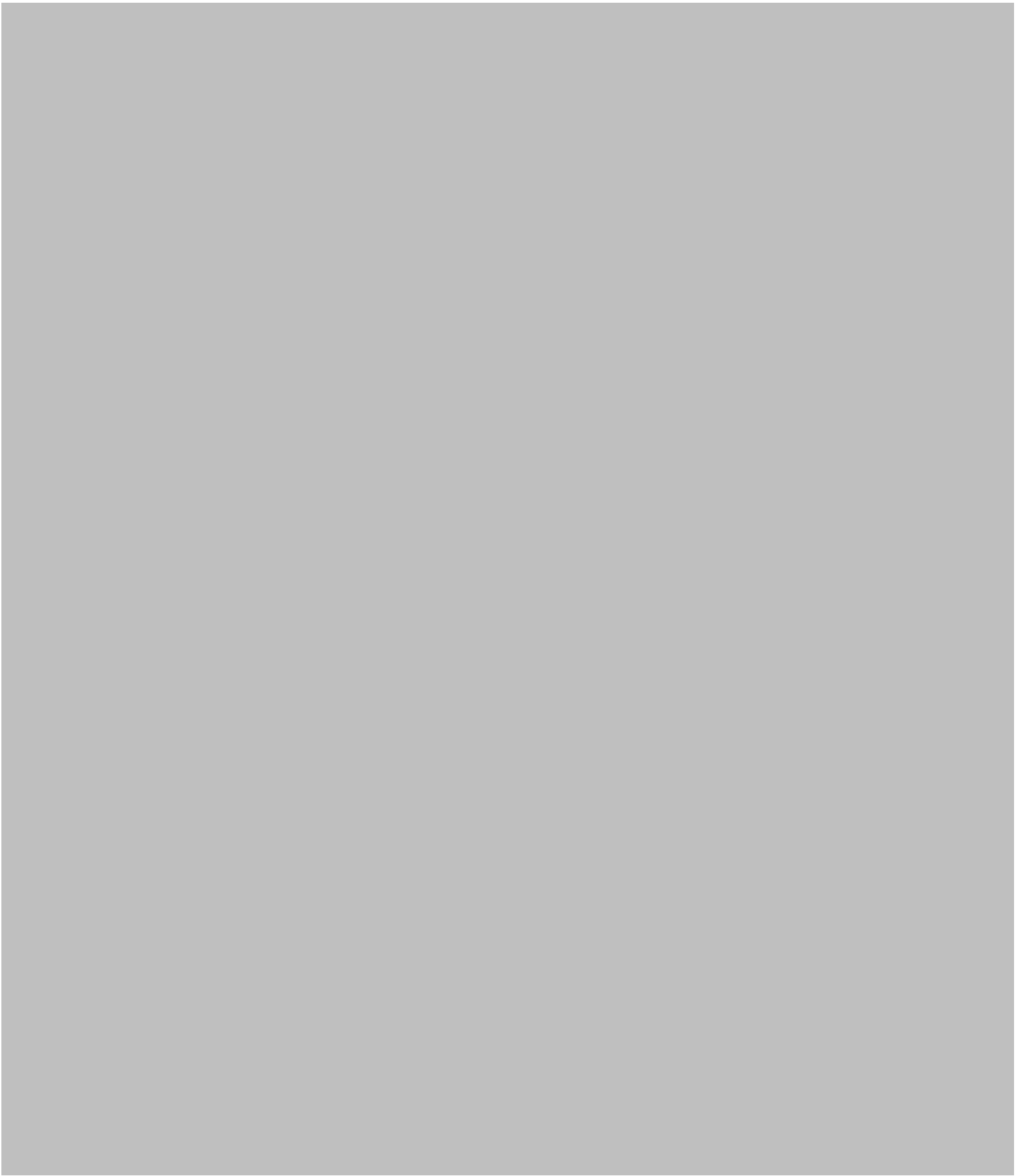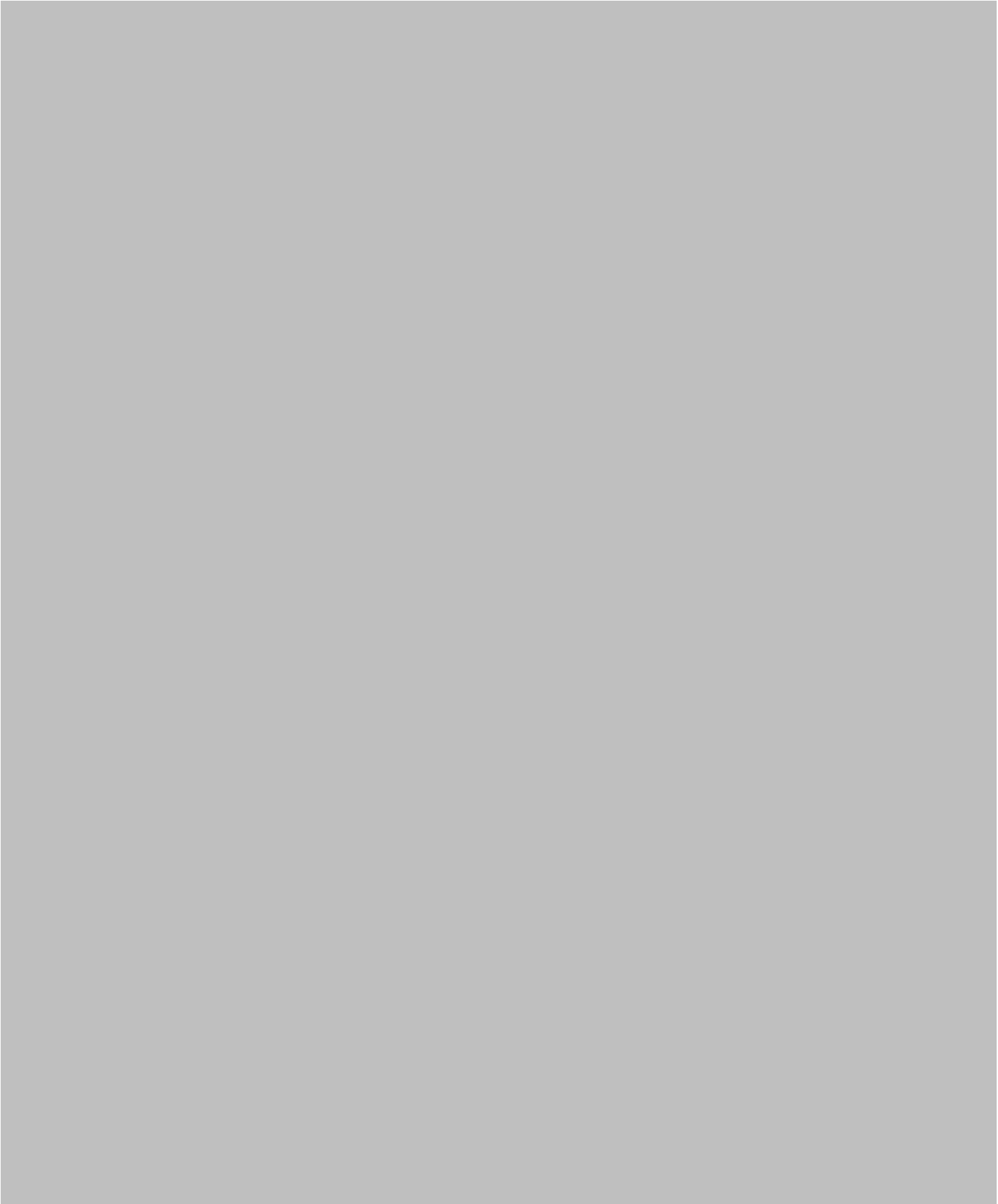
Appendix H

A table which documents the strategies identified by the school's SLT, which they believed enhanced pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour.

