

An Examination of the Analogy of Attainment,  
Achievement and Success  
for Low Performers at Key Stage 2:  
The Disconnected Minority

by

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A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham

College of Social Sciences

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September 2018

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## **Abstract**

This is a study of educational disadvantage. The thesis explores how the terms attainment, achievement and success are used to express transitions in the secondary education system, from key stage 2, the point of entry, through to key stage 4, the point at which pupils are required to sit GCSE examinations. The research is contextualised by studying a particular cohort of pupils who enter the secondary education system with low scores as assessed by Standard Assessment Test protocols.

The research is located in a postmodern paradigm and uses a conflict perspective to provide a theoretical framework. Using a mixed-methods approach the thesis explores how the reliance on GCSE floor targets affects the ability of this cohort to recognisably 'attain', 'achieve' or 'succeed' during their KS2 – KS4 transition.

The research findings are discussed in relation to the rationale behind existing education policy and planned changes and how implementation impacts on both the teaching profession and pupils.

The thesis concludes that inherent disadvantage exists within the education system which is acceptable to the power-elite for a number of reasons. The research also concludes by identifying that a separate articulation of successful transitions is needed for a number of pupils within the cohort of study and although this is unlikely to happen, makes recommendations on how this might be accomplished.

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## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

The foundations for this thesis were laid as a result of my own experiences of the secondary education system in England. Having previously worked for a world-brand automotive manufacturer as a Quality Control Engineer, I had been well-trained in process non-conformance and so was attuned to identify, question and analyse, review and regulate processes and process non-conformity; a major factor in this role was to almost intuitively recognise where something is not 'quite right'.

In employing those skills in this project, the 'voice' of the researcher is expressed in multiple ways; as a consumer of the service (admittedly some time ago), as a parent of two children who have negotiated the system, with distinct differences in their performance outcomes, and through experiences of working within a number of secondary schools over a period of 5 years between 2007-2012 as a Teaching Assistant, Cover Supervisor and Examination Invigilator.

Similarly, how I 'see the world' in a social context is shaped by many influences over many years, which includes some 35 years work experiences before entering academia. As a direct consequence the theoretical perspectives from which this study is conducted are very clearly informed by how those experiences have impacted on my life.

It may be somewhat of an axiom to state that the concept of disadvantage is multifaceted but in accepting that as fact, in reductionist terms, this thesis is concerned with disadvantage in the education system. Specifically, despite a discourse articulated by successive governments, that all pupils entering the secondary education process have an equal chance of success, it is generally accepted within

the academic community that this claim is false. Nevertheless, and despite a substantial body of academic literature on the topic of academic underachievement, it is an ambition of this study to expand on that general acceptance and offer additional perspective to the existing intellectual contribution. For example, it has been identified in academic literature and within the education profession that good performance is frequently celebrated. Nevertheless, the system of measurement upon which that performance is quantified, is flawed (Ponte and Smit, 2013; Pring, 2014). A contradiction of that recognition, as I argue in this thesis, is that the education system overlooks or ignores, the capabilities of a number of pupils. These pupils have little chance of realising any worthwhile academic results from the outset, comparative to government imposed floor targets. For the purpose of this study, the terms floor targets and benchmarks are used interchangeably. They represent the predetermined targets which apply to all pupils in the secondary education system, which at the time this study was conducted, in the later stages of the 2010-2015 Coalition Government, were 5 GCSE passes at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics (Department for Education, 2014d).

Excluding the introduction and conclusion, this thesis is arranged into eight substantive chapters. Chapters 2 – 6 describe the theoretical and methodological foundations for the thesis and the analysis of relevant literature. Chapter 2, which concerns social-world theoretical frameworks; chapter 3, methodology and methods; chapter 4, educational philosophy; chapter 5, how policy is made and implications which arise; and chapter 6, how policy and articulations of “success” are interpreted.

Three subsequent chapters 7 – 9 are the results of the empirical study. Chapter 7 is an analysis of data provided by one of the schools in the study and relates to actual

progress, KS2 – KS4, of a cohort of pupils who entered the school with low key stage 2 scores. Chapter 8 uses results from a survey and a series of interviews to discover how education professionals articulate their views on policy and policy implementation. Chapter 9 uses a similar approach in an attempt to reveal opinions on potential alternatives to current policy, as this specifically relates to the cohort which is central to this thesis. This is a group within the general yearly intake in to secondary education, at year 7, who enter the system with key stage 2 test scores of 3 or less, as measured by established criteria.

### **1.1: Research questions.**

The title of this thesis is “An examination of the analogy of attainment, achievement and success for low performers at key stage 2.” The focus is broadly one of educational disadvantage and the overarching research question chosen to examine the research theme is:

*Why does the UK education system fail a number of pupils who enter the secondary education process with low key stage 2 test scores?*

Below that broad question sit a number of supplementary propositions for which answers are not readily identifiable throughout the literature, such as:

- Why are GCSE passes considered to be an adequate measure of successful transitions from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4 for all pupils?
- How many pupils entering the secondary school system do not have realistic chances of reaching their attainment benchmarks (‘floor targets’ and ‘expected levels of progress’)?
- How is it determined that those floor targets are achievable for all pupils?
- What different articulations of successful transitions are readily identifiable?
- What control do pupils have over their own educational outcomes?

The thesis has the ambition to answer these questions through a review of literature, a survey and a series of interviews. The way in which resulting data is presented has been discussed throughout chapter 1.2 below.

## **1.2: Thesis structure.**

**Chapter 2** uses a set of philosophical frameworks to help identify ‘the problem’ and how it could be studied, beginning with a description of Personal Construct Theory which underpins the theoretical notion that individuals construct reality in terms of what it means to them. This helps inform the constructions that I make and upon which the foundations of this thesis are laid. Using a set of propositions argued by Lister (2010), the chapter also relates the importance of using academic theory in the study of social policy, an ethereal concept with which I had largely struggled for the most part of my academic career. Amongst other factors which Lister relates are that the use of theory can help to make sense of the social world and to help make connections between different social phenomena and policies, which were invaluable in the generation of the overarching research question and any propositions which sat beneath that enquiry. The work of Lister pointed me towards earlier theoretical academic works by for example, Lyotard (1984 [1979]) and Baudrillard (1988) which helped to locate the research as a social enquiry in an interpretive paradigm. Consequently, it was possible to reject the use of meta-narratives and approach the study from a postmodern perspective. This chapter also describes how some of the work of Foucault (1998) has been interpreted so that the postmodern paradigm can be employed to analyse power structures and issues of class divisions, as represented by policies of successive governments which privilege the ablest pupils.

Chapter 2 continues with descriptions of how the education system is viewed from the perspectives of functionalism, conflict and interactionism, as argued by Ballantine and Hammack (2012). Specifically, how functionalism views education as an all-encompassing social system which reinforces societal norms and values, provides a qualified labour force and emphasises a meritocracy which preserves or even deepens, innate inequalities in society. Wilson (2011) for example, arguing that this also maintains the dominance of the power elite. Contrasting conflict theories with functionalism, Ballantine and Hammack (2012) and Wilson (2011) relate how social strata are determined by the ability to generate wealth and that systemic preservation of social divisions underpins our education system. The fact that pupils are regarded as a minority group excludes them from processes of wealth generation and as a consequence they have an inert relationship with their educational environment (Mason and Hood, 2011). This view is contrasted with an analysis of interaction theory which rejects notions of 'structure' and argues that pupils have a greater degree of agency (Jenks, 1998) and that as a result the education system is predicated on individual relationships such as those between teachers and parents, teachers and pupils and between pupils. The notions of labelling and rational choice are introduced at this point in the chapter, both of which are concerned with perceptions of behaviour relative to external factors. In the case of labelling, pupils behave in the way that they are expected to behave. With rational choice, they behave in the manner based on how they might or might not be rewarded.

The chapter concludes with a justification for using a conflict approach to inform this thesis, arguing that neither the functional nor the interaction theories capture the spirit of what the thesis sets out to achieve in providing a 'voice' for a cohort of pupils who appear disregarded by the education system as a result of the perpetuation of power- elites.

**Chapter 3** discusses the research methodology and methods employed. Section 3.1 discusses the research design. This thesis is a social enquiry which recognises reality in terms of a number of socially constructed interactions. Within this paradigm it is generally accepted that qualitative research methods are most suitable. However, there was an early recognition that an amount of statistical background and analysis would be required. Consequently, and having regard for my own background in process compliance and extensive experience of qualitative research, this study was conducted using a mixed methods approach. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) described mixed methods research as "... A research paradigm whose time has come ..." and "... the natural complement to traditional qualitative and quantitative research ..." (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 1). Whereas quantitative research seeks to determine on a binary scale - what works or why it does not - very often a qualitative response is needed to explain the statistical outcome. For example, it is an ambition of this thesis, using three case study schools, to quantify a number of pupils who have little chance of reaching government floor targets at GCSE level. Analysis of statistics ought to provide that quantification. Nevertheless, it will then require some form of qualitative approach to explain the further ambition of *why* those pupils are so disadvantaged. Located, therefore, in a perspective that determines that things that 'do not work' often due to any number of external factors, which need to be explained and not simply quantified, the rationale for using a mixed methods approach was established.

Section 3.2 discusses issues of research ethics, how informed consent was obtained from research participants and how confidentiality was protected. This section also examines research ethics in respect of how the researcher-participant relationship needs to be appropriate and how the researcher should ameliorate any perceptions of bias in the work by the use of a robust methodology.

Sections 3.3 through to 3.6 discuss the technical aspects of conducting empirical research: 3.3 Data collection and analysis, 3.4 Sampling, 3.5 Data collection timetable and 3.6 Examining data

Section 3.7 briefly explains how experience and my previous research helped to inform a formative evaluation of a selection of literature. Section 3.8 then introduces the process of a pilot stage in the empirical research process before circulation to the wider research population. 3.9 explains how this process was employed for the research survey and in 3.9a how results from the pilot survey were used to restructure aspects of the final questionnaire before wider distribution. 3.9b explains how the final survey was launched and reveals response rates.

Section 3.10 discusses how the process related in 3.8 and 3.9 was also used to structure and conduct a series of interviews using a semi-structured approach and how my experiences when conducting pilot interviews shaped the final questions. Chapter 3 closes with a discussion (section 3.11) of the strategies used to code and analyse the qualitative data provided from ‘free field’ text responses in the survey and the interviews. A justification for the choice of using a directed content analysis is also offered, within the context of a realist paradigm.

**Chapter 4** is largely concerned with theoretical perspectives. Rather than concentrating on social theory, the focus of chapter 2, this chapter is concerned with how a diverse set of philosophers and educational psychologists articulate various models of child development. The chapter begins with the wide-ranging question ‘Why Educate?’. Using propositions developed by Peters (1966) and Bailey (1984) and contrasting those with opposing views from for example, Marples (2010) and Winch (2013), it becomes apparent that divergent opinions exist on the purpose of

education. For the likes of Peters and Bailey, education should be liberal and concentrate on what is ‘worthwhile’, whilst Marples and Winch argue that the education system exists to provide the means of acquiring qualifications, based on a fairly strict regime of academic attainment. Winch, at least, concedes that achieving these ambitions is not an easy task. The rationale for education continues in chapter 2 with a brief discussion on why education is delivered in schools. This is relevant to this thesis because of later discussions (in chapter 6 and beyond) about different methodologies of educational delivery. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the concept of ‘withdrawal’ of low ability pupils from the education process. This emanates from analysis of Bourdieu (1974) and the theory of habitus and an analysis of how the education system (as previously highlighted) concentrates efforts on the ablest pupils.

The UK education system is predicated on the notion of universality (that is, that all children should be compulsorily schooled). Chapter 4, therefore, continues with a debate on equality of opportunity based on some of the work of Rawls (2001) with an ambition to discover whether all pupils have an equal starting point within the system. This is a heavily contested debate, as articulated by a number of prominent authors for example, Seddon (2006) and Taylor-Gooby and Martin (2010). It is apparent within the debate that talent and ambition, two of Rawls’ dimensions of equality are frequently negated by the third dimension, that of prospects to attain advantage. Once again, the relevance to the propositions at the heart of this thesis is readily apparent as the argument of a subjugated, inert cohort of pupils is advanced. It is widely recognised within social science that individuals have their own starting point from which to be measured. This is a pertinent distinction to draw upon when considering how a young person’s development affects their GCSE prospects. As

argued elsewhere in this thesis, for some, simply realising their best possible outcome might be all that can be expected; there is no real prospect of attaining a target of five A\* - C GCSEs, simply a resolve to achieve the best possible conclusion to their time at secondary school. For some, this may involve a modest acceptance of surviving the process of schooling.

The substantive element of chapter 4 relates to models of child development and theories of learning as promoted by eminent philosophers in those fields. It is immediately apparent that academics working in this area very much view the 'child' in terms of being an individual and how their ability to process information and react to that information is influenced by their environment. Many child development models indicate that a significant proportion of the attributes contributing towards successful outcomes for children are axiomatic, for example that children develop in stages, at differing rates of progress. The relevance of these arguments to an education system which is common to all young people at each stage is tangible.

This chapter also identifies assets-based models of child development, using as an exemplar, the US based educational charity, Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets. The methodology identifies forty characteristics as fundamental in helping young people to develop into "healthy, caring and responsible" adults (Scales and Leffert, 2004). Search Institute contend that assets which: (a) encourage participation in school and community; (b) help to build social and emotional skills; (c) promote supportive relationships with teachers and parents; (d) consistently reward positive behaviour, frequently feature in reports of positive educational outcomes. A number of other characteristics are identified which may be useful in identifying pupils' "success" in any system of measuring educational progress which was not wholly grounded in academic performance, which makes the analysis of 40 Assets relevant

to the research questions posed in this thesis. This also resonates with concepts of Character Education, discussed in chapter 4.2b following 40 Assets. Despite being more academically grounded than assets based models, Character Education philosophy is viewed as seeing a young person holistically and imparting positive personal strengths (The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015a). Sub-section 4.2b, drawing on work from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues based at the University of Birmingham, identifies a possible alternative mechanism for identifying a successful transition through the secondary education process.

One of the principal arguments contained in this thesis relates to how a cohort of low-performing pupils is at best, marginalised and at worst ignored, by the education system. Chapter 4 therefore concludes with a section which analyses whether the sociological dichotomy of agency and structure is relevant in the context of child development models and education system which is imposed on young people so that they have an inert relationship with it. Although research is indicating that young people are recognised as social actors, they are equally seen as a minority group which is excluded from full participation in society (Mason and Hood, 2011).

The processes and system upon which education is based is entirely dependent on government policy. It seems necessary therefore, to examine how and why policy is formed, the likely impacts of policy and how the education profession responds. Consequently, **Chapter 5** is concerned with issues of policy making and policy discourse and helps to inform the empirical stage of the study. The chapter begins by briefly assessing why the state becomes involved in social policy having regard for what Le Grand (1998) and Deacon (2004) suggest as ‘policy motives’, for example the advancement of social mobility and reduction in income inequality as described by Portes (2011). Both are important factors in an education system which is

grounded in a discourse of elitism and academic competence. A major element of this chapter is the portrayal of models of policy-making by Grindle and Thomas (1991) and Hay (2004) which contrast a linear, rational, approach to policy-making (Grindle and Thomas) with a model of crisis narration (Hay).

Government representations argue that policy is evolutionary rather than reactionary (Stevenson, 2011). Although accepting of this argument to some degree, using the crisis narration model I argue, from the conflict perspective, that evolutionary policy in the current context is somewhat of a misnomer. I argue that policy discourse is being driven by reactionary motivation through innate ideology and political philosophy. Successive governments have created (narrated) a series of crises in the education process which almost demonises the profession; for example, around ‘standards’ and by controlling the discourse around secondary education to represent a system which is in danger of total collapse (Gove, 2009). These arguments lack credible support from within the profession (Brown, 2013; Steers, 2014).

Later sections of chapter 5 are studies of recent policy history (1997-2015). In section 5.2 (The Policy Climate), General Election Manifestos which are regarded in academia as providing good signposting from policy ideas through to later policy implementation (Pearce, 2004), are used as an instrument of examination and reveal that a ‘crisis narration’ around educational standards is not an entirely new concept. In fact, the Conservative Party was beginning to articulate the notion of ‘high standards’ at the time of the General Election in 1997, which is important because much later, when in government, this mantra became the foundation for much of the policy they pursued. The fact that they lost that Election, it can be argued, merely delayed their intent to reorganise the education system as immediately upon being elected to power in 2010 (albeit in Coalition), many of the proposed changes

highlighted in 1997, including issues of school autonomy, were implemented.

Section 5.3 explores the approach of the ‘New’ Labour governments between 1997-2010, which were also articulating issues of underperforming schools and an improvement in teaching standards. Section 5.4 assesses Coalition Government policies in the years 2010-2015 which introduced a number of policy initiatives such as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), specifically a measure of performance and not a qualification; Pupil Premium, a fund of money payable to schools for the benefit of disadvantaged pupils and Progress 8, a revised measure of academic performance at key stage 4. Perhaps most importantly, underpinned by the Wolf Report of 2011, this administration, more than any other, set out the policies for free schools and hardened the rationale for academies which had been introduced by previous Labour governments. These policies were regarded as major steps towards the privatisation of state education (Kitchener, 2013).

Chapter 5 concludes with a consolidation of the previous sections and argues that ‘The Problem’ which results in a cohort of pupils being disregarded by the education system is the result of a crisis narration generated by government to suit a particular political philosophy. Section 5.5 offers a mechanism by which a problem representation can be examined based on the work of Bacchi (2012), who argues that a problem representation is implicit within a policy and can be examined using a six-stage model.

The substantive element of an examination into literature around education begins in **Chapter 6** with an examination of separate interpretations of how “success” is viewed at KS4. Articulating alternative interpretations of success is an important factor in addressing the overarching research question and other primary arguments proposed throughout this study. It is important to understand whether the argument

of systemic failures for those with low key stage 2 scores can be improved by offering a different performance outcome measure (or, at least a different representation of what ‘success’ might look like) as a pupil exits the secondary education process. This stage of the literature review therefore seeks, in section 6.1, to disentangle different and competing articulations of ‘success’ at the benchmark phase of Key Stage 4. This is the point at which young people nominally transition out of secondary education. Of particular relevance in this respect is the cadence that successive government administrations have given to academic qualifications.