| Attainment	Behaviour	Attendance
Enhancing spelling, punctuation and grammar	CAF	CAF
Whole-school work scrutiny	Monthly parent meetings	Monthly parent meetings
CAF	Structured conversations	Structured conversations
Monthly parent meetings	Supporting parents' needs	Supporting parents' needs
Structured conversations	Letters home about success	First day calling
Supporting parents' needs	Smaller groups (max 8 pupils)	Home visits
Letters home about success	Alternative curriculum	Alternative curriculum
Prize evening	*Options* & reward scheme	*Options* & reward scheme
Yearly assessment of reading & Spelling	Counsellor	Identifying pupils' underlying SEN
One to one tutoring	Reiki healing	High expectations
Revision clubs	Addressing bullying	Attendance sheets
Smaller groups (max 8 pupils)	The four rules	Attendance surgeries
Alternative curriculum	Student voice	Raffle ticket for 100% attendance
Options & reward scheme	Sleuth	Half term certificates for good attendance
Counsellor	Incident slips	Monitoring SIMS data
Reiki healing	'Three strikes' Approach	Breakfast club
Stimulating curriculum	Catching up with work	Student voice
The four rules	Identifying pupils' underlying SEN	
Student voice	High expectations	
Catching up with work	Whole-school approach to decision making	
Whole-school approach to decision making		
Identifying pupils' underlying SEN		
High expectations		
Broad curriculum		
Assessing Pupil Progress (APP)		

Appendix I

A copy of the interview transcript from the focus group I conducted with the year 10 pupils. The interview transcript was analysed using thematic analysis.

194
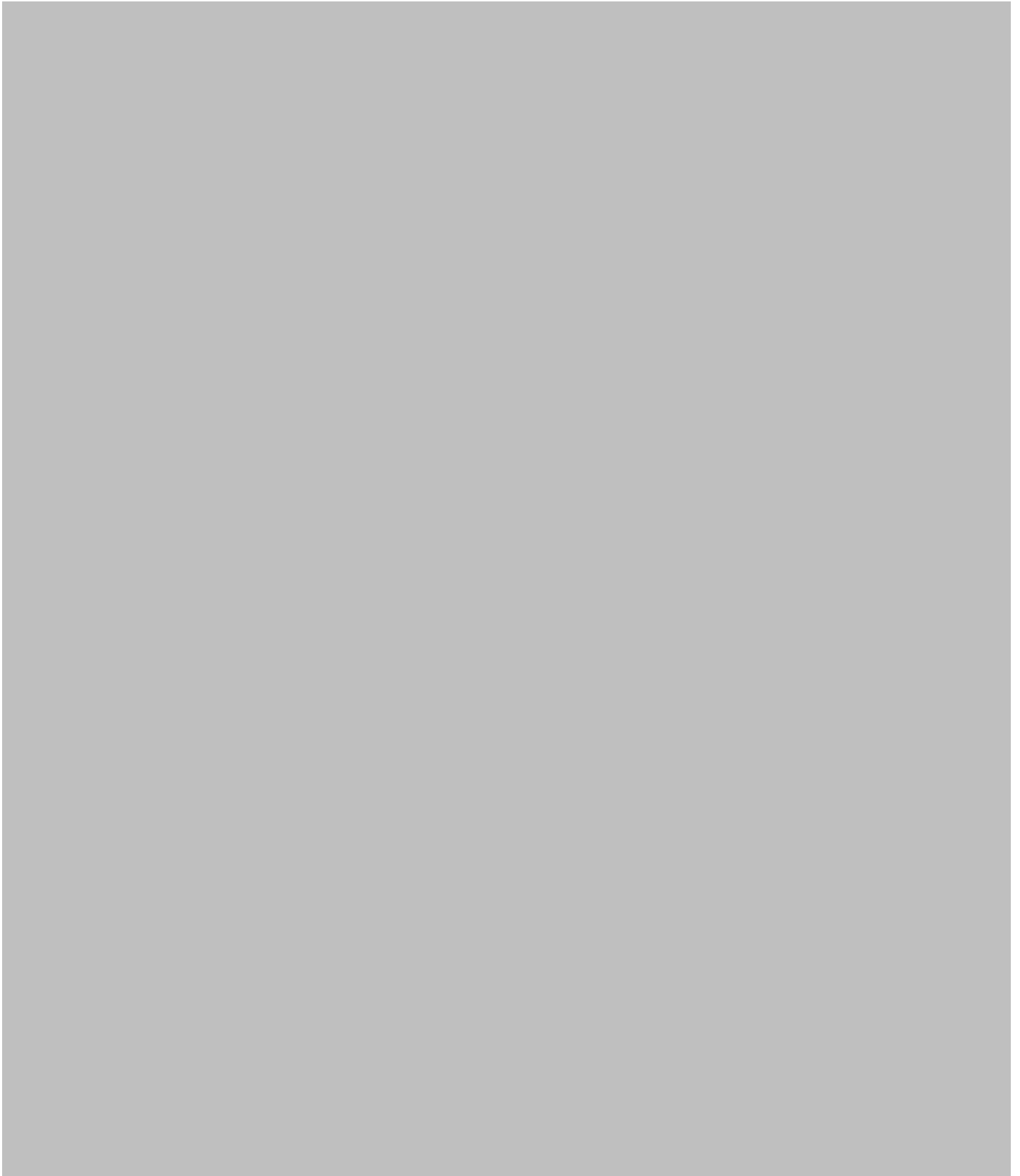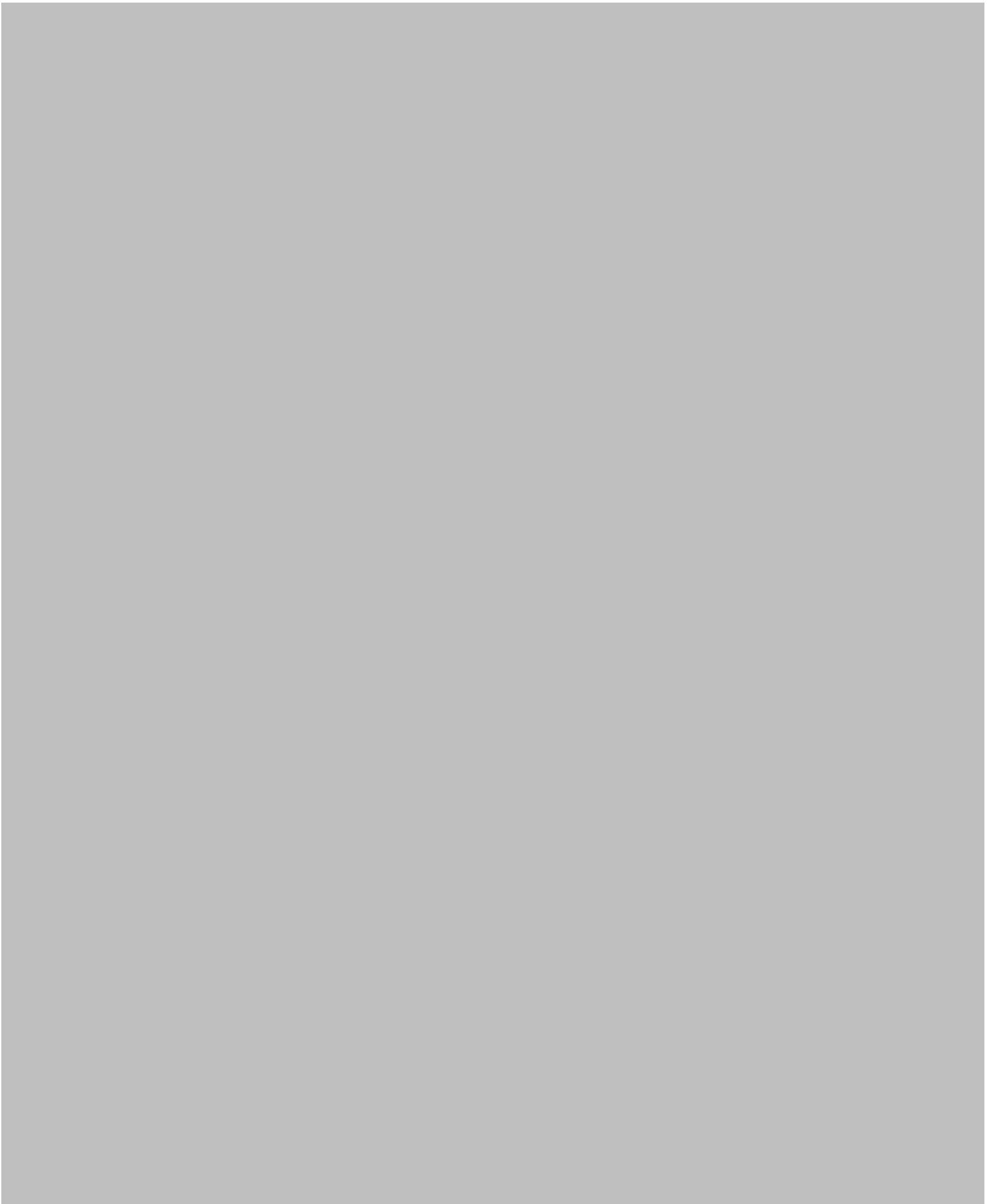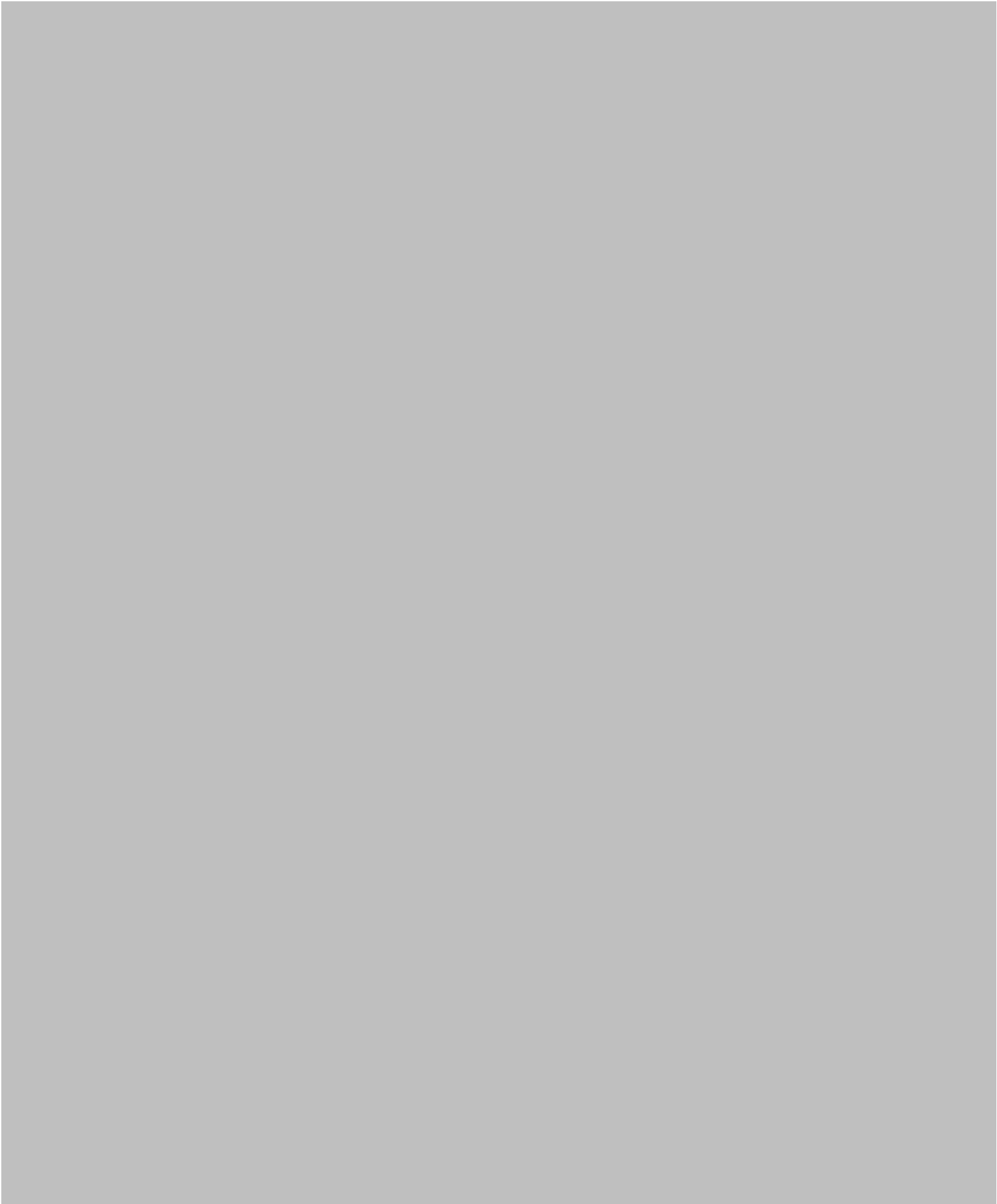
Appendix J

A copy of the interview transcript from the focus group I conducted with the year 11 pupils. The interview transcript was analysed using thematic analysis.
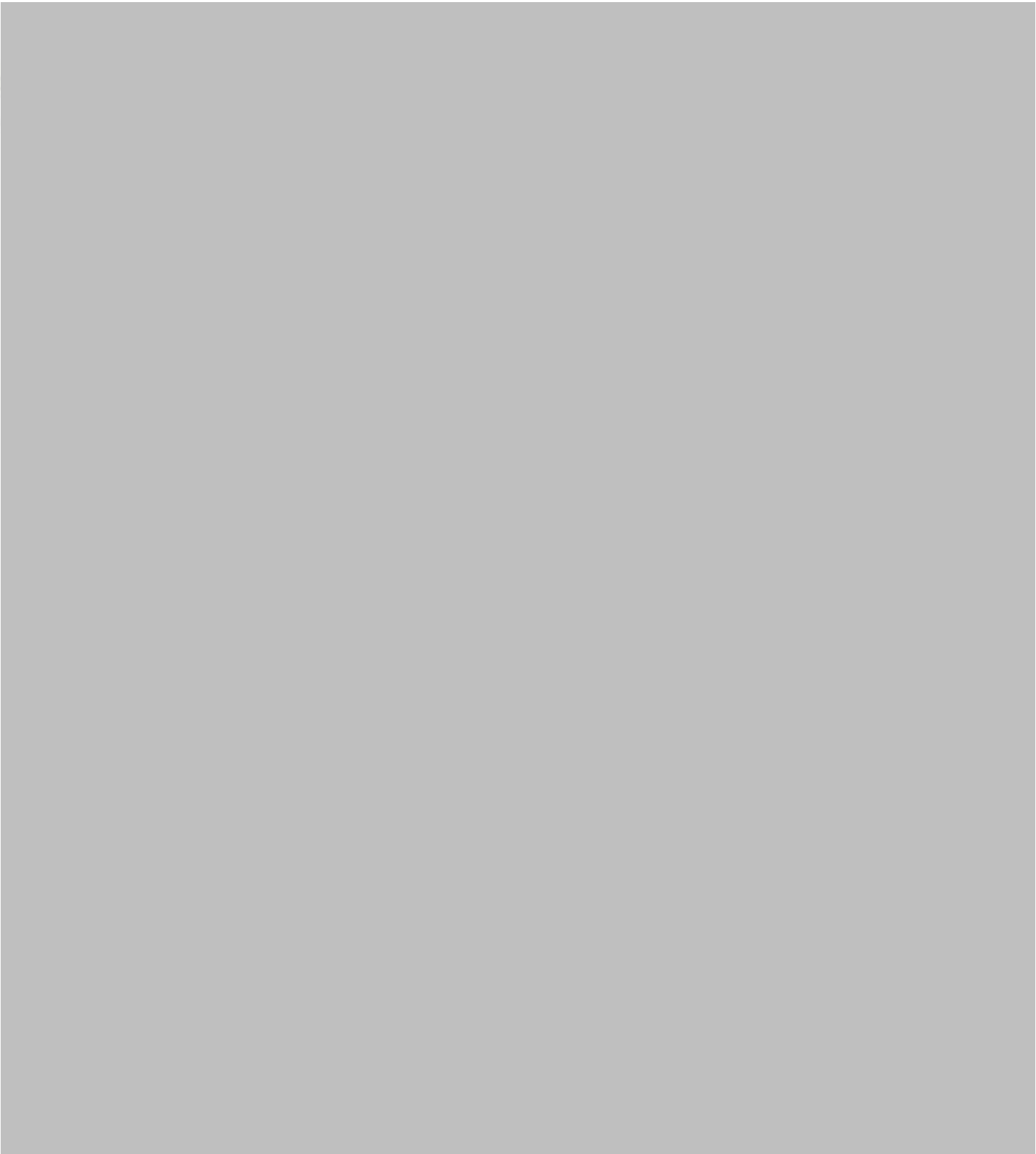
Appendix K

An extract taken from my reflective journal, completed during the focus groups with students.