In 6.1a, a concept of ‘Education for All’ as identified by Ponte and Smit (2013) is discussed relative to developing perceptions of a return to streaming by ability. A theme of elitism, which has resulted from the introduction of Academies and Free Schools ensues.

The concept of alternative mechanisms is also explored in section 6.2 which explores the differential between ‘formal’ and ‘informal education, highlighting initiatives which have the capability to affect educational outcomes. Section 6.3 examines exemplars of these such as Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme and the Youth Sport Trust which are understood as non-academic but nevertheless, offer recognisable and academically validated qualifications. Also identified are ways in which the 40 Assets framework, as identified in chapter 4, relates to areas where the assets approach could be employed in the holistic development of a young person.

Described by Braun and Reynolds (2012) as a classic economic theory, the concept of marginal gains identified in earlier chapters, has been recognised for some time as a methodology for recognising how small improvements in a number of areas can result in a significantly increased overall performance.

Chapter 6 concludes with two short sections. Section 6.4 briefly considers a contested debate centred on how a young person's own attitudes, aspirations and behaviour may link with educational performance. Further, that academic research reveals no established link between the type of extra-curricular activity offered by DofE and educational outcomes but these structures of informal education can contribute to holistic wellbeing (Carter-Wall and Whitfield (2012). Whether these informal structures are more easily accessed by disadvantaged pupils, who find it difficult to engage with formal systems of education, is also disputed. As a direct consequence of these debates, section 6.5 discusses whether the extra-curricular programme is 'open to all' or whether the pupils that most need to be enrolled in these activities are marginalised by an inability to access the schemes.

**Chapter 7:** results from permission of senior managers, in one of the case study schools, to allow limited access to school data on pupils' progress from KS2 through to KS4. The measure at each point was KS2 scores in English and maths tests at year 6 and GCSE passes recorded at year 11.

Although the dataset is very restricted the relevance of the analysis of these data to the overarching research questions is, I argue, significant. Albeit in only one school, an opportunity exists to identify and begin to quantify a cohort of pupils in support of my thesis that the education system fails a number of young people with low key stage 2 scores. I have been informed by the school which provided the data that a similar analysis should be available at all schools across the country.

Analysing these data, I suggest from their low starting point, that a significant number of pupils within the cohort which I have termed the "disconnected minority" has no real chance of ever attaining government floor targets. Furthermore, although

identified to an extent at the individual school level, this group of pupils is either unrecognised or ignored by wider education processes.

**Chapter 8:** focusses in section 8.1 on taxonomies of policy relating to pedagogy and the school curriculum. Primarily this outlines concern from amongst teachers that certain policies adversely influence their ability to do their job effectively and that proposed changes to the school curriculum will not benefit students who are already finding it difficult to fully engage. For example, those who require and benefit from Alternative Provision; students for whom the ‘national’ curriculum is considered, by their teachers, to be unsuitable. Whilst it is natural for teaching professionals to make such statements as they seek to protect their own knowledge base, privileges and working conditions, weight must also be given to a critical analysis of those policies to determine whether any alternative arguments are credible. In section 8.2 perceived difficulties amongst respondents are highlighted with the way in which government is attempting to enforce, regulate and monitor education policy. In three sub-sections these mostly concern: 8.2a the use and possible misuse of the Pupil Premium; 8.2b the pace and scale of current reform in the introduction of revised performance measures for pupils at the end of KS4 and 8.c the continued commitment to the Free Schools and Academies initiative under the portent of increasing collective academic standards in secondary education.

The fieldwork from which these responses are derived took place during the winter and spring school terms September 2013 through to June 2014. As identified in the methodology chapter, 75 survey responses were examined and 17 semi-structured interviews conducted.

**Chapter 9:** This chapter examines responses which articulate issues directly affecting pupils’ ability to engage with the education process but which are not

directly recognisable as relating to education policy. In so doing there is an overarching acceptance that an unavoidable cross-over exists between the two high-level themes.

Section 9.1 deals with the disparity between constructs of “success” and whether these should be based solely on GCSE performance or whether alternatives exist which better encapsulate the individual student’s secondary education experience. Whatever the benchmark might be, there is consensus from all sides that some measure of performance is needed. Section 9.2 identifies the themes of actual and perceived “barriers” to success, where it is immediately apparent that the axioms of material disadvantage, family background and economic circumstances are key determinants in students’ experience of education and how they engage with education. The chapter continues by identifying, in Section 9.3, pertinent themes surrounding ‘jobs and skills’ and how any constructed benchmark of academic success will impact on future employability. A major example of this is the projected pathway into employment for students who leave school having not met the required GCSE performance benchmark, a proportion of whom will have no qualifications of any kind. The chapter closes (9.4) with how research participants responded to interpretations of the generic term ‘alternative provision’ which revealed a concept of a ‘Gifted and talented’ arrangement that had not featured in earlier examinations of education literature or from previous responses.

The conclusion and recommendations for further research are contained in **chapter 10**. These are expressed by connecting the research findings to the research questions and assessing outcomes in terms of the relationship with education policy. This chapter also includes certain of my own reflections on the overarching research process.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **PERSONAL CONSTRUCTS and PERSPECTIVES ARTICULATING THE PROBLEM**

The sociological concept, Personal Construct Theory (PCT) recognises the myriad ways that individuals view and interpret the world around them. Kelly (1955) and Fransella (1995) for example, identify PCT as a notion whereby individuals construct models of what is real to them to explain how they ‘see’ the world. Kelly identified a number of consequences of this, which he terms corollaries:

- *Construction*: What we anticipate is based on past experiences.
- *Experience*: Constructs change when original construct does happen as expected.
- *Dichotomous*: Constructs are polar and so have opposites
- *Organisational*: Constructs are connected to one another
- *Range*: Constructs have a limited range of use, some ranges are broad, some narrow
- *Modulation*: Certain ranges can be controlled to accommodate new ideas
- *Choice*: Individuals may choose to increase knowledge to enlarge constructs or ‘play safe’ and stay with what they (think they) know
- *Individuality*: Everyone has different experiences, therefore their constructs differ
- *Commonality*: Where experiences are shared, similar constructs evolve
- *Fragmentation*: Differences in roles and/ or context may cause conflict in constructs
- *Sociality*: Interaction with others through understanding of their constructs.

(Adapted from Kelly, 2003: pp9-14)

Using PCT therefore, it is possible to argue that the theoretical perspectives by which anyone conducts the day-to-day business of their life and that the behaviours they exhibit, are shaped by many influences, over many years. For me, this includes over 35 years of work experiences before entering academia. Based on these experiences, the ‘voice’ of researcher throughout the substantive element of thesis is expressed in multiple ways.

Lister (2010), provides frameworks for the importance of theory in the study and practice of social policy, in a persuasive book. The book expresses thoughts which resonate strongly with my own preconceptions of ‘theory’ and has been an invaluable tool in helping understand what were very ethereal topics:

I was initially rather sceptical about the value of ‘Theory’ with a capital ‘T’. [...] It seemed too abstract and frankly sometimes impenetrable so that reading it could be like wading through treacle.

(Lister, 2010: 1)

A clear articulation is offered of how the use of theory in the study of social policy can help to:

- Make sense of the social world
- Make connections between different social phenomena and policies
- Put issues and policies in a wider context
- Question assumptions which underpin policies and political programmes
- Adopt a more critical and sceptical stance towards ‘what everyone knows’.

(Lister:2010: 3)

Lister goes on to further describe how theories can be classed as either ‘normative’, which hypothesise over what is right or wrong or ‘social’ which ask ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘what’, so providing a structure from which the social world can be examined and interpreted. Three such theories which the academic community argue are relevant to studies of education are, functionalism, conflict theory and interaction theory.

### **2.1: Functionalism.**

Functionalism sees education as an integral part of an overarching social system, where each part contributes to the success (or otherwise) of the whole. Each part has

specific functions. From a functionalist perspective, education serves a number of purposes. Chiefly these are to pass on societal norms and values, socialise, integrate, socially place and provide a qualified labour force. The concepts of social placement (aka. meritocracy) and the provision of a qualified labour force are particularly important for the arguments contained within this thesis. Both determine that inequalities within society are fair, as everyone is given an equal chance to succeed. As identified in chapter 4.1a below, inequalities are pervasive and as a consequence equality of opportunity for all pupils is a heavily contested debate (Seldon, 2006; Taylor-Gooby and Martin, 2010; Orr, 2012; Parris, 2013; Keep and Mayhew, 2014). Other underlying functions of the education system are as a mechanism of child care and social control and the lowering of unemployment figures, as pupils are out of the recognised labour force. Each of these is at odds with, for example, Peters (1966) who argued that education should be for its own sake and not as a means to something else.

Ballantine and Hammack (2012) identify three criticisms of the functional approach to education: (1) That it lacks capacity to recognise diversity, ideologies and values which lie outside accepted 'norms'; (2) It is very difficult to effectively analyse relationships within the system, such as teacher-pupil, or pupil-pupil and roles with which individuals identify outside of the school structure; and (3) Functional theory accepts change as slow and deliberate and not in terms of fast-paced responsive change within society. Once more, these themes are readily identifiable throughout later chapters of this thesis (particularly in the discussion on policy-making throughout chapter 5).

Wilson argues that the functional purposes of schools and the requirement for a consensus of values only serve to reproduce and reinforce inequalities and maintain

the dominance of the power elite (Wilson, 2011). This is concurrent with a Foucauldian approach which sees power as an everyday, socialised and embedded occurrence (Gaventa, 2003). The Wolf Report concluded that academic qualifications were the key determinant of a successful transition through from KS2 to KS4. Based largely on government's acceptance of those findings and subsequent actions, there is considerable evidence throughout chapter 5, to construct an argument that a functional approach is currently being adopted to education in England. Not the least of this is the continuing discourse on attainment and standards.

## **2.2: Conflict theory.**

Whilst not intrinsically disagreeing with the functions described above, conflict theorists take a different view of their outcomes by emphasising that a systemic preservation of social divisions underpins the education system (Ballantine and Hammack, 2012). From the perspective of the conflict theorist, society is an arena where:

Different individuals and groups contest one another in order to obtain scarce and valued resources, most of which have economic implications which, in turn, have implications for access to influence in our society and the so-called "levers of power."

(Wilson, 2011: 11)

Wilson argues for the acceptance of an axiom that wealth equals power and as a corollary social stratification is determined by wealth-generation and there is a significant canon of academic work which would support this argument.

Furthermore, for Wilson schools are one of the 'battlefields' where the "... struggle between groups, or social strata, is played out ..." and that sufficient rationale exists

for an examination of schools using conflict theory as a lens. The rationale and attendant explanations offered by Wilson are interpreted and adapted, in combination with data from Ballantine and Hammack (2012) and, for simplicity, presented in a table below:

**Table 2.1: Conflict perspective rationale example, using education as a model**

Rationale	Explanation
A disconnect between social class and cultural values of teachers and pupils	Teachers identify as ‘middle’ or upper middle’ class and tend to be from white backgrounds; does not reflect state school pupil demography
A selective curriculum and attendant values - a ‘hidden curriculum’	Unintended(?) transference of norms and values which perpetuate social divisions and support the status quo.
Methodologies employed in identifying pupils who are gifted or learning disabled	Standardised ‘one size fits all’ testing such as at KS2 SATs and at KS4 GCSEs
Emphasis on the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ and ‘credentials	This is the pathway to wealth and social mobility.
The advantages of attending particular schools, based on reputation (conversely the non-attendance of other schools for the same reason)	Often not based on curriculum content but on status and kudos. For example, the dichotomy between public schools and state education.
The reinforcement of meritocracy	Compulsory education does not serve the interests of lower-strata groups with little academic ability who are not ‘wealth-generators’

(Author’s adaptation; from Wilson, 2011: pp10-11 and Ballantine and Hammack, 2012: pp15-16)

However, as stated by Ballantine and Hammack (2012: 16) “... Neither conflict theory nor functional theory focusses on the individual, the individual’s “definition of the situation”, or interactions in the educational system ...” These factors, they

argue, are subject to examination using interaction theories such as labelling theory, or rational choice theory.

### **2.3: Interaction theory.**

Interaction theory is the antithesis of functionalism and conflict theory in that it rejects the macro-level approaches which can "... miss the dynamics of everyday school life that shape children's futures ..." (Ballantine and Hammack, 2012: 16) Within this rejection is an understanding that individuals are more 'active' in their roles as actors and, whereas functional and conflict theories debate issues at a structural level where the individual is having things 'done to them', interactionists argue that a greater degree of individuals' own agency is in evidence:

By defining a situation an actor generates his or her own possibilities, and by so defining, is also exercising control and creating and reproducing the social conditions of control in interaction with other actors.

(Jenks, 1998: 268).

In a school setting, interaction theorists examine relationships in terms of how individuals interact with each other. Many complex relationships can be evidenced: within peer groups, between teacher and pupil, teacher and teacher, teacher and the school leadership team, for example (Ballantine and Hammack, 2012). Within the school structure, individuals experience a similar environment and a transference of norms and values can occur as each interprets the actions of the other (Blumer, 1969). In so doing, a socially constructed world is formed (Mead, 1934). Amongst other factors, this world focusses on constructs of attitudes and behaviour, values, achievement, aspirations. Ballantine and Hammack identify two sub-theories which they term useful in sociological studies of education labelling and rational choice,

over which pupils at least would, on the evidence presented in chapter 2 above, appear to have very little control. Signposts towards labelling theory are offered by Lister (2010: 149) who relates that in the earlier work of Berger and Luckman in their book 'The Social Construction of Reality' the authors "... were concerned with the role of language in labelling certain forms of behaviour as problematic. 'How we name things affects how we behave towards them' ...". More simply, labelling can be described as what a number of sociologists would term a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. (c.f. Merton, 1968 [1948]; Biggs, 2009), which identifies that where individuals are repeatedly told, for example, they are anti-social, lack intelligence, or that they will never achieve, they 'act up' to that label. In a school setting, for example, where a pupil is segregated into a 'special needs' category and because he or she sees themselves as somehow 'different', behaves differently from their mainstream peers.

Rational choice theory is predicated on an assumption that interactions are grounded in a cost-benefit analysis "... positing the individual as a strategic and calculating actor who makes choices according to rational criteria ...". (Cooper, 2008: 10).

Where benefit outweighs cost, for example where good behaviours or hard work are recognised by rewards, it is rational that the individual will continue to behave well.

Conversely, if costs outweigh benefits the individual is likely to behave differently.

Insofar as the main tenets of this thesis are concerned, relying on Mason and Hood (2011) as described in 3.3 below it is argued that pupils within the education system are regarded as a minority group and so are prevented from fully participating in what happens around them, as identified in studies such as Sorin (2005).

My arguments do not set out to demonstrate that the system of measurement for pupils exiting the education process at KS4 is either 'right' or 'wrong'. In keeping with the primary research question however, the study does argue that the system of

measurement is flawed and fails a cohort of pupils who enter the system with low key stage 2 scores. As an alternative proposition, there is a general intent to establish whether there are any viable alternatives which capture successful transitions for all pupils, rather than simply those who do well in examinations. As such, this lends itself more to what Lister terms social enquiry rather than a normative approach. Lister (2010) states that social theories "... are concerned with understanding how we came to where we are; why things are as they are; and where we may be going ...". The choice of social enquiry locates the study within an interpretive research paradigm rather than a more 'naturally scientific' model which might require 'grand' or 'meta-narratives' such as rationality and reason, to explain what is being observed. Lyotard, (1984) and Baudrillard (1988) are amongst a cadre of academics who identify this approach with a philosophy of postmodernity.

A number of social policy academics agree that postmodernism is a difficult proposition to define (c.f. Spicker, 2008; Annetts et al, 2009; Lister, 2010). Spicker (2008: 34) for example, states that:

Postmodernism is difficult to pin down, but the core of the argument is that society is no longer understandable in terms of the patterns of thinking which characterised most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is, instead, diversity – a rainbow effect of different identities, possibly individualised or atomised, often coupled with uncertainty about the nature of social relationships.

Annetts et al (2009; 73) agree that in postmodern thinking meta-narratives are dismissed asserting that "... post-modern social theorists argue that referent categories such as class, income, status or occupational group no longer have any meaning in a fragmented post-modern world ...". This is not to say however that issues such as class cannot be studied using a postmodern methodology. Foucault, for example, may see class in terms of power and opportunity; equally he may argue

that this represents a ‘regime of truth’ or ‘general politics of truth’; both are types of discourse that are constantly redefined and reinforced through the education system, the media and political and economic ideologies (Rainbow, 1991; Foucault, 1998). Foucault imagines power as a universal concept and an important basis for the archetypes of social discipline and conformity – those socialised behaviours, or norms, and constraints that underpin social divisions (Foucault, 1998). The perceived role of schools in providing, through a concept of ‘education for all’ the mechanism for the perpetuation of social norms and conformity is a well-established academic debate. This idea informs one of the primary findings contained in this thesis, that universal education, as predicated on the existing system, is not the best option for a significant number of young people.

The efficacy of underpinning this thesis with a broad postmodern foundation is similarly provided by Lister (2010: 104) who describes such an approach as being able to “... deconstruct discourses in order to lay bare their assumptions and internal contradictions. This can also mean revealing how the discourses of excluded groups have been marginalised or effaced ...” Citing an example of ‘welfare dependency’, Lister links how power relations can often dictate that those who claim welfare are workshy; at the same time, those in power create an illusion of the ‘hard working family’ as a complete antithesis. A similar image is visible in discourse on education where state schools are often constructed as ‘failing’ whereas the academy/ free school system currently being promoted by government are articulated as innovative and as a panacea.

Postmodern thinkers are “... preoccupied with discourses and the power associated with them ...” (ibid: 112). The notion of deconstruction referred to by Lister in the quotation above is a key principle in postmodern thinking and largely attributed to

Derrida, who adopts a critical view of the connection between text and meaning (Derrida, 1997 [1967]). Such interpretation of text, to include verbal and non-verbal communication, is described by other philosophers as using ‘hermeneutic’ thinking (c.f. Kinsella, 2006; Friston and Frith, 2015) and, for the purposes of this thesis, the term hermeneutic, rather than deconstruction, is the understanding which will be accepted. Hermeneutics, the discipline of interpretation, is argued by Kinsella (2006: abstract) in terms of having “... much to offer those interested in qualitative enquiry, and is especially suitable for work of a textual and interpretive nature ...”