15.1.2014 <u>Year 11 Focus Group</u>

- Rewards are important & desirable
- Bravado - trying to uncover their true feelings
- Identifying the barriers to learning more than the supportive factors
- Incredibly positive about staff ⤵

    the key difference between mainstream & the current school
- well-being
- more students contributing about strengths as focus group has progressed
    ↓

dominant voice - opened up - domino effect
- all pupils listening to the questions
one pupil not contributing until the end - appeared motivated on arrival.

A timeline of the current research.

8th March 2013	• Ethics proposal submitted
12th April 2013	• Amendments made to ethics proposal
23rd September 2013	• Initial contact made with SEBD special school
26th September 2013	• Semi-structured interview conducted with school's SLT
October 2013	• Produced interview transcript • Conducted thematic analysis • Identified strategies relating to pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour • Shared transcript and strategies with SLT
November 2013	• Develop strategy cards in preparation for Q-sort activities
6th January 2014	• Consent and information forms were sent to parents
15th January 2014	• Consent retrieved from pupils • Conducted focus groups with pupils • Conducted Q-sort activities with school's teaching staff
January 2014	• Produced interview transcripts for year 10 and 11 focus groups • Conducted thematic analysis
February 2014	• Conducted analysis of completed Q-sorts (PQ Method)
April 2014	• Embedded the results

Appendix M

*Statistical data relating to pupil attainment during the 2012-13 academic year.*

A range of data relating to student attainment was retrieved from the participating school ('school A'):-

- Students' GCSE results in English and Maths for the 2012/13 academic year.
- The percentage of students who achieved 5 GCSEs, grades A* to C not including English and Maths.
- The average point score per student for GCSEs and equivalent qualification. A student's point score reflects the number of qualifications they have achieved and the grades which they were awarded. Each grade corresponds with a number of points:- A* = 58 points; A = 52; B = 46; C = 40; D = 34; E = 28; F = 22 and G = 16.
- Data relating to GCSE achievement from the 2012/13 academic year was compared with the 6 other secondary SEBD special schools from inner and outer London. Data regarding the other SEBD special schools was accessible online (DfE, n.d; The Telegraph, 2014). National levels were also included as a point of reference. This information was retrieved from the Office for National Statistics and was accessible online.

- During the 2012-13 academic year 6.25% of eligible pupils at the school achieved a GCSE grade C for English. No pupil achieved higher than grade C for English. Within the national population, 54% of boys and 70% of girls achieved GCSE grades A* to C for English (DfE, 2014).
- 12.5% of eligible pupils at the school achieved a GCSE grade C for maths. Again no pupil achieved higher than grade C. 66% of boys and 69% of girls achieved GCSE grades A* to C for maths (DfE, 2014).

Percentage of pupils who achieved a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C (not including English and Maths) within the 2012-13 academic year.

- 44% of year 11 students achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C.
- This figure is 4.3% higher than the number of pupils who achieved this target, who experience a primary need of SEBD. However this includes pupils from all state settings, including mainstream schools.
- The school's results are also 40.9% higher than the national average for all boys who attend special schools. However this includes pupils with a wide range of SEN.

- As the table demonstrates, 0% of students within the six comparative schools, achieved the target of 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C.

5 GCSEs at grades A* to C
(not including English and Maths)
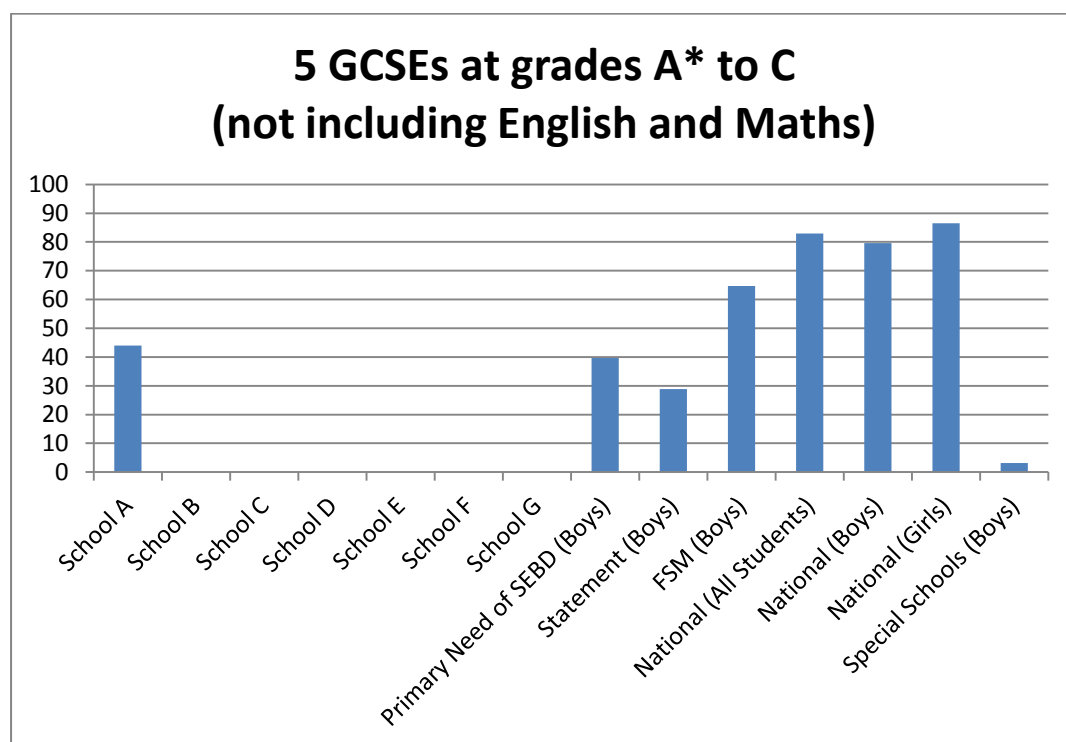
Average point score per pupil (GCSE and equivalent)

During the 2012-13 academic year, pupils at the school achieved an average point score of 332.5 within their GCSE and equivalent qualifications. This figure was 225.9 points higher than the mean of the average point scores achieved at the six comparative schools (106.6 points).