Using a hermeneutic approach to enquire and interpret any empirical findings supports ideas identified by, for example, Foucault, who perceives that truth is multi-faceted; there are ‘many truths’ and therefore the postmodernist framework offers an opportunity to question what is generally accepted as truth and provide alternative versions (Foucault, 1973). The primary research question in this thesis explores how the discourse of attainment, measured by an ability to reach floor targets, is expressed by successive governments to privilege the ablest pupils and reveals that systemic failures are an accepted consequence. Using postmodern approaches to analyse this discourse therefore allows for a valid challenge to the attainment discourse. Similarly, a challenge can be made to the suggestion that the terms attainment, achievement and success are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. Consequently, throughout this thesis, these interpretations will be challenged and by using a counter-discourse - that a distinct cohort of other pupils is being significantly disadvantaged by the nature of the system – it will be argued that for a proportion of pupils in the secondary education system, an alternative mechanism for measuring their transition from KS2 through to KS4 is required.

It is widely accepted within the academic world that a number of ‘world views’ exist. Specifically, relative to the study of education, Ballantine and Hammock (2012) identify that functionalism and conflict theory view education at a ‘macro’, institutional, level whereas interaction theory studies the education system in the terms of relationships at the level of the individual, or within small groups (Ballantine and Hammack, 2012: 10). A brief description of functional, conflict and interaction theories, is now offered before a justification for the choice of perspective that informs this thesis is argued.

#### **2.4: Rationale for the choice of perspective that informs this thesis.**

Having regard to what is written above, this thesis is informed by a postmodern perspective. The justification for adopting this position lies largely in my own outlook and means of interpreting what is around me. In addition, I make the argument that neither the functional viewpoint, nor that of an interaction theory, adequately captures the spirit of what I am attempting to achieve. Namely, that by the nature of the system that a number of pupils are at best marginalised, at worst disregarded, in the policy-making process. Either of the theories could be used to explain this outcome but within that acceptance it should be understood that the explanations offered would be different. Although there is evidence in the literature that certain pupils are marginalised, I do not believe that this evidence adequately identifies, recognises or attempts to quantify the cohort which is most disaffected.

Arguing from a conflict perspective I advocate this is as a result of the effect of power-elites. The term power-elites is attributed to Wright Mills (2000 [1956]) who described how relatively small socio-political and socio-economic groups in capitalist societies, can appropriate power to constrain the mechanisms of

democracy. More recently, Jones (2014) has reframed the power-elite in Britain as ‘the establishment’ – a network of powerful groups who need to protect structural stability, their position in society and ensure it does not threaten their own interests. Jones believes ‘the establishment is where these groups interconnect. Politicians, owners of ‘the media’ who often set the framework for debate and key figures in business and finance, even the Church of England (though to a lesser extent) are represented within the groups. Where Wright Mills originally included the military in his articulation, Jones conflates this to the police who, he argues, enforce laws that are arranged in favour of the powerful, who are driven by the concepts of free-market economies and constriction of any organisations or collectives which threaten stasis. Although the elite is not impenetrable, a prerequisite to entry is high educational capital (Roustetsaari, 2015)

Within this framework it is advantageous for the power-elite as represented through establishment figures - the most influential, most highly educated and highest wealth generators in society – to exert control over the processes of education *per se*.

As will be seen throughout chapters 4 - 9 in this thesis, by implication this perpetuates the inherent inequalities within the education system which, according to the power-elite, provides necessary stability in society (and which does not unduly threaten their own positions).

## **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY and METHODS**

### **3.1: Choice of research design.**

Creswell (2003), Creswell & Plano-Clark, (2011), Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) and Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) exemplify bodies of work which suggest that there are three distinct strategies for conducting educational research. Researchers can either employ qualitative methods, quantitative methods or adopt a mixed methods approach.

The initial intent for this thesis was to conduct a wholly qualitative study using as methods, a desk top document analysis and interviews and focus groups from which a narrative analysis could be conducted. A number of obstacles prevented this. Not the least of which were several ‘U’ turns as a result of changes in the focus of the thesis from one relating to Public Policy, through Educational Sociology and finally to one of Social (Education) Policy, before a robust research strategy could be decided.

As each paradigm has its own particular strengths and weaknesses, many respected authors contend that in combination, qualitative and quantitative methods can be employed to ameliorate the weaknesses in each whilst drawing on the strengths of both. Creswell is considered by many to be amongst one of the most influential advocates of the mixed methods approach, certainly in terms of research into education and has written extensively on the subject, alone and in collaboration with other academics (cf. Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In arguing their case Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) determine that issues arise when quantitative research outcomes cannot, in their own right, provide adequate explanations for what has been observed; as a result, qualitative investigations, using the experiences of

participants, can be used to bring some meaning to the raw statistics. This is of particular value in studies such as this thesis, where statistics need interpretation or when it would be helpful to further understand the viewpoints of selected participants to help appreciate statistical returns. For example, government statistics used in earlier chapters on ‘expected levels of progress’ tell the story that a significant number of pupils do not make their 3 levels of progress between key stage 2 and key stage 4. These bland statistics, however, can offer no explanation as to why this might be when certain of their peers – based on key stage 2 scores – seem able to make the 3 levels and in some cases exceed them. As argued by Creswell and Plano-Clark, using a mixed methods approach provides a “... more complete picture by noting trends and generalisations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants’ perspectives ...” (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011: 33).

The mixed methods approach is used for collecting data by ‘mixing’ both quantitative and qualitative data during the research process in order to more fully understand the research issue (Hammersley, 1996); Morgan, 1998 (cited in Bryman, 2008: 606; Creswell, 2002). Bryman in particular, describes this as two research strategies combining to allow the different characteristics of the investigation to form a synergy which allows for a more complete analysis. Gorard and Taylor (2004: 1) are amongst a number of authors also asserting that “... both approaches have strengths, and that even greater strength can come from their appropriate combination ...” advancing the notion that research claims are somewhat stronger if based on using a multi-method approach. This would *prima facie* resonate with Creswell’s ideas of triangulation, a concept which seeks to identify a convergence of results and development where one method is used to inform the other (Creswell, 2003).

In quantitative research, the researcher relies solely on statistical data as a tool for interrogating a particular problem. Becker and Bryman (2004: 181) determine that this draws on notions derived from the natural sciences for its central values. According to the authors, there are four main considerations, measurement, causality, generalisation and replication. Furthermore, quantitative research adopts a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research and an objective position to the nature of reality. Quantitative research, therefore, would follow a theory-hypothesis-measurement-confirmation pathway, where knowledge is acquired through reason or logic. This can involve identifying variables for example, gender, ethnicity, age and testing each against the other to understand relationships and causality. Amongst the recognised weaknesses of quantitative methods is that, whilst they measure the extent to which something occurs, those measurements do not reflect *why* it occurs. Some degree of further investigation or interpretation is generally needed to discover ‘root cause’. For example, whilst quantitative methods can remove the context of human influences on a study, the statistical models produced can also disregard many of the variables that could help explain why a phenomenon occurs and what explains the statistical outcome of any given quantitative study. This is emphasised by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) when they argue that quantitative research is “... weak in understanding the context or setting in which people talk [...] the voices of participants are not directly heard in quantitative research ...” (p9). This resonates with the ambition of this thesis to provide a ‘voice’ for a number of young people who are significantly disadvantaged by the current education system and who are unable to articulate their issues themselves.

Elements such as family background, experiences of school and perceptions of self-worth are widely understood as key determinants of whether a pupil will do well at

school (see, for example, Johnson and Kossych, 2008; Field, 2010). Although all of these factors can and have been measured by surveys, none are highlighted in the simplistic statistical model highlighted in chapter 6 (figure 6.1), which measures a pupil's academic performance between the Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 benchmarks. A particular example from within the sphere of academic attainment is the well-recorded relationship between poor attainment and white working class boys (see for example, Centre for Social Justice, 2013).

Conversely, qualitative research is a "... complex, holistic picture [which] analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting ..." (Creswell, 1998:15). In a qualitative study the researcher may acquire knowledge using an inductive approach which begins by interpreting characteristics within particular cases from which general theoretical conclusions may be ultimately formulated (Becker and Bryman, 2004). Following the reasoning of for example Lyotard (1984 [1979]) and Baudrillard (1988), in a postmodern paradigm, qualitative research may be conducted from an interpretivist-constructivist perspective. Reality is 'constructed' by individuals in and through their actions; data is therefore collected from those who are engaged within the setting of the object of study; in the case of this research study, this was professional people engaged in the formal settings of education. This involved teachers at all levels including teaching assistants, a number of others involved in the education process, for example educational psychologists and home-school welfare officers at three local schools. In qualitative research, the researcher is involved as a social being and becomes the primary instrument for collecting data. The possibility of acquiring rich descriptions of participants' experiences and the focus on why a phenomenon has occurred are considered to be great strengths of the qualitative approach. Research methods designed for use in qualitative studies are therefore intended to provide researchers

with the tools for understanding those social phenomena. As evidenced by a large corpus of academic literature, most often this is achieved by either observation or interaction with those contributing to the study (cf. De Vaus, 2001; Becker and Bryman, 2004; Bryman, 2008; Matthews and Ross, 2010).

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that the mixed methods approach is one of pragmatism. Citing as examples ‘classical pragmatists’ such as Peirce, James and Dewey they claim that mixed methods offers a system for researchers to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques to build knowledge.

In short (they argue) when judging ideas we should consider their empirical and practical findings to help in the import of philosophical positions and, importantly, to help in deciding which action to take next as one attempts to better understand real-world phenomena.

(Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 17)

Faber and Scheper develop this concept by arguing that a mixed methods approach is most appropriate when “... social phenomena tend to have multiple empirical appearances, then using only one method in each study can lead to the unnecessary fragmentation of explanatory models ...” (Faber and Scheper, 2003). Duckworth et al (2009) are amongst a corpus of academics and education professionals who agree that for better or worse social phenomena such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background have a marked impact on the educational outcomes of all school pupils. Government statistics, schools’ and pupils’ performance data alone cannot tell the story of how far, and why, these disparities occur. An element of subjective enquiry is therefore needed, using the statistical base to formulate a series of propositions and questions upon which to locate the investigation. Consequently, a multiple methods approach would seem an appropriate strategy to employ where an examination of relative levels of educational attainment, as measured statistically by floor targets and expected levels of progress, is a primary motivation.

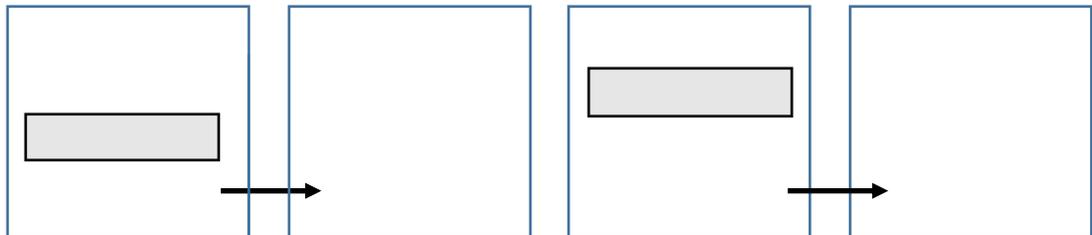
Creswell et al (2003) argue that in designing a mixed methods study consideration needs to be given to:

- Whether the quantitative approach or qualitative approach is prioritised in the study.
- Whether the data collection and analysis is conducted sequentially, one after the other, or at the same time.
- The point in the research where the data are integrated and connected.

Following strategies proposed by Creswell, this study could have adopted a mixed methods design identified as either ‘Embedded’, ‘Exploratory’ or perhaps even a combination of both types.

Embedded designs are used when one dataset is used to support a study in a secondary role, where the study is primarily based on the other data type (Creswell, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Creswell et al, 2003). The two types of embedded design are represented in figure 4.1 below.

**Fig 3.1: Embedded Research Design.**



**QUANTITATIVE**  
Embedded designs are employed when researchers need to include both types of dataset within a study to answer (often different) questions which are largely orientated towards one or other paradigm. In a design which is based in phenomenology, for example, which is the case for this study, quantitative data is embedded within a qualitative methodology.

**QUALITATIVE**

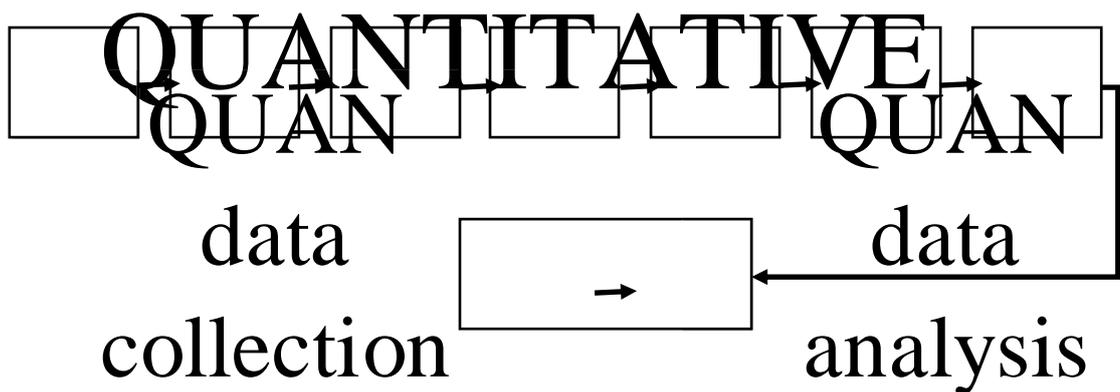
Explanatory designs (figures 3.2a) are used in a two-phase approach where qualitative data helps to explain initial quantitative results and are frequently used in studies where the researcher needs qualitative data to explain, or expand upon, results which arise from a quantitative study. Particularly, the ‘follow-up’ explanations model (figure 3.2b) is used where the researcher needs a strategy to expand on quantitative results, for example differences within groups or unexpected results. An explanatory design is also widely used in studies where there is an ambition to use responses from quantitative participants to guide purposive sampling in the qualitative phase as depicted in figure 3.2c (Creswell et al, 2003).

**Fig 3.2: Explanatory Research Designs.**

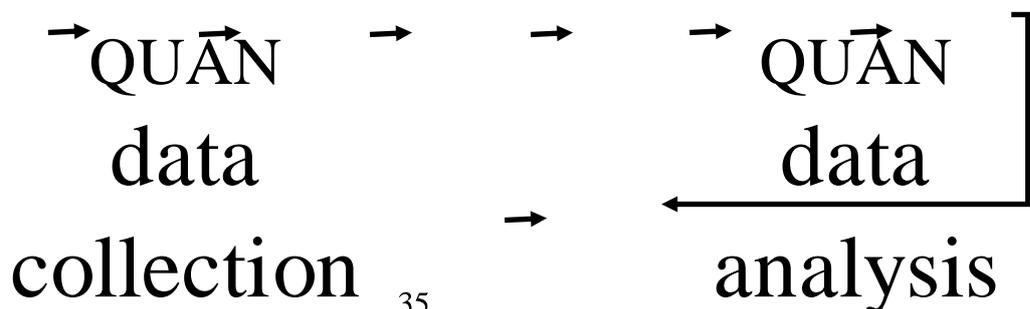
(a) Explanatory design



(b) Follow-up explanations model



(c) Participant selection model



The descriptor best suited to the design used for this study was a combination of the 'Embedded' and 'Participant Selection' models, which was employed over two phases. Phase 1 was conducted through an online survey which contained a series of 'closed' and 'open' questions which allowed respondents to provide a certain amount of narrative thus embedding qualitative data within the survey. This allowed respondents to some extent substantiate their responses to questions with a small amount of narrative, which was then subjected to a partial 'themed' analysis to identify repeating traits. Phase 2 was a series of 1:1 semi-structured interviews which intrinsically relied on elements of the results from quantitative data to identify participants. These traits were then used to help identify suitable participants for interview and develop research questions to be used in the interviews

In phase two of the study, a qualitative 'case study' approach was adopted which involved collecting and analysing text data through a number of individual semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these was to help understand how certain internal and external factors identified from within the survey questions could be explained or, if not fully explained, at least elucidated by studying participants' opinions in greater detail.

The justification for using semi-structured interviews was that this instrument provides flexibility in approach. For example, they allow for questions to be pre-set but the order in which they are asked can be fluid dependent upon the interviewer's 'feeling' for how the interview is progressing. The interviewee also has flexibility in the way they can answer. Some of the question wording can be changed, if thought necessary and explanations offered; questions which seem unsuitable for any given interviewee can be left out of the schedule, whilst additional questions can be added if thought necessary (Bryman, 2008: pp.438-439).

It would not be possible to understand the views of education professionals, as they relate to answering the research questions, without considering the setting and context within which those views are formulated; for example, how they are constricted by government policy and the requirements of the school curriculum and how they are further constrained by the school environment and pupil behaviour.

Following the concept identified by Stake (1995), this study adopted an ‘intrinsic’ approach to the case study. This approach is recommended when researchers have a genuine interest and the intent is to better understand the case, rather than to develop or build theory (which, nevertheless, is an option).

Detail of how processes were conducted at phase 1 and phase 2 are described at a later point in this chapter at sections 3.9 and 3.10

### **3.2: Research Ethics.**

An extensive literature base exists which explains the need for adopting a robust ethical approach to research (cf. De Vaus, 2001; Bulmer, 2008: Social Policy Association, 2009; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012) and ethical issues were addressed at each stage of the study.

Initially and to comply with University of Birmingham Doctoral Research regulations, permission to conduct the study was necessary. A standard Ethical Review Form (AER) was completed and consent subsequently given for the study to proceed. The AER contained information such as supervisory arrangements, details of the researcher, the title of the study and the potential number and demography of research participants. Importantly, the AER also required an indicative approach to research methods and methodology, participant recruitment and obtaining participant

consent. The review form was later used by the Research Ethics Department at the University as an exemplar of good practice during research training modules.