Average Point Score per Pupil
(GCSE and Equivalent)
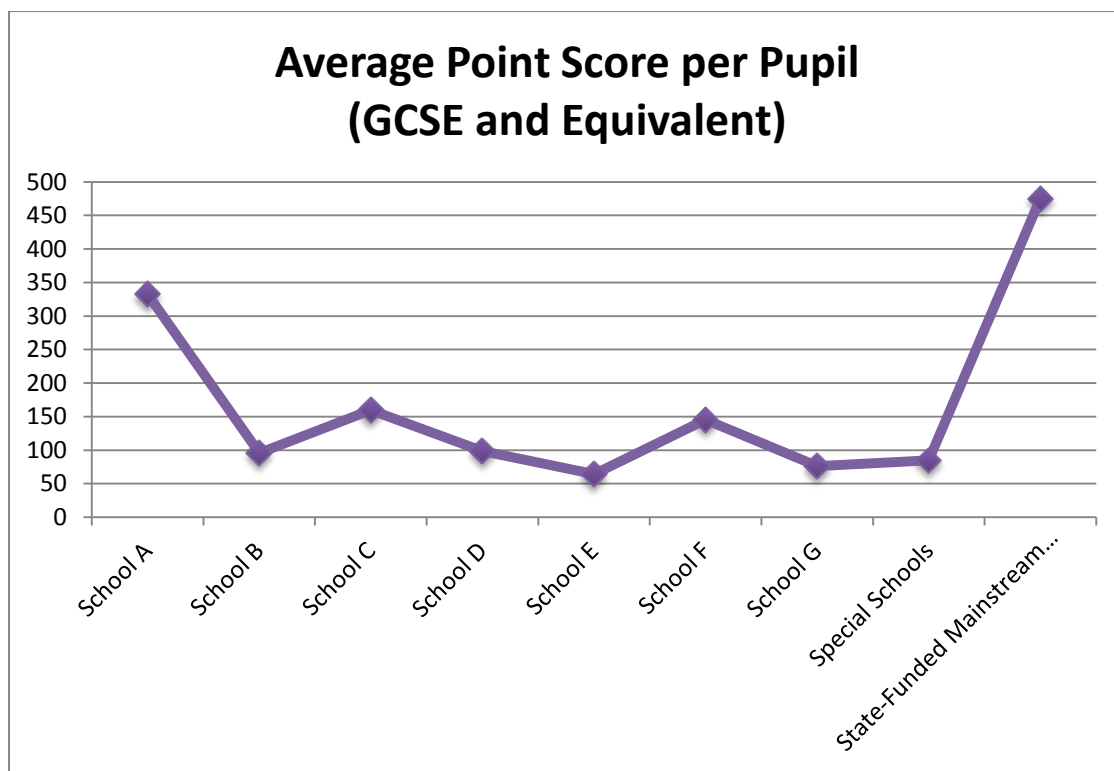
8.15   Appendix N

*Attendance data retrieved from the participating school for the current academic year (2013-14) (*between 1st September 2013 and 31st January 2014)*. Comparative data was retrieved from the Office for National Statistics (DfE, 2013d) and includes statistics from the 2011/12 academic year.*

Overall School Attendance

School Attendance by Year Group
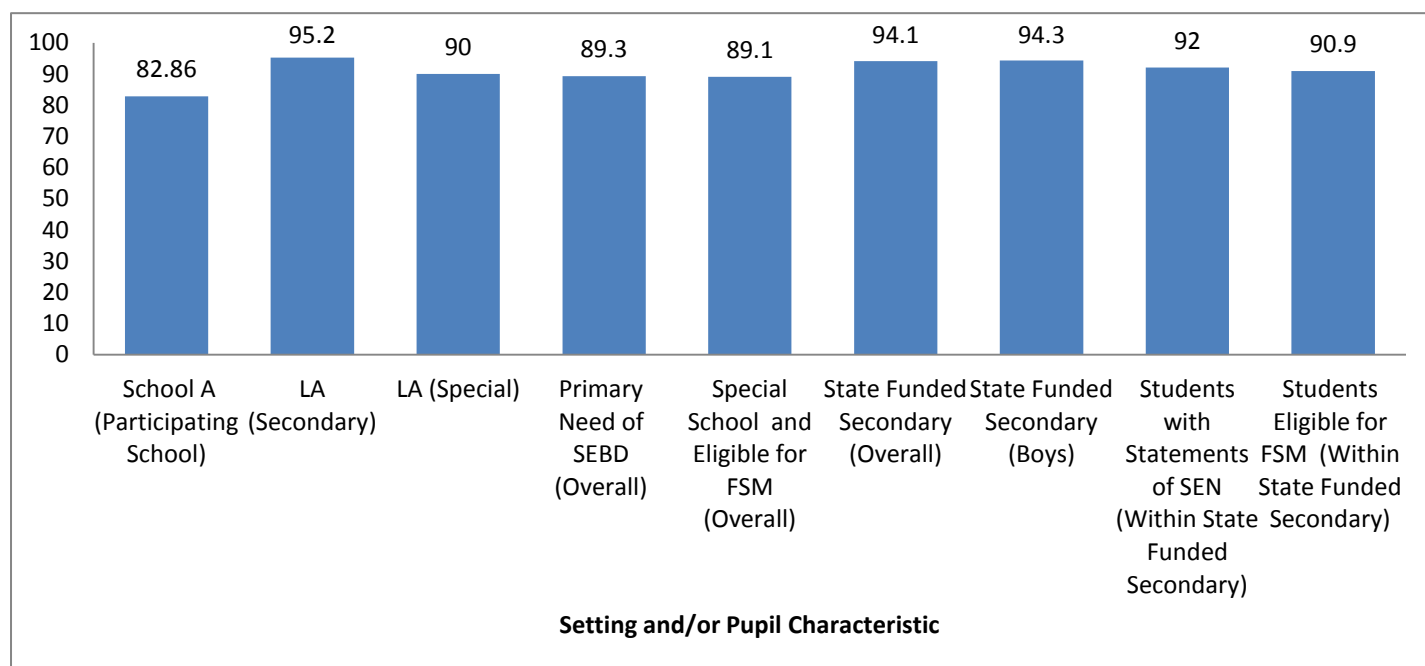
Average Attendance by Year Group
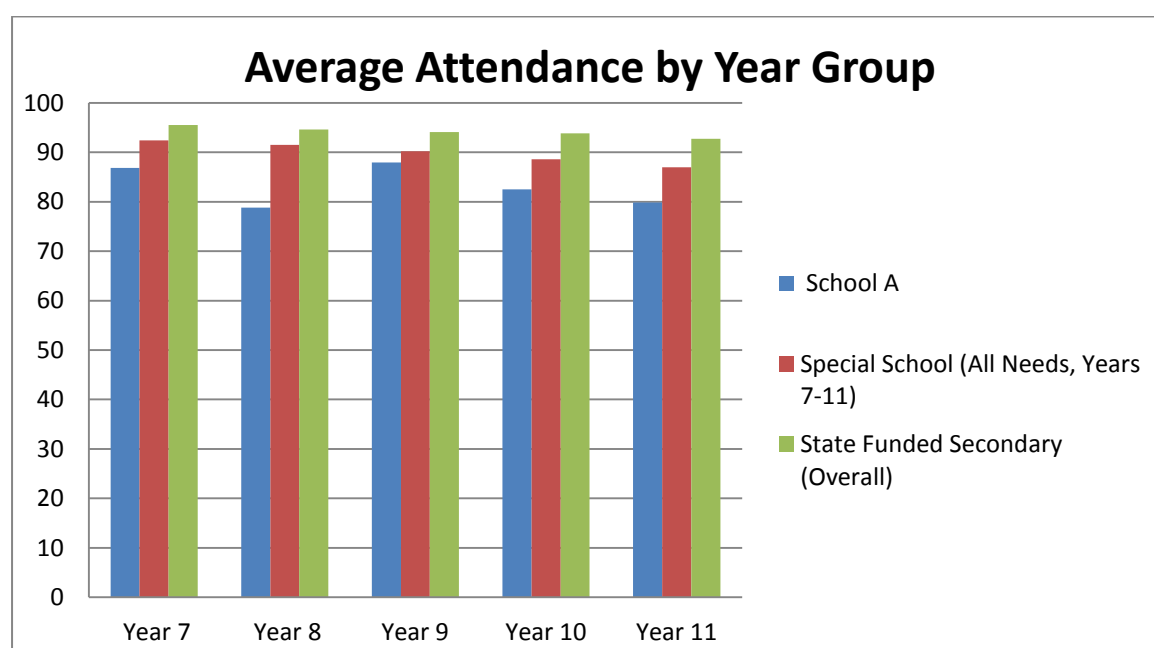
Percentage of Unauthorised Absences – Overall School