### **Issues of consent and participation**

Informed consent was obtained through the use of a project participation brief describing the requirements of participation and the responsibilities of each party (participant and researcher) to the other. The brief was issued 2 weeks before participation which allowed potential participants time to reflect on them taking part. During that period any questions that arose were addressed at the individual level and so their potential involvement properly deliberated. The first opportunity to withdraw was offered at that point. Consent was sought on an 'Opt Out' basis; established research shows that this method is regarded as much simpler than 'Opt In' consent and as a consequence generally results in greater response rates (Lacy et al, 2012). The simplicity factor was an important consideration when dealing with professional people given that they were likely to have severe time constraints.

From the outset, participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of taking part in the study. Their right to withdraw and the relevant timescale for withdrawal was clearly articulated in letters of invitation. In the case of interviews, the preamble for each invitation included an additional statement advising participants that they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Every reasonable effort was made to protect confidentiality and anonymity. The potential sensitivity of information which could result from interviews was recognised.

Anonymity was preserved by the use of robust data protection methods and in accordance with accepted codes of research ethics. Every effort was made to mask

individual responses (particularly those collected via email) so that they could not be traced back to participant's identities. A number of methods exist which are used to disguise or mask identity, for example the use of codes and pseudonyms and in the way that final data are presented. Questionnaire responses were protected by numerically coding each return; an added advantage was the use of the Bristol Online Survey system, access to which is strictly limited to the academic community and for which an application needs to be made through a gatekeeper.

Any quotes or extracts from narratives used at the empirical stage would, in accordance with appropriate ethical guidelines, be anonymised. No personal information would be disclosed which could lead to the identification of individual participants, neither would any data be revealed which could lead to the identification of individual organisations.

Any printouts from the survey and all interview notes and transcripts were securely kept at the researcher's home address in a lockable metal filing cabinet. Insofar as is reasonably practical, these are to be destroyed in accordance with the prevailing University of Birmingham guidelines; currently these state that raw data should be available for inspection for a period of ten years.

### **The role of the researcher and relationship with participants**

The role of the researcher in maintaining an appropriate ethical balance to the study is an important part of any research project. As alluded to in an earlier section, this is a major consideration in qualitative work but it is nevertheless as important when using a quantitative approach. It may be argued therefore that an ethical approach on behalf of the researcher is doubly important in a mixed methods approach.

A body of academic work argues that research can never be truly free of the researcher's own values; as Hodkinson (2008: 94) for example argues "...

researchers will always hold values, assumptions and biases and these will shape their research ...” This would appear to follow the Weberian sociology of “Verstehen” through which, according to Weber, the social world should be interpreted by understanding how individuals appreciate and construct their surroundings “... Weber insists that the researcher must understand the values of agents and consider both the subjective and objective dimensions of social life ...” (Iacono, Brown and Holtham, 2009: 41). Many authors argue that judgments based on those values cannot be eradicated; if not recognised and ameliorated by good research ethics, value judgements can cause bias in their work. Studies conducted incorporating the qualitative paradigm cannot claim to be entirely objective but need to exhibit a focus on reflexivity and research rigour as compensatory factors. The fact that a researcher has a personal interest in a topic may be seen as self-evident. This should not however lead to what a number of authors term ‘unconscious’ or ‘cognitive’ bias in how a research project is initially framed, or which may lead to a less than robust analysis, misrepresentation or misinterpretation of results. Researchers should, from the outset, be explicit about the values which they hold that are relevant to the research topic and how they might affect the results (Johnson, 1997; Bryman, 2008; Chenail, 2011).

### **3.3: Data collection and analysis.**

Ovretveit (2002: 144-146) describes ‘eight golden rules’ of data collection but determines that effective planning and preparation make targeted data collection and later analysis much quicker and more effective. It was always the intention within this study to analyse a range of primary and secondary data collected through a variety of means. Secondary data, such as GCSE statistical returns and academic

studies, which has previously been collected for other purposes, is referred to by Bryman as data which "...may entail the analysis of either quantitative or qualitative data..." (Bryman 2008: 698). Similarly, strategies for collecting primary data can include the use of surveys, focus groups and 1:1 interviews to collect new information. From the outset, it was anticipated that the data examined for the purposes of this study were principally qualitative. Nevertheless, there was always an ambition to interrogate quantitative data both at the earlier stage of the research, when the survey was launched and then later, if schools were prepared to divulge their own readings of their overall results, as where GCSE returns are made available, these might indicate disparities in performance leading to a natural line of enquiry as to why this might be. As well as generating basic statistical information, primary data collected through conducting surveys (many of the questions for which are generated through interpretation of existing statistics and academic studies) can, in turn, be analysed and interpreted to generate new questions for use in interviews.

As seen in earlier chapters, there was a strong theme emerging from the literature reviewed that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do worse at school than those for whom disadvantage is not an issue. Using datasets held on the Department of Education web-portal (<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance>) in order to determine GCSE outcomes for all pupils in England, a review was conducted to determine the extent to which this is reflected in high-level GCSE results. This indicated that at a ratio just short of 2:1 'other' pupils were more likely to achieve the government benchmark of 5 A\*-C GCSE passes including English and mathematics. Whilst this portal offers no rationale for this disparity, analysis of academic literature helps to reveal a number of the supplementary questions which were highlighted in chapter 1.1. for example, from interrogation of the raw data.

Each of those questions relate to the overarching research question, which seeks to determine why the education system fails a significant proportion of pupils with low key stage 2 scores.

The study was consciously aimed at garnering opinion from amongst the group or ‘target population’, of people who are at the forefront of delivering education policy at Key Stage 4, i.e. education professionals working in school settings. A subset of the target population, sometimes expressed as the ‘accessible population’, consists of those who could possibly be recruited to participate in the study. In this study the accessible population was the professional cohort in three local schools. The ‘sample’ which would represent that group and the choices made in selecting schools to be involved and research participants is justified below. This will be followed by the rationale for the data collection exercises and methods employed before then proceeding to outline the nature of the data and techniques and tools for its analysis and presentation.

### **3.4: Sampling.**

Five schools where I had previously worked were asked to participate in this study; each was 11-18 co-educational and located in the West Midlands within a fifteen-mile radius of Birmingham City Centre. Schools shared no real significant characteristics as reported by Ofsted’s Data Dashboard (<http://dashboard.ofsted.gov.uk>), although in very general terms, pupils in each school were making better than expected progress in English and mathematics (schools’ own data and Ofsted, 2014c).

As this had the potential to have an effect on academic performance, and although not a major focus of the thesis, consideration had to be given to the geographical

location of schools, particularly as one was located in an area considered to be 'disadvantaged according to the IMD rating scale. Of the five requests, three schools replied positively. It was coincidence that replies were from one each from inner city, semi-rural and rural environments. School 1 can be classed as being truly 'inner city', school 2, semi-rural and school 3 rural. Other features of each school, as taken from their most recent Ofsted reports, as held on the Ofsted web repository, are shown below. At head teachers' request, to preserve anonymity school names are not divulged nor can the detail which leads to their Ofsted reports be revealed; the rationale for this lies within the ethical boundaries which governed this project as explained earlier in this chapter at section 3.2.

**School 1:** School is larger than average sized comprehensive school serving an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. At the point of the study the school was operating across two sites separated by approximately half a mile. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals was well above the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities was also well above that found nationally, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is closer to the national average. Almost all of the school's students emanate from minority ethnic backgrounds with English spoken only as an additional language. The majority of students were of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, with a sizable minority of Black and Indian students. The school held an extensive range of nationally recognised awards, including Investors in People status, and had been recognised by the Department for Education as one of the most improved 100 schools nationally in 2010.

**School 2:** This school is located in a semi-rural location and considered smaller than average. The number of students on roll had fallen significantly since the school was last inspected. Most students originated from a White British background, with around one in four from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals was described as above average. A high proportion of students were identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs was around the national average. The school held specialist status for business and enterprise. It was part of a consortium, consisting of eight high schools, three special schools and a college of further education.

**School 3:** This is an average-sized secondary school in a rural location which, nevertheless, attracted students from a wide geographical area extending into Birmingham some fifteen miles away. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals was defined as well below average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, was also deemed well below average, as was the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school had specialist status in the visual and performing arts since 2005, working in a consortium with six other providers in order to make more extensive provision available to students in the sixth form.

### **Participant selection**

Decisions to be made on how participants were to be selected were centred on two central themes.

Firstly, for Stage 1 of the study, choices needed to be made on how participants for an online survey would be recruited.

Secondly for Stage 2, how using responses to the survey could be employed to identify individuals who might be productive interviewees. For example, in selecting potential interviewees, issues such as age and gender were not considered relevant characteristics from survey responses. However, length and type of service and roles currently held in the education profession were considered to be significant factors.

A body of discrete academic study has researched the subject of response rates to online surveys. Relying on some of the findings from those studies, it was possible to set a conservative target for survey responses (Deutskens et al, 2004; Wright, 2005; Sauermann and Roach, 2013; De Vaus, 2014). As represented in the table below, the calculation was based on an estimate of how many people would complete the survey comparative to the potential total sample (the total number of teaching staff ‘on roll’ at the schools at the time of the survey.)

**Table 3.1: Anticipated response rate to questionnaire at ‘launch’ stage, by school.**

SCHOOL	STAFF ON ROLL	SURVEY ISSUED TO	ANTICIPATED RESPONSES
1	69	66	20
2	104	98	30
3	60	59	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>68</b>

This type of sampling is frequently referred to as self-selection as respondents can choose for themselves whether they answer the survey and participate in the research. To a certain extent, using a self-selection approach divorces the researcher from the respondent, especially when the survey is delivered through a third party who has agreed to act as gatekeeper. Those who subsequently volunteer to respond are thought to do so for a variety of reasons, amongst which are thought to include

having strong feelings and opinions about the research topic and a particular interest in the outcomes. The primary advantages of self-selection include:

- A time saving element; the potential research subjects contact the researcher through the online survey.
- Respondents are likely to be engaged in the topic, which can lead to open and honest engagement.

The strategy developed for this study was chiefly dependent on these main beliefs being correct and simultaneously therefore countering the major disadvantages of self-selection. Highlighted amongst these is the concept of ‘self-selection bias’, where the decision to take part reflects an inherent prejudice on the part of the respondent. Examples may include aggrieved employees, or those with particularly strong views. In a study which is reliant on participants holding strong views either in favour of the education system, or against current delivery, this is an advantage as respondents are more likely to engage with the process (Schonlau, 2004; Bethlehem et al, 2011; McGillivray et al, 2010).

In identifying subjects for subsequent interview at Stage 2, a number of criteria were set. Not the least of these was survey respondents’ willingness to tolerate the interview process itself. This could lend itself to an argument that this constitutes convenience sampling where participants are used because they are readily available. Strategies for combating this argument included selecting interviewees who are representative with no strong bias and offering a clear description of the contributors.

### **3.5: Data Collection Timetable and Organisation.**

Stage 1 survey data were collected in the winter term of school year 2013-2014 (between September and December)

Stage 2 interviews were mostly conducted during the spring term, January 2014 to March 2014. The restricted availability of a small number of interviewees, who held senior management positions in the schools, meant it was not possible to complete all interviews until the end of summer term in July 2014.

### **3.6: Examining data.**

Creswell (2002) is amongst a considerable cadre of authors who indicate that collection of data for social science takes several forms. This includes the measurement of perceptions, opinions and other constructions of reality which cannot be directly calculated. In order to quantify those ideals, four main strands of measurement have been identified which were possibilities to use at the questionnaire phase of the study. In order to lend some validity to the results of the survey, it was initially necessary to consider the type of analysis proposed for the final data. Four types of measurement were consequently used; Nominal Scale, Ordinal scale, Interval Scale and Ratio Scale (Bryman, 2008: Matthews and Ross, 2010).

### **3.7: Generating questions for the survey.**

Based on a number of ideas originating from my time within the education system and as a result of previous research, a formative evaluation of the literature was conducted to generate a series of questions. These supplemented the principal research ambition of examining failures in the education system and covered three generic topics.

1. 'Transitions from key stage 2 to key stage 4' – Broad themes included respondents' attitudes to constructs of a successful transition, how 'success' should be measured and influences on the educational outcomes of pupils.
2. 'No child left behind?' – A notion of equality of opportunity was explored using the proposition 'Statistics suggest that a number of children entering secondary education with KS2 scores of 3 or lower, have little or no chance of reaching the current KS4 attainment benchmarks.' Aside from equality, a series of questions encouraged opinion and conjecture regarding issues such as observable interventions and whether proposed policy changes might benefit educationally disadvantaged pupils.
3. 'Attitudes to change' – Questions were scoped to examine how prepared school leaders and school staff were to instigate change within their environment. Particular emphasis was given to attitudes towards government initiatives for possible conversions of schools to academies and the relationship with the free school project.

A full copy of the questionnaire is appended to this thesis.

### **3.8: Pilot studies.**

Polit et al (2001) and Baker (1994) offer two distinct rationales for conducting pilot studies. These can be considered as a small scale ‘dry run’ for the main study or to test the validity of a particular research instrument. Whichever rationale is used (and, of course it could be that both are relevant) it is considered ‘best practice’ to trial surveys wherever this is possible and practical by using ‘draft’ and ‘pilot’ stages (Bryman, 2008; Simmons, 2008; Matthews and Ross, 2010). A draft can be amongst close acquaintances (family and friends perhaps) and the results from this would give an overall feel for the functionality of the survey. The pilot stage allows for the (revised if necessary) draft to be sent out to a small number of individuals who were also be amongst the final sample. At this stage, the questions can be analysed both for functionality and discrete subject-matter relevance (what might be termed a ‘sense check’). For the purposes of this study, the rationale of Baker, in conjunction with the notions of draft and pilot versions, was incorporated into the research methodology.

A considerable cadre of research outlines the importance of completing a pilot study as an element of a robust study design (De Vaus, 2001; van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001; Bryman, 2008; Simmons, 2008). In particular, van Teijlingen and Hundley describe the pilot as “... a crucial element of a good study design ...” (p1) The intent of a pilot study is to act as a trial run for a later full scale survey, testing the cadence of the study and attempting to identify any latent practical issues which might affect final outcomes.

Van Teijlingen and Hundley (1993: 2) offer a number of reasons for conducting a pilot study. Amongst their rationale is that the pilot can be seen as a miniature

version of a later, fuller study which can be limited in size or scope, for example by only sending the survey to a few people rather than an entire survey sample. The number and scope of questions may also be limited. Pilot surveys also offer the opportunity to test validity of questions and help determine any inherent idiosyncrasies which might make questions impossible to answer. Pilots also:

1. Allow for initial testing of the hypotheses leading to the later testing of a more specific proposition.
2. Frequently provide the researcher with fresh ideas and approaches which may not have been previously foreseeable.
3. Proposed statistical and analytical procedures can be checked offering an opportunity to evaluate how useful data might be. Alterations to help with more efficient analysis can then be made if necessary.
4. Where the pilot reveals difficulties, the design can be altered.

Completion of a pilot study does not, however, guarantee success and it should be recognised that a number of limitations exist which need to be ameliorated. This is particularly important where data from the pilot study are incorporated into the main results and (or) where new data is collected from participants of the pilot, and included in the main study. Peat (2002: 123) offers the following possible solutions:

- Administer the questionnaire to pilot subjects in exactly the same way as it will be administered in the main study.
- Ask the subjects for feedback to identify ambiguities and difficult questions
- Record the time taken to complete the questionnaire and decide whether it is reasonable
- Discard all unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous questions
- Assess whether each question gives an adequate range of responses
- Establish that replies can be interpreted in terms of the information that is required

- Check that all questions are answered
- Re-word or re-scale any questions that are not answered as expected
- Shorten, revise and, if possible, pilot again.

As a useful example of where the pilot survey was useful for this thesis, initially it was the intent to take survey populations from within two groups of people, identified as ‘in school’ and ‘out of school’. ‘In school’ was defined as individuals who work within the school environment; ‘out of school’, people who work in the wider field of education but in some other capacity, for example in Local Education Authorities, Academia or within industry as Training and Development Advisers. Following responses to the pilot (which incorporated respondents from both groups) and after some deliberation, I determined that using two groups in this way took too much of the focus away from the primary ambitions of the study, which lay within the ability of schools and school policy, rather than external influences, to deliver fully effective educational outcomes for all pupils. Consequently, a decision was taken to restrict the survey population to professionals working within formal school structures.

Taking into account both sets of criteria, the questionnaire for the empirical stage of this thesis was tested through a two-stage process. At the first pilot stage, the survey was completed by six close personal acquaintances of the researcher who understand but are not directly connected with the field of education. Each are full-time professionals working in areas such as local government, third sector organisations and the NHS. The remit given to these volunteers was fairly limiting and centred solely on the functionality of the survey; i.e. they were not expected to have any detailed knowledge of the subject matter *per se*. The overarching rationale for this

was for evolutionary structural development and not unjustified critique of the questions. The first-stage pilot was scoped with the intention to uncover certain of the issues identified by Peat (2002) such as; can the questions be answered; is there a logical progression; are any of the questions ambiguous?

### **3.9: Phase 1 – Questionnaire Survey.**

Given the flexibility afforded by a mixed methods research design, there was a well-founded rationale at the outset for the use of those research instruments to be used and the type of questions which needed to be asked. At the quantitative stage, the design allowed for an examination of government and schools' data and for a survey to be used, constructed using a variety of 'open' and 'closed' questions, where the latter are pre-coded to provide specific quantitative data. Similarly, for the qualitative phase the design permitted that interviews be conducted where a series of questions could be posed using a semi-structured format. In both phases, questions linked to the primary research question were enhanced following a partial review of new literature, specifically undertaken to inform these primary research instruments. A more detailed review of literature was completed subsequently as a foundation for the substantive part of Education Policy analysis and is described elsewhere in this study. Prior experience has shown that asking questions of front-line practitioners in education is an excellent starting point upon which to base considerations of how education policy might affect young persons' educational outcomes. The web-based questionnaire was intentionally constructed to exemplify the mixed methods approach. Questions posed throughout the survey were purposely designed so that there was a division between closed and open questions. Answers to closed questions from which a statistical return could be interpreted (for example based on the four

scale structures described earlier) provided a quantitative element to the survey; similarly, answers to open questions required a more ‘narrative’ response, so providing data which could be analysed using qualitative data mining techniques.

Studies have shown that online questionnaires tend to have fairly low response rates but these are somewhat ameliorated by quicker responses, cost effectiveness and the relative ease of manipulating data collected (Bryman, 2008: 652). These factors were decisive in choosing the questionnaire process for this research. Consequently, a questionnaire was designed incorporating questions which arose from the partial literature review and those generated from prior studies. As mentioned above, when discussing respondent confidentiality, the survey was hosted on the internet using the secure ‘Bristol Online’ service ([www.survey.bris.ac.uk](http://www.survey.bris.ac.uk)) to which the University of Birmingham (UoB) holds a subscription. Although this is an open subscription, which all UoB students are able to use, access is only granted by prior request and only then through a UoB gatekeeper. Bristol Online was used rather than any commercially available or proprietary questionnaire site (for example ‘Survey Monkey’) as this was thought to offer both enhanced data security and the added kudos that a site hosted by an academic institution provides. The questionnaire was issued via email to three ‘gatekeepers’, one each from the three schools which had agreed to take part in the study, with a request to forward the email and survey link on to the rest of the school. This is considered an acceptable method to conduct this type of research, although not without drawbacks. (Hine, 2008: 308-310) In accepting their convenience, cost effectiveness and ability to quickly target large populations Hine argues that: (i) accusations of sample bias (ii) a need to incentivise potential respondents and (iii) perceptions of a lack of technical skill on the part of the researcher should be acknowledged and mitigated where possible in the initial design. For the first caveat and to ameliorate the possible effect of sample bias, a

survey sample needs to reflect of the population it is supposed to represent. For this study questions were structured to easily recognise (without breaching their anonymity) where a respondent was located and what their specific role entailed at their school. It was then fairly simple to assess whether respondents were representative of the school population. On the second caution of incentivising potential respondents, no inducements were offered as the use of a trusted gatekeeper was envisioned to overcome fears of lack of motivation to respond. Each gatekeeper held a senior position in the school and so was in a position of influence to encourage staff members to participate. In addition, the relevance of the subject matter to potential respondents was considered a major advantage. People, it seems, like to talk about their work. With regard to Hine's third potential drawback of a lack of technical skill on the part of the researcher; the Information Technology capabilities of the researcher are extremely germane if a web-based questionnaire is to be used as a valid research instrument. As mentioned elsewhere, this study follows previous experiences at successfully devising, designing and analysing web-based questionnaires for both Bachelors and Masters Degrees, which together with an above average IT literacy goes some way to mollifying Hine's concern on this point.

### **3.9a: Reacting to pilot survey responses.**

A selection of salient responses which brought about later change to the survey is tabulated below. (As with the later responses to the pilot study involving interviews, results are offered here as they helped shape the later stages of the methodology and methods employed in this project). Changes made in response to comments received through the pilot survey are highlighted in red within the matrix below.

**Table 3.2: Responses to survey at “Draft” stage.**

Individual	Comment(s)
24yrs Male working as Recruitment consultant	“Pretty much works ok” “Had trouble in answering two of the questions as could only choose one radio button” (This was a forced choice question so comment expected)
56yrs Female, Company Director, Business Consultancy	“Questions 8 and 9 are the wrong way round in my opinion” (Subsequently changed order of questions)  “Couldn’t complete at one go. Would have been useful if I could save and go back later” (Subsequently changed to allow save and return)
54yrs Female, Chief Executive Homelessness Charity	“Couldn’t access the survey first time around – you had to send me the link again as it was incomplete on the earlier email” “I didn’t have any issues in completing the survey when I accessed it” (Link was broken but only on this one email – fixed and resent)
58yrs Male, Lifelong Learning Manager	“I’m working with similar questionnaires all the time. This was fairly straightforward for me, although it took longer than you said!” (Reviewed number and length of questions. Removed two questions which were duplicating answers. Controlled length of response for three others)
30yrs Female, Health Service, Legal Administrator	“Some of the questions wouldn’t allow me to make more than one choice”  (As above – these were forced choice questions, no further action needed)
30yrs Male, Health Service Manager	“I didn’t particularly understand the subject matter so difficult to judge really but managed to navigate through the questionnaire ok”  (No action needed)

Van Teijlingen and Huntley (2001) also caution against the limitations of pilot studies such as the possibility of making false predictions or assumptions based on initial responses. Mindful of these cautions, it was important only to consider the most salient of suggestions for alteration throughout the two pilot stages. Although all were given due consideration not all responses were acted upon. This was especially important at the second pilot phase when the survey, adjusted following comments received at stage 1, was tested using a small sample of individuals working directly in the field of education. The remit given to those testing the survey at this stage was to check the accuracy of the technical subject matter of the questions. For example: Were the questions relevant in terms of what is happening in the current education system? Would potential respondents be able to understand the questions as relevant to their role?

**Table 3.3: Responses to survey at “Pilot” stage**

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Comment(s)</b>
58yrs Male, Assistant Head, 30yrs experience	“Not many of our staff know what ‘Best 8’ is yet, they haven’t been briefed, they might not be able to answer the questions”
57yrs Female, Head teacher, 35yrs experience	“This works pretty well”
32yrs Female Science teacher	“Again – a false question – you are assuming that Academies are better”
34yrs Male Head of PE	“Are my answers definitely anonymous?”
54yrs Male, Head teacher, 30yrs experience	“You are assuming that everyone who sees this will have the same knowledge. That’s not the case. Can some questions be optional?”
52yrs Male, Head of Year Group, 12yrs experience	“There is a presumption here that there is a marked difference between all State Schools and all Academies. Read the press! It isn’t always the case”

By far the major feedback at pilot stage concerned perceptions that assumptions were being made in a number of the questions. It was evident that these assumptions needed to be addressed so that the final survey, when issued, could be seen as being as neutral as possible. In this respect, the comments which derived from the pilot stage were invaluable in reaffirming ‘best practice’ in Social research.

As discussed earlier, an academic canon advocates that research can never be truly free of the researcher’s own values and how he or she understands the world.

Hodkinson (2008: 94) for example states that “... researchers will always hold values, assumptions and biases and these will shape their research ...” This being the case and to help counter any such accusations researchers should, from the outset, be aware of those assumptions which are relevant to the research topic, how they might affect the results and how best to soften the impact of preconceptions. In this regard, the responses from the pilot survey served a reminder of the risks involved with value driven research. A number of questions in the pilot survey were consequently reworded so that perceptions of researcher bias could be lessened. Two further questions were discarded as being too ‘leading’.

### **3.9b: Launching the final survey.**

The survey was subsequently sent to three schools, where as previously indicated, the head teacher of each had agreed that the organisation would be involved in the project. The schools have many divergent demographic characteristics which, whilst allowing for some degree of comparison, also provided for significant contrast. The head teacher in each case was a personal contact of the researcher which might give rise to accusations of convenience and could be construed as a limitation to the validity of the sample. Bryman (2008) has described convenience sampling simply in

terms of accessibility to a population and it must be acknowledged that the three individuals were readily accessible and willing to take part themselves. Moreover, their actions as a 'conduit' or gatekeeper allowed access to the teaching profession and (most importantly), a number of individuals who might otherwise be considered hard to reach. Bryman (2008: 183) determines that convenience samples can fall into two types "... a convenience sample may be acceptable though not ideal ..."

alternatively "... it represents too good an opportunity to miss ..."

He also recognises that convenience samples are perhaps more common than generally acknowledged in Social research as they are both cheaper and easier to prepare.

Although there was no intent to make overtly statistical claims from the final survey, a robust sample size from within each school was still required. In order to reach the desired target of thirty respondents per group, it is thought that the survey needs to reach approximately twice that number. The survey did not simply ask questions which require discrete answers (although the possibility remained that some statistical analysis was achievable) and opportunities were afforded to respondents to have a 'voice' through the use of supplementary questions and comments boxes.

The potential sample size and final response rates for each school is tabulated below. Opinion seems to be divided concerning response rates to surveys administered by electronic means (primarily hosted by a web domain or distributed by email). One of the main arguments concerns lack of access to IT infrastructure which is not an issue in this instance as all teaching staff at the three schools have immediate access to the internet via their school portal (Bryman, 2008; Simmons, 2008; Matthews and Ross, 2010).

### 3.4: Questionnaire response rates - Anticipated response vs Actual responses; by school

SCHOOL	ANTICIPATED RESPONSES	ACTUAL RESPONSES	RESPONSE %	AGREED TO INTERVIEW	INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED *
1	20	24	36	8	4
2	30	29	29	7	6
3	18	22	37	11	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>17</b>

\* Disparity due to sickness, other absences and cancellations.

Similarly, there seems to be no absolute determination of what constitutes a good return of responses to surveys issued. Various quoted by research organisations as being between 20% and 30%, where 20% represents a ‘good’ response rate and 30% as excellent. As a purposive sample was used in this study, it was reasonable to assume firstly that issues of sampling error would be somewhat mitigated (all potential respondents were teachers) and secondly, that the response rate would be towards (or may even exceed) the higher of those figures as each potential respondent had a ‘vested interest’ in completing the survey. Bryman (2008: 415) defines Purposive Sampling as non-probability where

The researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those being sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed.

This strategy was entirely in accord with the sample chosen from the three schools.

#### 3.10: Phase 2 – Interviews.

Using interviews as a tool for research is well established (Becker & Bryman 2004).

Using a strategy similar to that adopted for the generation of survey questions, a number of propositions were developed to be put to interviewees in semi-structured

interviews. Questions tended to follow the themes adopted throughout the survey but were slightly more detailed and the semi-structured approach allowed for follow-up or supplementary questions to be asked where it was considered necessary.

Interviews were pre-arranged and conducted, in the main, at the interviewee's place of work across the spectrum of hierarchy as detailed later in this chapter.

Whether comments were derived from a 'chance' conversation or through the pre-arranged interviews, individuals with whom the researcher conversed gave explicit consent to the information they provided being used for the research. In accordance with University of Birmingham regulations and Social Policy Association guidelines, a confidentiality and anonymity undertaking was given by the researcher, as agreed with the respective head teacher of the three schools or with individuals with whom the researcher informally conversed. The semi-structured interviews were recorded by hand at the time of the interview.

Throughout the field work and in addition to interviews conducted with members of staff at the three schools, a number of subsidiary conversations were held with individuals engaged in the delivery of education policy. In particular, teaching staff and specialists and technical advisors such as educational psychologists who were not employed at the three schools chosen for the study. These conversations generally took place in informal settings but were subsequently recorded in the research diary. Considerable understanding of a number of the issues facing education professionals was gained during these 'off the cuff' conversations and this understanding was further enhanced by attendance at practitioner events to which the researcher was invited as a delegate.

In accordance with the rationale, as determined by Peat (2002), for the piloting of surveys, pilot interviews were conducted. The reaction to those pilot interviews is recorded below.

**3.10a: Reacting to pilot interviews.**

Three pilot interviews were conducted. Interviewees for these were taken from amongst the six professionals who had completed the pilot questionnaire and each of whom had already consented to the later process. A brief description of each of the ‘pilot’ interviewees is given below. Feedback given from participants in the pilot interviews highlighted a number of areas where overall performance could be improved in three distinct areas: Interviewer presentation, structure of questions and structure of interview topic guide.

**Table 3.5: Pilot interviewees, characteristics.**

INTERVIEW	INTERVIEWEE
<b>Pilot 1 (P1)</b>	58yrs Male, Assistant Head, 30yrs experience
<b>Pilot 2 (P2)</b>	57yrs Female, Head teacher, 35yrs experience
<b>Pilot 3 (P3)</b>	52yrs Male, Head of Year Group, 12yrs experience

***On interviewer presentation:*** “At times you didn’t look at me and make me feel part of the interview. It was as though you were distracted by other thoughts – like you were already thinking of your next question” (Interview P1).

Arskey (2004) stresses the significance of establishing a good rapport with the interview subject. It was easy to overlook the importance of this when the interviewee was a close acquaintance. Fortunately, this occurred at the first pilot interview and rectified for those that remained.

***On structure of questions:*** Arskey is equally firm in her assertions that questions should be understandable, appropriate and should not coerce the interviewee into saying what the interviewer wants to hear. In this respect, the issues of value-laden research explored elsewhere in this study are applicable. Again, feedback (this time from a different interview subject) was very useful. *“You seem to assume here that everyone knows this stuff, when in fact only about ten percent of our teaching staff have ever heard of this. That will change in time but at the moment you would be flogging a dead horse with that question”*

***On structure of interview topic guide:*** A small number of potential issues arose which related to the structure of the interview topic guide. *“It would have been really useful if I knew approximately how many questions you were going to ask or, at least, how long the interview was going to last. We had to rush through the last bit as I needed to get away for another appointment”* (Interview P1). Conversely *“I sometimes felt that my answer wasn’t long enough but was struggling for other things to say. It would have been useful to have an idea of what you were looking for”* (Interview P3). Although purposely designed to be informal, a semi-structured interview still has to retain a purpose. Arskey (2004: 268-269, emphasis in original) states that *“... In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer uses an interview guide organised around key areas of interest ...”* It became apparent from the pilot interviews that the interview guide in these conversations lacked the focus around ‘key areas of interest’. There was a danger that these might venture into the realm of

an unstructured interview, which allows the interviewee almost total control of the discussion. This was not the intent for this study as there were a number of 'key areas of interest' that needed to be covered. Having recognised this, the issues were fairly easy to rectify. By allotting a specified time to each subsequent interview (30 minutes) and by using the interview topic guide in a much more controlled way, the interviewer could retain control of the discussion whilst allowing the interview subject sufficient leeway to expand on responses.

### **3.10b: Conducting the 'Formal' Interviews.**

The use of semi-structured interviews with professionals engaged in day-to-day school activities provided an opportunity to build up detailed information of perceptions of the effectiveness or otherwise of current policy towards those children at risk of failing to attain or achieve Ofsted benchmarks. This second stage of primary data collection therefore involved interviews with 17 key personnel from across the spectrum of education delivery within schools. Primarily teachers were the subjects of interview but also included were a small number of non-teaching support staff from within Special Needs departments, who were identified from within respondents to the web-based questionnaire. Their selection was justified by their experiences of closely working with the cohort of students who were at the focal point of this thesis. Questionnaire respondents were informed at an early stage that their anonymity would be protected by using a system of coding compliant with all UoB data protection guidelines. Learning taken from the pilots dictated that the 'formal' interviews had a number of pre-determined open questions designed with the flexibility to be modified during the course of the conversations if appropriate. This style of 'informant' interviews (Powney & Watts, 1987), allows for more

freedom to respond rather than leaving participants feeling restricted by a series of rigid, pre-set questions. In this way, the interviews have the capacity to be what Kvale (1996) refers to as ‘an inter-view’ – an interchange of views between two persons on a theme of mutual interest. Having regard to the possibility that the interviewer’s own perspective and non-verbal communication might begin to shape the interviewee’s responses, Kvale argues that the most important consideration is “... not whether to lead or not to lead, but where the interview should lead, and whether they will lead in important directions, producing new, trustworthy and interesting knowledge ...” (Kvale, 1996: 159).

The choice of semi-structured interviews followed by qualitative analysis appears to offer flexibility in a process which attempts to capture people’s belief systems and perceptions. It was significant that varying degrees of relationships with a number of the professionals interviewed had been previously formulated during the time I spent working in each establishment. It certainly seemed that due to the professional relationships I had previously developed with a number of interviewees and their ensuing acceptance that I was completing a pertinent academic study had an effect on interviewees’ attitude. Seemingly less resistance was offered than there may have been with an ‘unknown’ 3<sup>rd</sup> party to explore issues which were more personal and beyond the proposed list of questions. As Smith states, ‘it facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and enables the interview to enter novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data’ (Smith, 2003 p.12). However, Smith also raises the problem of control within this context and the fact that this can sometimes lead to difficulties when carrying out the analysis. King & Beinstein (2001) in a study of school refusers, also describe research interviews as being similar to the counselling interview in the sense that they utilise similar interactional styles and skills. There was clearly the potential for strong opinions to emerge.

There would therefore be a need to ensure that the skills and support mechanisms of the interviewer were appropriate to the task and subsequently allowed for the management of such responses. For the most part, skills which developed over the period studying for Bachelors and Master's Degrees, in conjunction with certain activities undertaken as Personal Development Programme initiatives (for example the 'Leading Academics' Programme in summer 2013) allowed the researcher to empathise, understand and manage the emotional aspects appropriately.

### **3.11: Analysing and coding the qualitative data.**

Qualitative data were analysed using a directed content analysis approach.

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Neuendorf (2005) this approach allows for immediate coding, using predetermined codes, based on prior research or understanding of a topic; where data which cannot readily be coded using that initial framework, it can be set aside for later analysis and identified as a new code, or subcategory of an existing code.

Findings from a directed content analysis can offer evidence which both supports and opposes an initial theory. The major strength of the directed approach is that existing theory can be supported and extended. For this thesis, which begins with the theory that the UK education system fails a proportion of its pupils, this is a positive trait. As argued by Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1283), the directed approach can offer some added validity to the research when the evidence tends to support the original proposition "... as research in an area grows, a directed approach makes explicit the reality that researchers are unlikely to be working from the naive perspective that is often viewed as the hallmark of naturalistic designs ..."

It should be recognised however that the directed approach presents challenges to the realist archetype it represents. As discussed extensively above, using a predetermined approach has built in limitations as it is often felt that researchers approach the data with a strong bias, however informed they might be. Hsieh and Shannon contend that researchers might, therefore, be inclined to find evidence that supports, rather than opposes their theory. They further argue that the interview process might offer ‘clues’ from the interviewer in the way in which the question should be answered. A third limitation is that researchers might choose to ignore the context in which a question is asked because of an overemphasis on the original theory. In each case, the limitations can be ameliorated by adopting appropriate ethical strategies as identified 3.2 above.

The code map which immediately precedes chapter 7, identifies and categorises the codes which derive from the directed content analysis conducted using the above rationale.

### **3.12: Summary.**

In combination, the web-based survey, pre-arranged interviews and follow-up conversations with interviewees provided a wealth of material. Some of the material originated from conversations which took place outside of the formal interview setting. These however remained ‘informed’ with the interviewees consent and so still conducted in accordance with ethical practices. It was possible therefore to gain an understanding of education professionals’ perspectives on possible failings within the education system and their day-to-day operationalisation of the policies they are compelled to implement.