Percentage of Unauthorised Absences

Unauthorised Absence by Year Group

Appendix O

Statistical data relating to pupil behaviour during the 2013-14 academic year

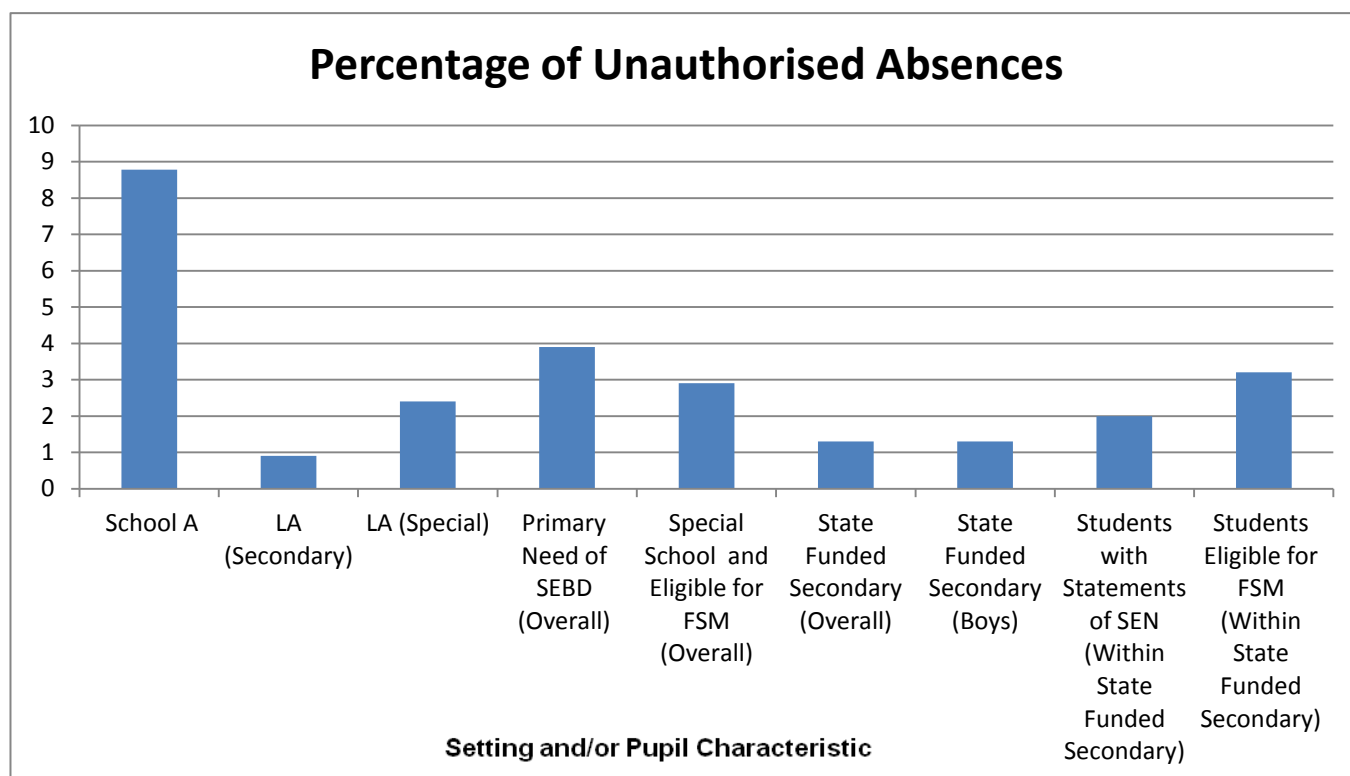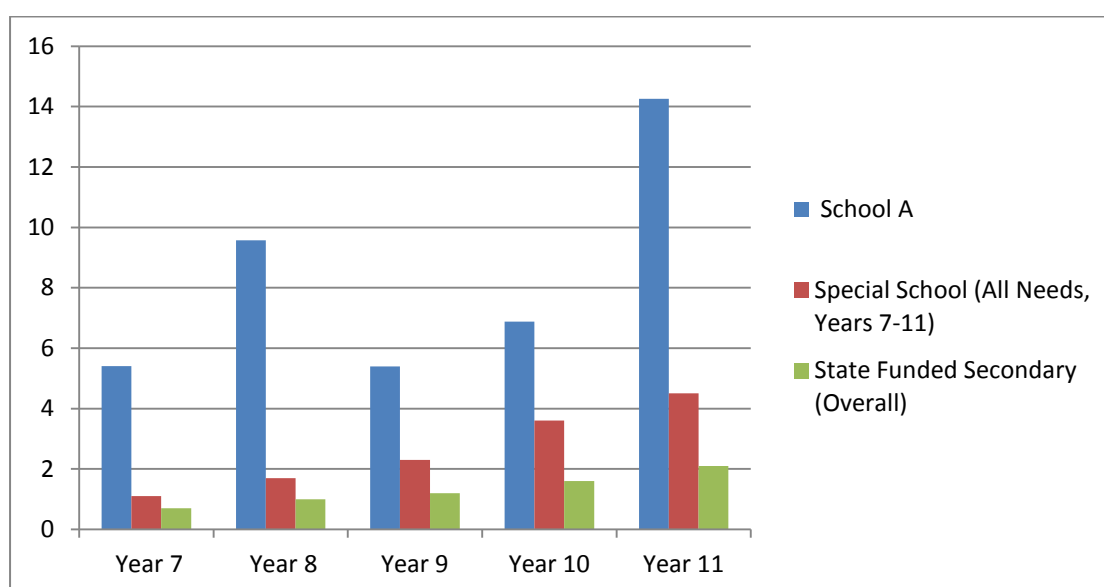During the 2012/13 academic year there were 41 fixed term exclusions (FTE) issued. The DfE (2013*d*) calculates fixed term exclusions as a percentage, by taking the number of FTE's and dividing this by the school population. However this does not account for students who have received more than one fixed term exclusion. It is not possible to retrieve data regarding the number of FTEs for students with a Statement of SEN, with a primary need of SEBD. National data from the 2012/13 academic year is not available therefore I have provided national data from the 2011/12 academic year. In the table below, I have presented data regarding behaviour incidents within the school during the current academic year. This table outlines the reasons behind the completion of an incident report. In total there were 5303 incidents between 1st September 2013 and 31st January 2014. An incident report is logged by school staff when further action is required by the school due to the severity of the student's behaviour (see table below).

A table which documents the percentage of fixed term exclusions issued within the current school, in comparison to national data.

	Percentage of FTEs issued.
The current context	73.2%
All special schools but only including students with a Statement of SEN	15.5%
All State-funded Secondary Schools	8.4%

A table which documents the number of incident reports logged in relation to the behaviour of the students.

Type of Incident	Total	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Stealing	2	1	0	1
Smoking	27	8	12	7
Use of Mobile/IPOD/MP3	7	1	4	2
Fighting	29	6	16	7
Bullying	111	37	59	15
Damage/Vandalism	143	30	70	43

Racist Bullying	47	9	24	14
Self-Exit	1095	276	429	390
Failure to Arrive	2084	431	849	804
Disturbing the Group	489	122	227	140
Refusal to Work	341	74	156	111
Inappropriate Sexual Comments	23	9	11	3
Verbal Bullying	15	6	8	1
Physical Bullying	5	0	3	2
Physically Abusive to Staff	46	13	28	5
Physically Abusive to Peers	90	21	52	17
Verbally Abusive to Staff	301	93	151	57
Verbally Abusive to Peers	102	47	41	14
Spitting	10	4	1	5
To Calm Down	19	0	8	11
Other	317	71	170	76

Appendix P

SEBD Secondary Special Schools within Inner and Outer London and corresponding Ofsted grades.

School	Ofsted Grade	Date of Inspection
School A (The participating school)	Outstanding	March 2011
School B	Good	June 2011
School C	Good	May 2011
School D	Outstanding	March 2009
School E	Good	January 2013
School F	Requires Improvement	June 2013
School G	Good	November 2011

Appendix Q

Details of the Ofsted inspection report completed at the special school in February 2011and reported in March 2011.