## **Chapter 4: THEORIES OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY and CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

A vast body of academic literature and many studies by respected educational psychologists identifies that young people develop, physically and cognitively, at very different rates (c.f. Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These aspects are important as the major arguments contained within this thesis are underpinned by the suitability of the universal concept of secondary education. The processes which dictate the stages at which young people are tested, for example key stage 2 and key stage 4 are age-related. These are common to all pupils in the education system and take no account of the psychological stage at which an individual would be assessed in terms of cognitive development.

Within what Bryman (2008) identifies as a ‘narrative’ form of literature review, a number of the strategies associated with the more ‘systematic’ type of review that he also identifies were adopted to interrogate existing literature, to help understand how developmental stages might affect educational progress. Using the thesis title and both primary and supplementary research questions to identify key terms, the obvious initial focus for the search was developed. ‘Key stage 2’ and ‘key stage 4’ were very obvious terms to use; similarly, ‘attainment’, ‘achievement’ and ‘success’. Other obvious search factors were ‘education’ and ‘pupils’. Other terms arose through the initial stages of the review which informed later searches – for example ‘alternative provision’. Entering these terms singly and in combinations, into online databases such as the University’s own library search engine, ‘Google Scholar’ and ‘Web of Science’ and ERIC (Education Resource Information Centre) initiated a search for books and journals available both in the library and online for download.

ERIC was specifically chosen due to its specific link with education literature which helped considerably in narrowing down a huge amount of ‘hits’ from other databases. By further limiting searches, by date for example (1997 – 2015) and adding supplementary terms such as ‘GCSE’ and then by using Boolean operators (‘AND’, ‘NOT’, ‘OR’, for example) the relevance of search outputs could be better controlled.

Underneath the broader research question outlined in chapter 1, predominant themes in this thesis include questioning the fundamental principles of the education system, notably the concept of universal education and the inequity of the measurement systems employed to determine ‘success’. Consequently, this chapter examines a number of the central philosophies which underpin the rationale for state intervention and the ambition of a system of education which offers schooling for all young people (4.1). A political environment exists which consistently uses a discourse of increasing standards and which is argued by some to be preoccupied with elitism. Accordingly, it is relevant to determine whether all young people have an equal chance to improve their educational outcomes. This is analysed by conducting a brief enquiry into the Rawlsian concept of fair equality of opportunity (4.1a). Section 4.2 examines a number of theories of learning, offering a theoretical underpinning to the frameworks used at the empirical stage of this study. Amongst these frameworks is Search Institute’s ‘40 Assets’ model which considers the success of a young person holistically, not simply in terms of academic performance. The structure of the 40 Assets framework is outlined in section 4.2a. A number of questions which align well with the sociological debate on structure-agency arise from the 40 Assets outline; these are explored in section 4.3 as many of the 40 Assets can be recognised as locating within one or other of those sociological tenets.

#### 4.1: Why Educate?

In examining educational disadvantage, it may be helpful to understand, or at least attempt to understand, how relationships between theories and practice in educational learning are complicated by a number of diverse factors. Peters (1966) in an influential book *Ethics and Education* argued, for example, that education is theoretically connected to what is thought to be ‘worthwhile’; the outcome of education for Peters therefore would suggest that its fundamental value should not be connected to it being a means to something else, for example a method of getting a job. This resonates with an alternative construct of ‘success’ at key stage 4, other than a measurement of GCSE performance. This is reaffirmed in his later work where Peters, in collaboration with other philosophers of education such as Hirst, advocated the concept of liberal education, arguing that education should be concerned with the development of the mind: knowledge and understanding should be developed for its own sake, much in keeping with Bailey (1984). Two quotations from 19<sup>th</sup> Century philosophers resonate with my own thinking and exemplify how, by using a conflict perspective, disadvantaged pupils are marginalised within the current education system.

“... Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern but impossible to enslave ...”

(Henry, Lord Brougham, 1828)

A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation; in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.

(Mill, 1962: 239)

These principles, along with much later arguments as proposed by Peters, Hirst and Bailey are diametrically opposed with, for example, Wolf (2011) who argues that education should be measured by performance outcomes. For example, by setting benchmarked levels of academic performance such as ‘floor targets’ for GCSE performance. The importance of Wolf in determining current policy cannot be understated as her report was hugely influential in shaping education policy under the Coalition Government 2010-2015. Importantly as it directly relates to how and why governments become involved with education, this belief is shared by a number of politicians as exemplified by the Shadow Secretary of Education of the time in a 2009 speech to the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) who declared that the “... principal goal [of education] is *academic attainment*, the principle guiding every action is the wider spread of excellence ...” (Gove, 2009: pp19-20, emphasis added). The influence of this statement on later education policy is palpable as the Shadow Secretary was promoted into Government as Secretary of State following the General Election of 2010 and was the figurehead for a number of significant policy changes. (These are discussed in more detail at a later stage of this thesis). Marples (2010) identifies that a familiar extension of the thinking portrayed in this philosophy is the justification of education as a means to acquiring those qualifications necessary to secure a ‘good job’. This is validated by leading academics such as Winch (Professor of Educational Philosophy and Policy at Kings College London), who argues that it is “... reasonable for young people to expect that their education, both within and beyond school, will enable them to obtain worthwhile employment ...” (Winch, 2013: 103). Winch however adds a postscript by conceding that “... we seem incapable of recognising that and doing something about it ...” (ibid). Such a philosophy is reliant on what description is given to ‘worthwhile’ jobs and on a

sufficient quantity being available for those who require them. None of these factors are clearly articulated.

Similarly, over time, a number of opposing positions have been adopted as to what education is for and importantly why education is delivered in schools. In recent times, whilst a small number of nations such as Singapore are highlighted as having a clearly articulated justification for educating its population, the same cannot be argued for the English education system. Singapore is regarded as one of the major success stories in education largely as a result of having a consensual agreement as to the purpose of its education system, which principally concentrates on attention to the curriculum, the communication of factual and practical information, and the preparation of students for end of term, 'high stakes' examinations. To do this, teachers depend on the use of key textbooks, homework and in-class worked examples and significant attention to practice exercises (OECD, 2010). This analogy is pertinent as the Singaporean education system is frequently used by key government decision-makers as an exemplar of how the English education system should operate (Barber, 2012).

This leads naturally towards perhaps the most fundamental question concerning education; "*What is the purpose of education?*" This has engaged the minds of a significant number of respected academics and thinkers across hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Noddings (1995) and Reed and Johnson (1996) for example cite Aristotle, Plato, Locke and Rousseau as writing extensively on the purpose of education as it related to their own cultures. Similarly, in a much more modern era, educational philosophers such as Dewey, Adler, Tyack and Bourdieu have suggested a detailed rationale of the motive(s) for education (Dewey, 1997[1938]; Bourdieu, 1984[1979]; Adler, 1982; Tyack, 1988). There is a certain synergy in some of their

justifications. Tyack (1988) for example suggests that the purpose of education is inextricably linked to social and economic needs. This largely corresponds with Adler (1982) who suggests that there are three primary aims of educating young people:

- Advancing social responsibility
- Personal growth or self-improvement
- Preparation for work

Analysis from philosophers such as Bourdieu suggests that a corollary of the notion of social needs and social responsibility, is the principle that education reinforces the social class divide (Gartman, 2013). According to Bourdieu, societies have to successfully cultivate an environment where cultural differences can be repeated and in this regard he recognised that schools were the most important setting for the reproduction of the social classes (Bourdieu, 1974). This locates within Bourdieu's concept of habitus, - individuals' behaviours relative to their understanding of the social structures experienced as a result of their own social status. Habitus in this form can also be extended to describe group behaviours; this allows Bourdieu to identify a social stratification in societies when reflecting that pupils from lower working class families do not "... bring to their school work either the keenness of lower middle class children or the cultural capital of upper class children ..."

(Bourdieu, 1974: 41). A similar analysis is offered by Scott (2000) who emphasises that individuals are distributed across layers of a social hierarchy on economic grounds. These social groupings, he argues, are "... forged together through both their economic relations and their associated social relations and interactions; groupings that are able to reproduce themselves over time ..."

(pp21-22). Importantly, for the focus of this study, Bourdieu's theory of habitus includes a

notion of a ‘withdrawal’ from the education process amongst low ability students, particularly those found amongst lower working class families, as a direct result of the education system concentrating efforts on students who are ‘ready’ to learn, the keen lower middle class and the cultured upper class. On the basis of Bourdieu’s analysis, Nash (1990) “... suggests that the school will generally ignore the *habitus* of children of non-dominant classes, and that this mechanism is the primary cause of the low attainments of working class students ...” (p436, emphasis in original). However, this appears at odds with the principles of Special Needs Education, which place a duty on schools to compensate for disadvantage in students regarded as ‘at risk’ of underperformance. Successive Special Education Needs Acts have dictated that schools offer additional help for students who, comparative to their peers, are identified as having difficulty in learning; have social, emotional or mental health issues; physical disability, or health problems.

As a direct result of their environment and how the young people locate themselves within that environment; the lack of cultural capital and higher status *habitus* consequent from where, and to whom, these young people were born; and a tendency to ‘withdraw’ from the education process, it is almost inevitable that a majority amongst this group will fail. This cohort is readily recognisable within children studied by Elliott et al (2011) which assimilated educational performance with material disadvantage. In a similar vein, Nash (1990: 441) states:

The implicit explanation in the conventional sociology of education is a theory of disadvantage. The more points of disadvantage an individual is burdened with the less likely he or she is to succeed.

A cadre of academic work identifies however that *habitus* is a problematic theory in some regards as it takes no account of the effects of individual action by the young person, or action taken by other individuals or groups on their behalf, for example

within school or the wider community (cf. Nash, 1990; Savage and Egerton, 1997; King, 2000; Sullivan, 2002). Sullivan (2002:144) argues for a more individual perspective and states "... success and failure in the education system is seen as being due to individual gifts (or the lack of them) ..." Clearly how an individual is positioned does affect outcome, although it has to be stated that there are always exceptions and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not always fail at school. Similarly, those from more advantaged backgrounds do not always do as well as they should.

#### **4.1a Rawls and Fair Equality of Opportunity.**

The UK system is predicated on a philosophy of universal education where, in principle, every pupil has the same opportunity to do well. The concept of 'equality of opportunity' is widely covered in social studies. For this study, the concept as articulated by Rawls is privileged as it triangulates talent, ambition and prospects in a way that fits within the framework of my research questions.

Rawls (2001:44, emphasis in original) argues that "... Fair chances obtain when those who are equal along two dimensions, *talent* and *ambition*, are equal along a third dimension, their *prospects for success in the attainment of advantageous positions* ..." which, I interpret as a young person's prospects of advances in social mobility. Rawls' theory has been and continues to be, the subject of a relatively polarised philosophical debate (cf. Arneson, 1999; Mason, 2004; Chambers, 2009; Shields, 2015). Similarly, in political-educational discourse, the concept of an equality of opportunity for all pupils to learn is a heavily contested debate (cf. Seldon, 2006; Taylor-Gooby and Martin, 2010; Parris, 2013; Keep and Mayhew, 2014).

Whilst accepting that individuals will have talent and ambition, the third dimension of Rawls' proposition is an extremely difficult thread on which to deliver for a number of reasons. Firstly, an almost infinite corpus of academic literature and political reportage describes why, due to pervasive inequalities embedded within in society, prospects for individuals are not universal. (cf. Spohrer, 2011; Taylor-Gooby 2011a, 2011b; Shields, 2013; Parris, 2013; Brighouse, 2014). Secondly as described by Taylor-Gooby and Martin (2010) meaningful equality of opportunity requires that government commits to providing a set of common basic standard services. Thirdly, also described by Taylor-Gooby and Martin, prospects are to some degree determined by individuals' own resolve to take the opportunities which are presented to them.

Despite the contested notion of disparity in opportunity between certain cohorts of pupils, Keep and Mayhew (2014) argue that education and skills could be the 'silver bullet' which would guarantee economic growth and prosperity. Such themes are regularly articulated in the political arena as witnessed in a debate in the Scottish Parliament, which pre-dates the work of Keep and Mayhew.

They [education and skills] will drive our economic growth and allow us to meet the challenges of globalisation, compete with the emerging economies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and prosper. Skills and education give our next generation the opportunity to be all they can be, to raise their quality of life and that of their families, and to make real their hopes and aspirations.

(Gray, 2007)

Keep and Mayhew (2014: 767-768) further describe how policy makers tend to assume that reforms in education can help reduce inequality especially where this relates to income and to opportunities for employment. This presupposes that there is a universal ability to access and fully engage in the education system (Jacob and Ludwig, 2006; Mortimore, 2010; Brighouse, 2014). This supposition has been

repeatedly exposed by studies into socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and other indicators of disadvantage and inequality to be somewhat of a myth.

Later sections explore a number of these issues, whilst section 4.2 which follows, analyses how young people develop at different rates and some of the effects this might have on their ability to access education at 'benchmarked' stages.

#### **4.2: Child Development and theories of learning.**

Whereas Bourdieu's analysis considers young people in terms of their habitus (as described in section 4.1 above) many of the most regarded theories of Child Development focus on the young person as an individual, whilst recognising that environment is only one of a number of factors that contribute to a child's ability to process information. As a consequence, the sociological debate of agency and structure becomes pertinent. This debate, largely centring on the ability of a young person to 'act' as an individual in relation to education policy which is prescribed, will be explored later in this chapter (section 4.3)

In this thesis, I do not promote any one theory of child development as being superior or more influential than any other. If some are described in greater detail than others, it is because they seem to me to exhibit certain characteristics which resonate with the cohort of pupils at the heart of the study. It does seem to me that whilst respected psychologists can describe several philosophies, each determining that children grow and learn at different rates and in different ways, it is illogical that education policies should continually favour only one mechanism of measuring transitions through the secondary schooling process.

Child development theorists attempt to categorise a number of features which either contribute to or encumber a young person's ability to reach their full potential. Consequently, it must be recognised that a number of separate theoretical models of child development exist. A selection of the most well-known are listed in the table (4.1) on the following page, together with major advocates of those theories. Whilst not seeking to devalue, in any way, the theories associated with Gesell and Freud, perhaps the most relevant for the purposes of this study are: Psychosocial, Cognitive, Behaviourist, Ecological and Information processing theory. These are themes that are most identifiable within the Assets based frameworks and the concept of 'Positive Youth Development' as identified by Scales et al (2006), Benson (2011) and Lerner et al (2011), which will be used at the empirical stage of this research project as frameworks for analysis.

**Table 4.1: Major Child Development Theorists.**

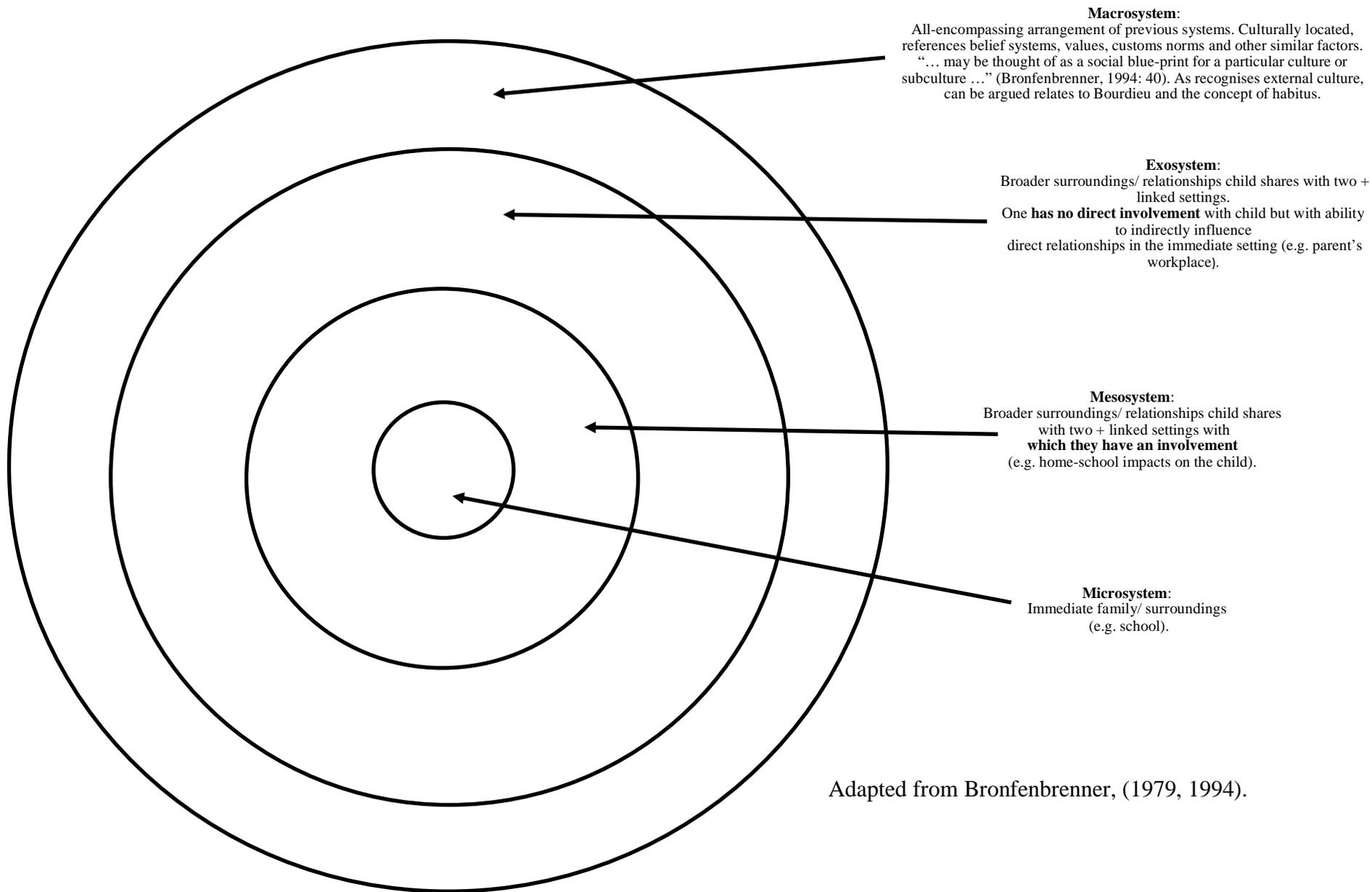
<b>Psychological/Theoretical approach</b>	<b>Principles of the theory</b>	<b>Key Theorist</b>
<b>Maturation</b>	Growth and development occur in orderly stages and sequence. The individual genetic timetable affects rate of maturation.	Arnold Gesell
<b>Psychodynamic</b>	Behaviour is controlled by unconscious urges. Three components of the mind are id, ego and super ego.	Sigmund Freud
<b>Psychosocial</b>	Personality develops in eight stages throughout a lifetime. Development is influenced through interactions with family, friends and culture.	Erik Erikson Jean Piaget Lev Vygotsky
<b>Cognitive</b>	Qualitative changes in the way children think. The child is considered an active learner going through stages.	Jean Piaget Erik Erikson
<b>Behaviourist</b>	Learning is gradual and continuous. Development is a sequence of specific conditional behaviours. Main emphasis is on the environment, not heredity. Observable behaviours are considered most important.	John Watson B.F. Skinner Albert Bandura
<b>Ecological</b>	Balance between nature and nurture. Child is placed in the middle of concentric factors which all influence the child. Emphasis is placed on environment and heredity.	Uri Bronfenbrenner
<b>Information processing theory</b>	We all have innate learning ability. Children are born with specialised information processing abilities that enable them to figure out structure of development.	Noam Chomsky
<b>Attachment theory</b>	Bond between mother and child in early years shapes later development/ ability to form relationships	John Bowlby Mary Ainsworth

Adapted from Centre for Learning Innovation (2006).

This categorisation is by no means exhaustive; there is no claim that this is the case. Indeed, it is recognised that a number of other principles exist which, in certain regards, are fundamental in shaping a young person's ability, behaviour and personality.

Not the least of these is the last category in the table above, “Attachment” theory, largely accredited to Bowlby, resulting from an extensive research base over many years (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1992). The bond between the primary care-giver (notionally the mother) and child lies at the heart of attachment theory. Research conducted by Bowlby and others offers significant evidence that strong bonds between care-giver and child in early-years have positive effects on the child’s continued development and the ability to form relationships with other adults in later life. The importance of this in relation to the classroom is well documented as exemplified by Geddes (2006), Bergin and Bergin (2009) and Bomber (2007, 2011) who recognise that attachment has a marked influence on a student’s success. Each argue that the relationship between student and teacher is an important determinant of success and that students tend to do better in tests and examinations where ‘secure attachments’ with trusted adults are formed. There is also evidence, they argue, that secure attachments lead to better behaviours and increased willingness to take on challenges.

Each of the main theories are largely rooted in principles that development occurs in phases. Social and ecological theories tend to be distinct from others in the way that they place equal emphasis on socio-cultural influences and interactions between children and their peer group and adults. These are an important part of the development process, which is incremental and continuous. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) for example offers a systemic overview which organises child development in five concentric circles, where the child is at the centre and where the elements in each subsequent circle have less direct impact on the child. The four circles, from innermost to outermost are shown in his circles diagram on the following page.



The fifth circle, **Chronosystems**, is often disregarded in analysis of Bronfenbrenner and so is not represented on the diagram. It is, however, worth noting that according to Bronfenbrenner, a chronosystem incorporates either the changes or consistency of both the person and his (sic) environment over time (ibid). The influence that polar issues such as stability or change in family structure such as divorce and bereavement, socio-economic status (promotions, job losses) and place of residence (moving house) are particular facets to be considered within a chronosystem. Each has identifiable resonance with the trajectory of a child's development.

Similarly, Vygotsky's concept of 'scaffolding' as articulated in his sociocultural theory of child development and expanded in ideas of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is predicated on social aspects of the environment in which a child is situated playing a pivotal role in development. Scaffolding, simply, is the assistance that adults and other close associates can give to enable the child to complete tasks:

...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers

(Vygotsky, 1978: 86).

A more common-sense interpretation of this aspect of Vygotsky's thinking might be, that the more help a child receives, the more likely they are to successfully negotiate any challenges they face, including their experiences of the education system.

In a similar vein, Bandura's social learning theory emphasises the importance of learning through observation, imitation and demonstration (Bandura, 1977). This theory assimilates an ongoing collaboration between behaviour, perceptions and the environment in which the child is located. Activities are focussed either by

reinforcement or rewards. Bandura describes this as observational learning, characterised by required elements which may be self-evident as ‘external’ factors.

Observational learning has three basic representations:

Live – where an individual demonstrates an activity or behaviour.

Verbal – involving descriptions and explanations of a behaviour

Symbolic – the use of fictional characters to display behaviours (for example by using books, visual media or IT systems for exemplars).

Recognised equally within assets based approaches, Bandura also identifies that learning and behaviour was equally influenced by internal factors such as pride and pleasure at completing tasks. Attention, a need to concentrate in order to learn;

Retention, the ability to store information; Reproduction, performing the activity or behaviour that has been learned and stored; Motivation, having the drive or inspiration to actually replicate the behaviour that has been learned.

Bandura’s simple proposition that people learn from one another, Vygotsky’s concept of scaffolding and ZPD and the articulation by Bronfenbrenner of an ecological balance between ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ are readily recognisable characteristics within assets based examinations of child development and, particularly, the Search Institute 40 Assets framework which readily demonstrates the equal importance of environment and individual responsibility in a young person’s learning and development.

Assets-based approaches to child development divide and classify environmental and social themes which affect the development of young people on a day-by-day basis, separated into a number of theoretically based categories (Scales and Leffert, 2004; Rothon et al 2012; Ramey and Rose-Krasnor, 2012; Schucan Bird et al, 2013). These

categories indicate issues over which young people have little control themselves, the external and those which they can influence through their own actions, the internal. 'Child centred' investigations employing this technique are fairly common place particularly when examining issues of health and education (Scales et al, 2006; Fenton et al, 2010; Elliott et al, 2011). Elliott et al (2011: 2327) for example, examined thirty-four asset based studies of educational outcomes before concluding that "...asset policies are likely to promote higher rates of educational attainment both due to their direct and indirect effects ...". I contend that this piece of research is of particular relevance to my thesis as the assets based approach allows for the identification of a considerable number of individual characteristics, upon which a successful transition through KS2 to KS4 could be measured. Furthermore, asset based studies as described in detail below, have explicit and implicit associations with many of the major child development theories within their overarching framework, which I further argue offers an opportunity for aggregating the major tenets of those separate theories into a single structure.

#### **4.2a: 'Assets based' child development theory.**

Developed by the Search Institute, a youth development research organisation based in Minneapolis, USA, the 40 Assets protocol arose when researchers began to 'reverse engineer' the problem of "at risk" children. Rather than asking, "What puts young people at risk?" researchers instead began to question "What gives young people strength?" (Benson and Lerner, 2003). The ensuing framework describes developmental assets as positive factors in young people, families, communities and schools as they were found to be the most important in promoting young people's well-being. Benson and Lerner further describe developmental assets as "social and

psychological strengths that function to enhance health outcomes for children and adolescents” (p. 8).

The 40 Assets were developed after evaluating over two million young people across North America, in scientific studies over a period of 40 years from the late 1950s into the 1990s and can be located in broader initiatives within welfare policies towards the use of asset based approaches. There is for example substantial evidence which indicates that assets based approaches are fairly commonplace strategies within recognised toolkits for improvements in health care systems and community development (Kegler et al, 2005; Foot and Hopkins, 2010; O’Leary et al, 2011).

Identified by Search Institute as a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development, the assets explicitly evidence the significant roles families, schools, local communities and religion play in shaping young people's lives (Lerner, 1998; Scales and Leffert, 2004; Benson & Lerner, 2003). In the original iteration in 1990, Search Institute identified only 30 developmental assets classifying them as ‘internal’ and ‘external’. Following later empirical research, including thorough examinations of youth development literature together with interviews with practitioners and other experts, Search Institute refined and strengthened the asset framework. Largely through a study conducted in Minneapolis and Albuquerque, the theoretical framework was subsequently extended from 30 to 40 developmental assets (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Benson & Lerner, 2003).

In addition to adding 10 new assets, the revised framework included two new categories, “... expanding the concept of health to include the kind of skills and behaviours needed to succeed in employment, education and civic life ...” (Benson & Lerner, 2003: p.31).

**Table 4.2: Search Institute 40 Developmental Assets.  
(Adolescents 12 – 18 years)**

<b>EXTERNAL ASSETS</b>	<b>SUPPORT</b>	<p>1. <b>Family support</b> - Family life provides high levels of love and support</p> <p>2. <b>Positive family communication</b> - Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents</p> <p>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b> - Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults</p> <p>4. <b>Caring neighbourhood</b> - Young person experiences caring neighbours</p> <p>5. <b>Caring school climate</b> - School provides a caring, encouraging environment</p> <p>6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b> - Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school</p>
	<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>	<p>7. <b>Community values youth</b> - Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth</p> <p>8. <b>Youth as resources</b> - Young people are given useful roles in the community</p> <p>9. <b>Service to others</b> - Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week</p> <p>10. <b>Safety</b> - Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighbourhood</p>
	<b>BOUNDARIES and EXPECTATIONS</b>	<p>11. <b>Family boundaries</b> - Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts</p> <p>12. <b>School boundaries</b> - School provides clear rules and consequences</p> <p>13. <b>Neighbourhood boundaries</b> - Neighbours take responsibility for monitoring young people's behaviour</p> <p>14. <b>Adult role models</b> - Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour</p> <p>15. <b>Positive peer influence</b> - Young person's best friends model responsible behaviour</p> <p>16. <b>High expectations</b> - Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well</p>
	<b>CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME</b>	<p>17. <b>Creative activities</b> - Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theatre, or other arts</p> <p>18. <b>Youth programs</b> - Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/ or in the community</p> <p>19. <b>Religious community</b> - Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution</p> <p>20. <b>Time at home</b> - Young person is out with friends with "nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week</p>
<b>EXTERNAL ASSETS</b>	<b>COMMITMENT TO LEARNING</b>	<p>21. <b>Achievement Motivation</b> - Young person is motivated to do well at school</p> <p>22. <b>School Engagement</b> - Young person is actively engaged in learning</p> <p>23. <b>Homework</b> - Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day</p> <p>24. <b>Bonding to school</b> - Young person cares about his or her school</p> <p>25. <b>Reading for Pleasure</b> - Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week</p>
	<b>POSITIVE VALUES</b>	<p>26. <b>Caring</b> - Young person places high value on helping other people</p> <p>27. <b>Equality and social justice</b> - Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty</p> <p>28. <b>Integrity</b> - Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs</p> <p>29. <b>Honesty</b> - Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy"</p> <p>30. <b>Responsibility</b> - Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility</p> <p>31. <b>Restraint</b> - Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs</p>
	<b>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</b>	<p>32. <b>Planning and decision making</b> - Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices</p> <p>33. <b>Interpersonal Competence</b> - Young person has empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills</p> <p>34. <b>Cultural Competence</b> - Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/ racial/ ethnic backgrounds</p> <p>35. <b>Resistance skills</b> - Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations</p> <p>36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b> - Young person seeks to resolve conflict non-violently</p>
	<b>POSITIVE IDENTITY</b>	<p>37. <b>Personal power</b> - Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me"</p> <p>38. <b>Self-esteem</b> - Young person reports having high self esteem</p> <p>39. <b>Sense of purpose</b> - Young person reports that "my life has a purpose"</p> <p>40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b> - Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future</p>

The assets approach is used by Educational Psychologists and others and is, in part, a 'deficit model'. Young people are assessed against the number of assets they exhibit set against the number they do not based on the 40 assets developed by Scales & Leffert and Lerner & Benson. A full list of assets is listed in table 4.2, above. Used effectively, this framework of developmental assets could be a useful instrument for observing both the obvious and unseen differences between individuals and within and among groups of young people. Such understandings can lead to new theoretical models of how to increase the chances for young people to experience upward social mobility, increase later life chances and be fully participating members of society and community (Benson et al, 1998).

As identified by Mason and Hood (2011), where young people are sometimes excluded from full participation in society, any additional help that can be offered to them in an attempt to rectify that situation should be welcomed. This is supported by a concept devised by Sir David Brailsford, former team manager of the British Olympic Cycling team, was aimed at improving performance and which he termed 'the aggregation of marginal gains'. Broadly, this principle argues that by breaking down and identifying every aspect of an athlete's performance and then identifying methods of making small but incremental improvements in each aspect, performance can be optimised (Hall et al, 2012; Walsh, 2013; Durand et al, 2014). It is possible to identify areas where using an approach similar in ethos to that of marginal gains, may be achievable within the developmental model of 40 Assets.

The methodology, it is argued, is effective where an accumulation, or aggregation, of small incremental improvements can result in significantly improved performance overall. For example, in relation to children with additional needs, a number of

seemingly minor interventions by support workers can be used instead of a single 'expert' involvement.

... different individuals are assigned different roles within the child's activities of daily living. This involves slightly modifying the context of the child's life in a number of areas, each one small, but the totality of these marginal gains leads to an overall improvement in the child's functioning ...

(Sugden, 2014).

It could be argued therefore that a synergy exists between this principle and by the recognition of how the use of 40 Assets can help to identify and exploit strengths and talents of young people beyond the paradigm of academic attainment and achievement.

Scales et al (2004) define the 40 Assets in terms of the importance of relationships, skills, opportunities and values which divert adolescents from behavioural risk and guide towards positive development. Scales et al agree with Search Institute when arguing that the greater the number of assets present in a young person's environment, the more it is possible to predict that a he or she will do well in education. Alternatively, they agree with other research in acknowledging that where a number of key assets are reported as missing, it is equally possible to envisage that difficulties will be experienced resulting in less favourable educational outcomes. Citing earlier studies, Scales et al (2006) contend that assets which: (a) encourage participation in school and community; (b) help to build social and emotional skills; (c) promote supportive relationships with teachers and parents; and (d) consistently reward positive behaviour, frequently feature in reports of positive outcomes (p693). An overt articulation that a strong relationship should exist between school, the student, family and community is readily apparent.

Further and recognised as important within the wider context of this project, several of the assets also resonate strongly with the political ideology of devolution of power and responsibility away from central government and into communities. This is a notion which is integral to the government's stated ambition to de-centralise the delivery of key public services and consequently is relevant in the discussions of policy for free schools and academies (Painter, 2013; Chaney and Wincott, 2014) which will take place in later chapters.

The idea that assets are represented as 'external' and 'internal' assets could equally be argued in terms of the Ecological Systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner which emphasises the balance between 'nature' and 'nurture'; the Sociocultural theory advocated by Vygotsky and Bandura's Social Learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994; Bandura, 1986). Whilst individual elements of 40 Assets are recognisable in other of the 'main' theories it is perhaps within the social and ecological theories that assets are most identifiable.

#### **4.2b: Character Education.**

The concept of Character Education has been evident in studies of school curricula in Western democracies for some considerable time, with the exception of a relatively short period at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is argued however that contemporary character education is "... better grounded academically than some of its predecessors ..." (The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015a). A number of research projects having the ambition to explore how 'character' is formed in pupils, are being undertaken by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues based at the University of Birmingham. The reporting of a number of these

studies post-date the timeframe set out for analysis for this thesis, nevertheless, as the research which underpins certain of those studies was conducted within that timeframe, they are considered relevant instruments from which to draw analysis. For example, an examination in 68 UK schools which investigated the way in which teachers view their role in developing good character and virtue in students. This study reported that teachers believe the current assessment system has a detrimental effect on the overall development of a young person (The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015b). To some degree, the principle of Character Education resonates with elements of the 40 Assets approach in that a young person is viewed holistically. Whilst recognising that examinations have a value, it does not privilege examination results as the only determinant of success at school. Rather, the focus is on:

[...] a set of personal traits that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character Education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues.

[...] Character Education is about helping students grasp what is ethically important in situations and how to act for the right reasons, so that they become more autonomous and reflective.

(The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015a)

An earlier research study from the Jubilee Centre draws from examples in seven case study schools and determines that character can be taught through a number of mechanisms. These are represented in the table on the following page.

**Table 4.3: Character Education Case Study Schools.**

<b>CHOOOL</b>	<b>TYPE OF SCHOOL</b>	<b>WHAT DO THEY DO? (‘DELIVERY MECHANISM’)</b>	<b>KEY EXEMPLARS OF ‘CHARACTER’ (‘MEASUREMENT MECHANISM’)</b>
<b>ETON COLLEGE</b>	<b>INDEPENDENT BOARDING</b>	<b>SPORT</b>	<b>HUMILITY FAIR PLAY GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP</b>
<b>KING’S LANGLEY SCHOOL</b>	<b>COMMUNITY COMPREHENSIVE</b>	<b>PSHE and RESILIENCE LESSONS</b>	<b>PENN RESILIENCY PROGRAMME (see footnote *1*)</b>
<b>KING’S LEADERSHIP ACADEMY</b>	<b>FREE/ INDEPENDENT STATE</b>	<b>CHARACTER PASSPORT</b>	<b>REVIEW OF ‘FLIGHT PATH’ PERSONAL TARGETS (Academic &amp; non-academic activities all count)</b>
<b>KING EDWARDS SCHOOL</b>	<b>INDEPENDENT DAY</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES (Includes older students leading classes of younger cohorts)</b>
<b>TOPCLIFFE SCHOOL</b>	<b>PRIMARY</b>	<b>UNCOVERING TALENT</b>	<b>FINDING SOMETHING A PUPIL IS GOOD AT (Not necessarily academic)</b>
<b>WELLINGTON COLLEGE</b>	<b>INDEPENDENT BOARDING</b>	<b>CHARACTER BEFORE KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>HARKNESS METHOD OF INDIVIDUAL LEARNING (see footnote *2*)</b>
<b>WEST KIDLINGTON SCHOOL</b>	<b>PRIMARY</b>	<b>CREATIVE CURRICULUM</b>	<b>STORYTELLING PUPIL-LED DISCUSSIONS REFLECTION EXPOSURE TO ADULT ROLE MODELS</b>

\*1\* PENN RESILIENCY PROGRAMME - group intervention programme which teaches cognitive-behavioural and social problem-solving skills. (positive Psychology Centre, 2015)

\*2\* HARKNESS METHOD OF INDIVIDUAL LEARNING - student-directed, discussion-based learning. Students own the process and the responsibility of understanding. (Noble Academy, 2015)

The report authors determine that the seven schools were selected due to their ability to exemplify an assortment of approaches to character education; it is evident from the table that activities from across the spectrum of school life are included in each school's measure of character evaluation. Many of these are explored further in later sections. Whilst the ability of these schools and their validity to represent good practice in character education is accepted, it could be argued that the choice is heavily biased towards schools in the independent sector. These schools have the time, resources and facilities to fully implement the criteria which represent a 'school of character' as set out by the Jubilee Centre.