The following key findings were identified by Ofsted inspectors during the Ofsted inspection:-

- Pupils make good progress overall and a growing minority make outstanding progress. All the pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. The improvements have been driven by the expertise and determination of the head teacher to provide ever better education for the pupils.
- Leaders are never content with the standards of provision or the level of the pupils' performance. Every aspect of the school's work is rigorously analysed and evaluated and action swiftly taken to improve things.
- The school's track record of rapid improvement, the quality of self-evaluation and action planning and the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the school's leadership and management indicate strongly that there is an outstanding capacity to improve even further.
- The level of pupils' achievement has risen dramatically since the previous inspection. Many of the pupils enter the school with relatively low attainment, often because of poor attendance at previous schools and negative attitudes to education. The pupils make impressive early gains in their reading and spelling and continue to make good and sometimes outstanding progress across the curriculum. By the time pupils leave, their overall attainment is just below national averages. Virtually every pupil leaves with a range of GCSE and Entry level qualifications.
- The pupils' progress is as a result of good teaching and an outstanding curriculum which is continually under review to make sure it meets the needs of every pupil. As a result, the pupils feel challenged by and interested in their activities. They develop positive attitudes and greater confidence in their own abilities.
- Teachers, however, do not always record the small steps in learning which the pupils make. This can lead to inconsistency in planning and target setting for individual pupils and sometimes slows down the pace of learning.
- The school demonstrates exemplary standards of safeguarding and care. This enables every pupil to flourish because they feel safe and secure. The promotion of equal opportunities underpins all the school's work. The progress of every individual pupil is very closely monitored and tracked. Pupils are then supported effectively, where appropriate, to get over academic or social or emotional barriers to their learning.
- Pupil attendance, apart from a very few persistent absentees, is above average and shows year-on-year improvement. Their behaviour improves substantially through the school, as do their attitudes to learning. For example, in the last two years every pupil has left the school for a college placement.

The school were informed that the following areas required additional improvement:-

- To improve assessment procedures
- To ensure teachers use the day-to-day recording of pupils' progress consistently
- To ensure the effectiveness of subject leaders in monitoring and improving standards of teaching and learning in the subjects for which they are responsible.
- Adapt learning activities to build on the small steps in progress which the pupils make
- Create precise learning targets which are regularly reviewed.

A copy of the participant information sheet which was given to the school's SLT.

An 'Outstanding' SEBD Special School: Exploring the strategies which promote positive pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour

Focus of the research

I would like to explore the school's individual strategies for raising attainment, attendance and behaviour.

I will then share these strategies with SEBD provisions within the London Borough of Bromley and contextually/demographically prevalent special schools. Additionally this research would form the focal point of my thesis, as part of my Doctorate in Applied Child and Educational Psychology.

Rationale

Currently there are a restricted number of SEBD special schools who have achieved an 'outstanding' grade during Ofsted inspections.

The school improvement framework Achievement for All was found to impact positively on attainment and the wider outcomes of pupils with SEN. However the significance of this impact decreased for pupils with:-

- Higher levels of SEN – school action plus or pupils with a statement of SEN
- Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)
- Pupils with a primary need of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
- Older pupils

Therefore there appears to be a requirement to explore what strategies are the most effective in raising attainment, attendance and behaviour within SEBD special schools.

Methods

My research methods are designed to ensure minimal disruption is imposed on the school, whilst ensuring the retrieval of rich and functional data will be obtained. I anticipate that all data retrieval can be completed within 3 hours. However the research would ideally take place over two sessions:-

Session 1
Semi-structured interview with Head Teacher or member of SLT. (No longer than 1 hour)

Session 2

A 'statement sorting' task with school staff, where staff will work independently (on a voluntary basis). This is also known as a Q-Sort activity[1]. this could take place during a staff meeting (This should take no longer than 45 minutes)

Focus group discussions with pupils (maximum of 8 pupils within each group) again on a voluntary basis. (45 minutes per group) . However due to the size of the provision, one group would provide a fair representation. I would also request that 1 member of staff accompanies me during the discussion.

Retrieval of statistical data regarding the pupil's attainment, attendance and behaviour (from the school's existing records). To compare and contrast with national data for SEBD provisions.

Ethics
This research proposal has received full ethical clearance from the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham. I will of course retrieve consent from all members of staff, pupils and parents prior to collecting research data. All participation is on a voluntary basis.

To Conclude
If you would like to participate within the research, I can offer the following benefits in return:-

An objective, in-depth evaluation of the pupils' and staffs' views regarding what works well and motivates pupils to attend, behave and achieve. This is highly prevalent due to the Government's emphasis on the inclusion of the pupil voice.

 A copy of my final report, executive summary and any statistical data that I produce (as part of my analysis). This will include an analysis of the school's strategies, alongside pre-existing research evidence.

By sharing outstanding practice, this will further raise the profile of the school and potentially enhance support for additional vulnerable pupils across the UK.

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[1] Please see additional attachment.

Thank you for your time

Steve Dexter

Trainee Educational Psychologist –

Appendix S

A copy of the parental information sheet which was sent to the parents of all potential participants (pupils). Parents were required to understand the information prior to signing the parental consent form.

Parental Information Form

About this research

- This research is hoping to explore the strategies which are most effective in raising pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour at Oakwood School. I want to focus on the views of staff and pupils at Oakwood, as this school was judged by Ofsted as an *outstanding* school.

- This research will also explore how the *Achievement for All* framework has impacted on the attainment, attendance and behaviour of pupils who attend your child's current school.

- Achievement for All is a charity and their objective is to raise achievement, access and aspirations for children and young people. Staff, employed by Achievement for All work with schools across England, in order to provide school staff with additional strategies which may support the school to raise pupil attainment.

What I would like to do

- I would like to go into Oakwood School, during the school day and work with groups of up to 8 pupils. I would like to hold a group discussion with the pupils in the group (this is also known as a Focus Group) and will involve me asking questions, but also involve pupils discussing the topics raised with each other.

- The following topics will be discussed:-

  - How well have pupils behaved at the school this year?

  - How would pupils describe pupil attendance at school this year?

  - I would also like to discuss how well pupils feel they have done academically in English and Maths this year and will ask them to compare and contrast this with how they felt they did last year. However I will not ask them to talk about their levels in front of other pupils.

- It is anticipated that the Focus Group will last for up to one hour.

- Before the discussion begins, a series of group rules will be developed in collaboration with the pupils and a member of staff from the school. This will help to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, everyone listens to one another and respects others' points of view. I will also remind pupils about the importance of confidentiality.

- The Focus Group will take place, on the school site. It will take place during the school day, however the pupils will not be expected to miss their break time or lunch time.

Appendix T

A copy of the participant information sheet which was provided to pupils. Pupils were required to understand this information prior to signing the participant consent form.

<u>Participant Information Sheet (Students)</u>

<u>What am I trying to find out?</u>

- I am trying to find out the key strategies which have helped the school to improve students' learning, attendance and behaviour.

- I am also trying to find out, why the school was judged by Ofsted (Inspectors) to be 'Outstanding'.

<u>What I would like to do</u>

- I would like to come into school during the school day and work with groups of up to 8 students. I would like to hold a group discussion (this is also known as a focus group) with the students in the group about the following topics:-

  - What is student behaviour like in school?

  - What is student attendance like in school?

  - I would also like to talk about how well you feel you are learning in school, for example in English and Maths– But you don't have to talk about your learning levels.

- When taking part in a focus group it is important that everyone has a chance to speak, everyone listens and that you are not rude to others – it's very similar to a discussion you have in the classroom, but I would like you to be honest.

- The focus group will last for about one hour. However you will not miss your break time, lunch time and I will make sure that you go home on time if you decide to take part.

Your parents have also received a letter about this research, so you may wish to talk to them about the research. If you have any further questions about this research, write them down or speak to an adult at school. They can then contact me.

Appendix U

A copy of the semi-structured interview schedule utilised to retrieve the views of the school's SLT.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule
Interview with SLT

1. Can you describe your role in relation to the process of school improvement?

2. Can you describe the school's main objectives within the school during the current academic year?

3. What strategies do you feel have enhanced pupil attainment?
   - can you describe each strategy and provide examples?

4. What strategies do you feel have enhanced pupil attendance?
   - can you describe each strategy and provide examples?

5. What strategies do you feel have enhanced pupil behaviour?
   - can you describe each strategy and provide examples?

6. How would you describe the receptiveness of school staff to take in new information/strategies regarding attainment, attendance and behaviour?

7. Can you identify any barriers or challenges you have experienced when attempting to enhance pupil attainment, attendance or behaviour?
   - Did you overcome these? If so how?

8. What are the key factors to becoming an outstanding SEBD special school?

Did you have any questions or comments to add to your previous responses?

END

Appendix V

A copy of the questions and prompts form utilised when eliciting the views of the pupils.

<u>Focus Group - Questions and Prompts</u>

<u>Student Focus Group</u>

Ground Rules

<u>Behaviour</u>

- Can you discuss what pupil behaviour has been like in school this year?

- What factors are important in raising student behaviour?

- How do school staff support students to behave?

<u>Attendance</u>

- Can you discuss what Student attendance has been like in school this year?

- What motivates you (makes you want) to come into school?
  - What is the most important reason that motivates you to come into school?

- How do school staff support students to attend?

Attainment

- Can you discuss what your lessons have been like in school this year?

- What factors are important in raising student achievement?

- How does school staff help you to achieve?

Outstanding School

Why do you feel this school was judged to be 'Outstanding'?

-What makes it *outstanding*?

Would anybody like to ask any questions or make any additional comments?

END

Appendix W

A copy of the consent form provided to the school's SLT, which they were required to sign prior to participating within the research.

Participant Consent Form - SLT

- The data produced from the interview will be transcribed and analysed by the researcher.

- The results and data analysis will be included within the researcher's research paper, which forms part of their research at the University of Birmingham.

- The research findings will also be shared with relevant members of the Bromley Local Authority.

- I will also be required to feedback my research to fellow Trainee Educational Psychologists, the University of Birmingham Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology tutorial team.

- The names of any children or individuals used within the study (including your own) will remain confidential – pseudonyms will be assigned.

- All electronic data will be stored securely on a memory stick using a secure password.

- All printed data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at my office at the Local Authority, at which I am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

- Confidentiality – The researcher will ensure that only the following individual will have access to the interview data –the researcher's tutor at the University of Birmingham. However this individual will only receive the original copy of the raw data if she requests to listen to the recorded cassette, in order to verify the researcher's transcript. No additional copies of the recording will be made. Your name will not be referred to within the research report or findings, or during consultation with additional participants.

- Right to withdraw —You have the right to withdraw from the research at any point. However if you decide to participate and decide that you would like to withdraw your data from the research, you have the right to do so up until the 10th October 2013 - After this date all data will be utilised with additional members of staff. Please contact the researcher if you would like to withdraw (the researcher's contact details are outlined below).

What I am asking you to do

- Ensure that you have fully understood the contents of the research proposal sheet, which you received via email prior to receiving this consent form.

- Allow the researcher to interview you, discussing the topics highlighted above

- Allow the researcher to keep all of the data retrieved from this research and analyse it for research purposes.

- Allow the researcher to quote you (using a pseudonym) from the research interviews within my research report

- To share the research *report* with third parties. However I will not share your personal details and will continue to use the pseudonym allocated in any future copies of my report.

- Researcher's contact details

- Steve Dexter

- Trainee Educational Psychologist

Participant Consent Form (SLT)

If you agree with the research information documented above and are happy to participate within the research project, please sign below

    _____   Name_____

Date:_____

Appendix X

A copy of the consent form provided to pupils, which pupils were required to sign prior to participating within the research.

<u>Consent Form (Pupils)</u>

- Before you read this consent form – do you understand the information that is included within the Participant Information Sheet – this sheet tells you about what I am trying to learn and what I would like you to do. It is important that you understand this before reading this consent form!

- When I have completed this research I am also going to write this research up as part of my thesis. My thesis is a large project – (25 thousand words) and is similar to an essay or experiment that you may write in school. This is a key part of my university course that I am currently completing – the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology, at the University of Birmingham.

- I would also like to record what you say on a cassette, as it will be difficult for me to remember what you say if I do not. I will then type up what everybody has said onto a Microsoft word document. This will be saved onto a memory stick but I will be the only person who can access this, as it will securely locked with a password.

- Then I will analyse your answers – this will help me answer what I am trying to find out. I will try and find things in common between what you and other people in the group have said.

- I will be asked to talk about my research with people at school, the place where I work, the place where I study- the University of Birmingham and with the general public. However your name will remain *confidential* –I will not use your real name or other people's names that you talk about during the focus group. That means that other people who were not in the room, will not know what you personally have said, even if they read the report that I write.

- All printed data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at my office at the Local Authority, at which I am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

- Confidentiality – My supervisor at University (Similar to a form tutor at school) may ask to listen to the tape recording of the focus group. However she will only do so to check that I have recorded the information from the tape cassette onto Microsoft Word correctly. No other individuals will have access to the tape cassette.

- Right to withdraw –You have the right to withdraw (No longer take part) from the research at any point. However if you decide to take part and decide that you would like to withdraw your data from the research, you have the right to do so up until the 1st August 2013 - After this date all data will be analysed alongside the other information I am due to collect

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and it will not be possible to identify. Please let your parent/carer or a member of staff know if you would like to withdraw (My contact details are outlined below).

<u>What I am asking you to do</u>

- To make sure you understand the information that is included in the Participant Information Sheet.

- To participate in the focus group discussion

- Respect and listen to others during the focus group discussion

- Allow the researcher to keep all of the data retrieved from this research and analyse it for research purposes.

- Allow the researcher to use the data retrieved from this research within my research report

- To share the research *report* with third parties (other people). However I will not share your personal details either in my report or during discussions about my research.

- <u>Researcher's contact details</u>

- Steve Dexter (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

- xxxx Educational Psychology Service

  Telephone number:

<u>Participant Consent Form (Pupil)</u>

If you agree with the research information which is written above and are happy to take part within the focus group and research, please sign your name here

_____

Name   _____

Date: _____

A copy of the parental consent form provided to parents, which parents were required to sign prior to their child participating within the research.

Parental Consent Form

- The Focus Group discussion will be recorded onto a cassette, in order for me to record exactly what was said within the discussion.

- The data produced from the interview will be transcribed (typed electronically onto a Microsoft Word document) and I will then analyse this information, in order to help me answer the key objectives of the research. I will analyse the information using thematic analysis – which helps the researcher identify common themes between what participants have said.

- This research will help me to identify the key strategies which have helped the school to improve attainment, attendance and behaviour.

- In addition the results and data analysis will be included within my thesis research, which forms part of core requirements of the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology course I am currently completing at the University of Birmingham.

- I will also be required to feedback my research to fellow Trainee Educational Psychologists, the University of Birmingham Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology tutorial team and the Local Authority in which I am employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist

- Your child's name will remain confidential – your child will be allocated a pseudonym. Therefore if you wish to withdraw your child from the research or your child wishes to withdraw, I will be able to identify their responses/data.

- All electronic data will be stored securely on a memory stick using a secure password, which I will only be able to access.

- All printed data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at my office at the Local Authority, at which I am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

- Confidentiality —My personal tutor at the University of Birmingham, is the only other individual, who may access the original data, this will only be in the circumstance in which my tutor wants to assess the accuracy of my transcriptions – transferring data from the cassettes to the Microsoft word document. However this individual will only receive the original copy of the raw data if she requests to. Your child's name will not be referred to within the research report or findings, or during consultation with additional participants.

- Right to withdraw —You have the right to withdraw your child's name from the research at any point. Your child also holds this right and this is stated within their consent form. However if you both decide to provide consent and later decide that you would like to withdraw your child's data from the research, you have the right to do so up until the 31st January 2014 - After this date all data will be unidentifiable and anonymous. Please contact the researcher if you would like to withdraw your child's data (the researcher's contact details are outlined below).

What I am asking you to do

- To carefully review the Parent Research Information Sheet.

- Allow your child to take part in a Focus Group with up to 8 other pupils, the researcher (me) and a member of the school staff – the Focus Group will last for up to one hour.

- Allow the researcher to keep all of the data retrieved from this research and analyse it for research purposes.

- Allow the researcher to use the data retrieved from this research within my research report

- To share the research *report* with third parties. However I will not share your child's personal details either in my report or during discussions about my research.

Researcher's contact details

- Steve Dexter (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Parental Consent

If you agree with the research information documented above and are happy for your child to participate within the research project, please sign below

_____ Name _____

Date: _____