Nevertheless, the report clearly states that character education has the support of key individuals within both major political parties; quoting by name the Secretary of State for Education and the Shadow Secretary, who agree that the importance of character, virtues and moral purpose are unambiguous. A number of these characters are identified by Arthur and Harrison in table 4.4:

**Table 4.4: Character, virtue and moral purpose.**

- Character education as a visible part of the day to day practice of the school
- Character seen as a pre-requisite to better attainment and behaviour
- Ensuring that core values drive every part of the school
- Understanding that character is largely 'caught', but that it can also be 'taught'
- Ensuring that the culture and ethos of the school is conjunct to character education
- Ensuring that all students have a right to character development and that it is at the heart of what constitutes good education
- Knowing that character education is not only the responsibility of schools, and working in partnership with parents, employers and other local organisations.

(Adapted from Arthur and Harrison, 2014: 4)

Arthur and Harrison (2014: 3) also maintain that "... All schools should enable students to become good persons and good citizens, able to lead good lives, as well as to be 'successful' persons. These are pertinent considerations for a group of pupils who are seemingly 'left behind' in the educational system and who, if alternative systems of recognition and 'success' were adopted, could be seen as having positive transitions from KS2 through to KS4.

It is intrinsic within the 40 Assets model that a number of characteristics should be present within the milieu of individual young people in order for them to successfully develop through adolescence (Scales and Leffert, 2004). This also resonates with a number of the principles of Character Education outlined earlier. Both concepts align with a study conducted by Elliott et al (2011) which reasons that where a majority of these characteristics are observable in a young person, he or she is normally destined to do well at school. Conversely, where a number are absent, defined for the purpose of this study as an 'asset-deficit', they are predicted to do less well. This asset-deficit is potentially most apparent in students who are predicted to have low grades in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 test results. Critically assets are predicated on where and how young people experience their education, what associations they have with their peer groups and others away from the school environment, including how they engage with organised youth programmes. Asset-deficit is most recognisable when triangulated with the features of learning theory as identified in earlier sections of chapter 4.2 and, at the same time, associated with a number of characteristics identified through multiple studies of causes of inequality in education.

**Asset 6:** "... Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school ...” (Psychosocial theory)

**Asset 14:** "... Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour ...” (Ecological theory)

**Asset 18:** "... Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports clubs, or organizations at school and/ or in the community ...” (Ecological theory)

**Asset 30:** "... Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility ...” (Behaviourist theory).

**Asset 32:** "... Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices ...” (Cognitive theory).

The examination of ‘social and contextual assets’ in relation to child development is a recognised academic field. Many studies confirm that there are positive relationships between engagement in after school activities such as sports and music with the general well-being of young people which includes their education.

Examples include Steptoe and Butler (1996); Posner and Vandell (1999); Donaldson and Ronan (2006); and Guhn et al (2012).

Guhn et al (2012) specifically identify that the number of social and contextual assets found to be present in a young person’s environment is important; each additional asset present represents an incremental improvement in the young person’s well-being. An unstated corollary must therefore be that each individual asset deficiency signifies a worsening in well-being, which is universally recognisable as having negative effects on educational outcomes. In an education system which is entirely predicated on academic competence, it would appear that these factors are not recognised or, worse still, recognised but ignored. By drawing on 40 Asset examples and applying these to the group of pupils entering secondary education with below-par test scores at Key Stage 2, it would be possible to recognise that a large number of pupils are destined to fall short of recognised

attainment benchmarks and considered 'at risk' in current discourse. Positive intervention strategies could then be developed and implemented. It is this group of young people for whom the distinction between attainment, achievement and success, as articulated earlier in this study, is most germane and so a wider interpretation of 'success' more central.

In chapter 6 it is acknowledged that some of the approaches to current education policy identify that, in recent history and for the present, articulations of a successful transition through the secondary education process from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 are predominantly grounded in how many GCSE passes a pupil acquires and at what grade. Furthermore, these grades are predicted some years in advance by a calculation determined by tests taken at KS2 and termed 'expected levels of progress'.

Analysis of government statistics show that approximately 30% of students in any KS4 cohort will not make their expected level of progress. The use of an analytical approach such as 40 Assets may provide an opportunity to identify and fully exploit the strengths and talents of those young people at the individual level, which has much in common with the philosophy of an 'aggregation of marginal gain'

#### **4.3: The ability to 'act' and its relationship with the policy-making process.**

An examination of an 'Assets based' approach to child development and the articulation of assets as either 'external' or 'internal' points towards the sociological separation of structure and agency. This perceived dichotomy is the subject of considerable academic debate. As it relates to the research questions which form the

strategies for this thesis, this polar debate should therefore be acknowledged and briefly explored. Where arguments are made, as they are in this thesis, that power structures and political ideology underpin the education structures within which pupils operate, it is relevant to consider arguments by a number of leading academics that policy is often devised to regulate, punish or reward behaviour on the basis of structural or agentic influences. This is a perspective from which much of social policy, including education, can be scrutinised (Le Grand 1998; Deacon 2004).

Explanations of how and why individuals behave in the ways that they do, or perhaps in the way that they are allowed to, are grounded in considerable philosophical debate. A canon of quite recent academic research indicates that the study of children as social actors is recognised as being an integral part of that debate (Mason and Hood, 2011; Oswell, 2013; Biggeri, 2014; Santi and Di Masi, 2014). Equally it is recognised that children are, in the main, regarded as a minority group which is excluded from fully participating in society (Mason and Hood, 2011). It can be argued this is a result of the external influences (social structures) within which children are forced to operate and the constraints these have on the child's ability to act freely. One of the key determinants may be the way in which 'childhood' itself is theorised and constructed (Wyness, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Several studies align those constructions with the discourses of institutional, state and organisational power-elites, as articulated by Foucault and Giddens (cf. Devine, 2000). Very few studies identify 'the child' as having power of agency. Sorin (2005: 12), for example, declared an ambition to "... recognise the changing contexts of early childhood and rethink pedagogy and practice to suit new demands ..." and subsequently categorised ten separate constructions of childhood as a response to traditionally accepted norms;

the innocent child, the noble/saviour child, the evil child, the snowballing child, the out of control child, the miniature adult, the adult-in-training, the child as commodity, the child as victim and the agentic child

(Sorin, 2005).

Only two of the categories identified in this study are recognisable as having any kind of self-determination for the child. The 'noble/saviour child' "... who has the capacity to take on adult responsibility to the extent of saving others from terrible fates ..." (p14) which is identifiable with young people who take on the role of primary carers for an adult; and the 'agentic child' which "... challenges the notion of the innocent, powerless child, as children are considered social actors who participate in their education and lives ..." (p18). This, according to Sorin, is however a negotiated position where power between the child and adult is shared.

The suggestion of a struggle between the concepts of structure and agency underpins a polar sociological debate in which many authors attempt to divorce the two terms, often describing the relationship as a 'problematic' concept (Hollis 1994; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Pleasants 2009; Campbell 2009). Others argue that the debate is a basis from which much of social policy can be examined; for example, whether policy is designed to regulate, punish or reward behaviour and towards whom policy is directed (Le Grand 1998; Deacon 2004). As a corollary it can be argued that the agency-structure discourse is a false dichotomy; that the two themes are both interrelated and interdependent. Walsh (1998) suggests that actors 'volunteer' to act within overarching social structures and is an example of a large body of authors who argue that structures "... cannot work, however, without the commitment of actors to them ..." (p32). This suggests that actors either acquiesce to the imposition of a social structure as they simply cannot do otherwise or, conversely choose as a matter of their own free will, to accept the standards and rubrics of the dominant

discourse as "... the norms and rules of the dominant discourse define what is rational, sane and true ..." (ibid). In the case of children, for example, it may be argued to some degree that there is an acceptance by them individually or as a collective that they are required to attend school and conform to the school regime either because they have no viable option or because of a free-choice decision that it is in their best interests to do so. Walsh, however, concludes by arguing that it could be a combination of the two:

The question of structure and agency then is whether this commitment is enforced or entirely volunteered, and how it is possible to be a combination of both so that the social structure is both achieved by and constitutive of social action.

(Walsh, 1998: pp32-33)

This complicity tends to support a proposition that agency and structure have some sort of a relationship, albeit indeterminate. Woodman (2009) appears to support this argument when analysing earlier work by Beck, arguing for a 'middle ground' approach. Actors have "...a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate..." (p246). It should, therefore, be possible for a child born into inequality to achieve social mobility entirely as a result of its own efforts. Crucially this does not mean that they can change their starting point, which has been identified as being far more significant than many other factors in determining later life chances (Denham, 2010). Nevertheless, alternative arguments are proposed along agentic lines by for example Nash (1990), King (2000) and Sullivan (2001, 2002) which advocate that the individual is capable of overcoming adversity and improving their life chances through education.

#### **4.4: Summary.**

Countless studies exist which attempt to define whether a child has done ‘well’ at school and what the defining factors that contribute to any success might be. This chapter has explored a number of those concepts from a variety of viewpoints.

Firstly, the chapter examined the purpose and role of education. This revealed that considerable debate exists amongst philosophers such as Dewey (1997 [1938]) and Adler (1982), the latter advocating that a three-fold rationale exists, the advancement of social responsibility, self-improvement and preparation for the workplace.

Secondly the chapter discussed whether – within a system which is predicated on universality – all pupils entering the system have an equal chance of a successful transition based on Rawls (2001) arguments of what constitutes ‘equality of opportunity’. Using Rawls’ theory, it is possible to argue that across the third dimension of his argument, many pupils entering the secondary education system do not have an equal chance of a successful transition when compared to a number of their peers. Rawls’ concept of ‘prospects for success in the attainment of advantageous positions’ when equated to the concept of social mobility, examined at a number of points throughout chapters 4, 5 and 6, shows equality of opportunity to be somewhat of a misnomer.

This chapter also advanced an argument, based on the work of a number of prominent educational philosophers such as Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, that the rate at which a young person develops, physically and cognitively, is an extremely important consideration in an education system which imposes a series of test regimes which are solely age-related. No general allowance is made for the pace at which individual progress can be made. This is important to a thesis which advocates

that a number of young people are failed by the education system. The concepts of 'Assets-Based' and 'Character Education' were also introduced. These approaches divide and classify environmental and other themes which affect the child on a day-by-day basis into a number of categories which can be worked on separately and where minor improvements in a selection of areas can result in significant improvement overall.

Certain of these themes can be attributed to categories over which young people have little control themselves and those which they can influence through their own actions, which, in the later stages of the chapter introduced the sociology of structures and agency. Where this relates to school pupils, an interpretation of the structural argument would dictate that either individually, or collectively, they accept the education process because there is no real option other than to do so; alternatively, in expressing agency as a free-will decision, pupils attend school as, on a balance of probabilities which they determine themselves, it is in their own interests.

## **Chapter 5: ISSUES OF POLICY MAKING: THE NARRATION OF A CRISIS and POLICY RESPONSES**

Within the context of the overarching research question and the supplementary questions which follow from it, the significance of how policy is formulated is an extremely pertinent consideration. Any analysis of a system which is argued to be 'failing' a number of pupils has to be grounded in an understanding of why the policies are implemented and what underpinned the initial rationale.

This chapter therefore examines concepts of policy-making and policy implementation, beginning with section 5.1 which studies two models of the 'Policy Making Process'. The first, represented as 'linear' offers a structured, rational explanation for the development of policy. The second is located more in a compulsion to reform. Using these models, in part, it is possible to identify some of the motivation to propose changes in education policy. The effects that current policies and policy initiatives are having on the education system will be examined in some detail at the empirical stage of this research study. Consequently, it is relevant to scrutinise what might be the justification for state intervention and policy implementation, having regard for what academics such as Le Grand (1998) and Deacon (2004) suggest as policy motives.

Policy motives are relevant to this thesis particularly in discussing notions of disadvantage, such as life chances and social mobility which are discussed in other chapters as having a relationship with educational outcomes. When these were analysed in a 2011 study by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), conclusions were reached that revealed government policy was holding

back, rather than promoting, social mobility for young people. In a number of policy areas, the study concluded that policy "... appears to be going backwards – particularly education ...” (Portes, 2011:2). Based largely on government statistics of poverty and inequality, Portes argued that whilst many people move out of poverty each year "... it is clear that the increase in inequality was roughly similar if incomes were measured over longer periods ...” (p3). Portes appeared to argue that income inequality, social mobility, and the socio-economic gradient of education – a relatively rudimentary measure of family background and educational achievement - are strongly correlated. This proposition has been previously acknowledged by amongst others, research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which in a 2007 report stated "...Children from disadvantaged backgrounds do worse than those from advantaged backgrounds by a greater amount than elsewhere ...” (Hirsch, 2007) and for the Institute of Fiscal Studies which identified that in England, there is a stronger association between disadvantage and educational outcomes than in other parts of the developed world (Jerrim, 2012). These arguments *associate* social mobility and educational (under)achievement rather than equating them and it is apparent from other evidence that this association, which will be examined in more detail at a later point in this thesis, is not tenuous. For example, data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) through its PISA programme is also supportive of these views. PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, is a triennial international survey which examines core competencies in reading, maths and science of 15-year-old pupils across 65 countries. The age cohort represented in PISA has particular relevance in this study as it is representative of pupils at KS4, the point at which GCSE examinations are taken in England.

Results from the latest survey in 2015 are not due for publication until late 2016. However, from the PISA survey in 2012, results for the United Kingdom showed that "... socio-economically disadvantaged students in the United Kingdom are less likely to succeed at school than their more advantaged peers ..." (OECD, 2012). In so doing this analysis offers strong cadence to the supposition of Portes and his recognition that countries with higher income inequality have lower social mobility. Portes concludes by arguing that income inequalities are likely to rise and that policies intended to increase social mobility are unlikely to have a positive effect. It is within this framework that the policy-making process is examined in the remainder of this chapter, using as reference points the typologies of the 'linear' model promoted by Grindle and Thomas (1991) and a later 'crisis narrative' model advanced by Hay (2004). In recognising that the linear model does not wholly locate within a postmodern analysis, it is used here simply for reasons of contrast.

Later sections in the chapter (5.2 – 5.4) use examples from recent General Election Manifestos to argue that although these models of policy making are relevant as indicators of rationale, the primary reasons for policy implementation lie in values and ideology which are deeply ingrained in the psyche of political parties. I accept that there is a wide acceptance within the academic literature that this is the case and do not challenge that body of work; rather, I use it to augment the primary research theme of educational disadvantage as already articulated in chapter 1. Section 5.4 uses more recent analysis of literature to examine the policies which impacted on the education system subsequent to the election of a Coalition Government in 2010. The chapter concludes with, in section 5.5, a 'problem representation' using an analytical model proposed by Bacchi (2012).

## **5.1: The Policy-Making Process.**

The timeframe for this study 1997-2015 covers the Administrations of the Labour Governments under Blair and Brown and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition which immediately followed. Insofar as education policy is concerned in that period, there is considerable resonance with the Hay model particularly since 2010, where the motivation for policy change can be argued as a response to a ‘crisis narrative’ rather than on an internal reform agenda, which would more probably follow Grindle and Thomas (Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Hay, 1996, 2004). From amongst an almost overwhelming choice of models of policy-making, the two chosen were done so on the basis of a judgement that they best reflected the contrast in how the current state of education policy is made between the ‘modern’ approach (Grindle and Thomas) which is rational and evolutionary and a postmodern analysis (Hay) which, whilst still having traits of an evolutionary approach, is far more reactive and one within which almost catastrophic ‘crisis’ events are articulated or ‘narrated’ according to perceptions of policy failures. In this way the narrative is not the ‘story’ of failures in the education system rather, the way in which the story is told.

In particular, the concept of a crisis narrative as articulated by Hay had resonance with what was being ‘played out’ in the education sector where teachers were resisting proposed changes and is in keeping with the conflict perspective from which this thesis is argued. In accordance with later work of Hay, the term ‘crisis’ is understood to be a temporal decision to make an intervention and narrative as a ‘discursive reconstitution’ of an object (in this case the education system) “... in need of decisive intervention and as the object of strategic restructuring ...” (Hay,

1999: 331). Much of course is dependent upon who controls the ‘discursive reconstitution’ and, as will be seen later in this thesis the philosophy of elite power plays a significant part in where such a decision locates. A diagram depicting Hay’s “Crisis Narration” model of policy making is reproduced on the following page.

The influence that political philosophy and prevailing economic and social conditions exert on the policy-making process cannot be underestimated; particularly relevant for the timeline that covers period of analysis for this study are:

- Shifts in political imperatives following changes in Administration. The link between a change in government and subsequent policy reform is particularly transparent following the 2010 General Election and the shift from ‘New Labour’ to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition and could be argued as a ‘paradigm shift’.
- A prevailing discourse which attempts to describe a policy failure in line with section 3a on the Hay model, an ‘Elite’ perception of policy failures. Elite, in this context, is argued as largely from within government. Following the principle raised earlier in this section, the ‘story’ of educational failures have frequently been ‘narrated’ as education professionals being somewhat dissident and uncooperative. These have been used by government representatives who articulate institutional (schools) and individual (teachers) failure as a rationale for the implementation for far-reaching change. This change has little support from within the profession (Brown, 2013; Steers, 2014). Despite protest from within the profession, the elite definition prevails for reasons of power relationships which government firmly dominate; again a conflict perspective can be witnessed. Evidence of a future discourse of failure was outlined by the Shadow Secretary for Education:

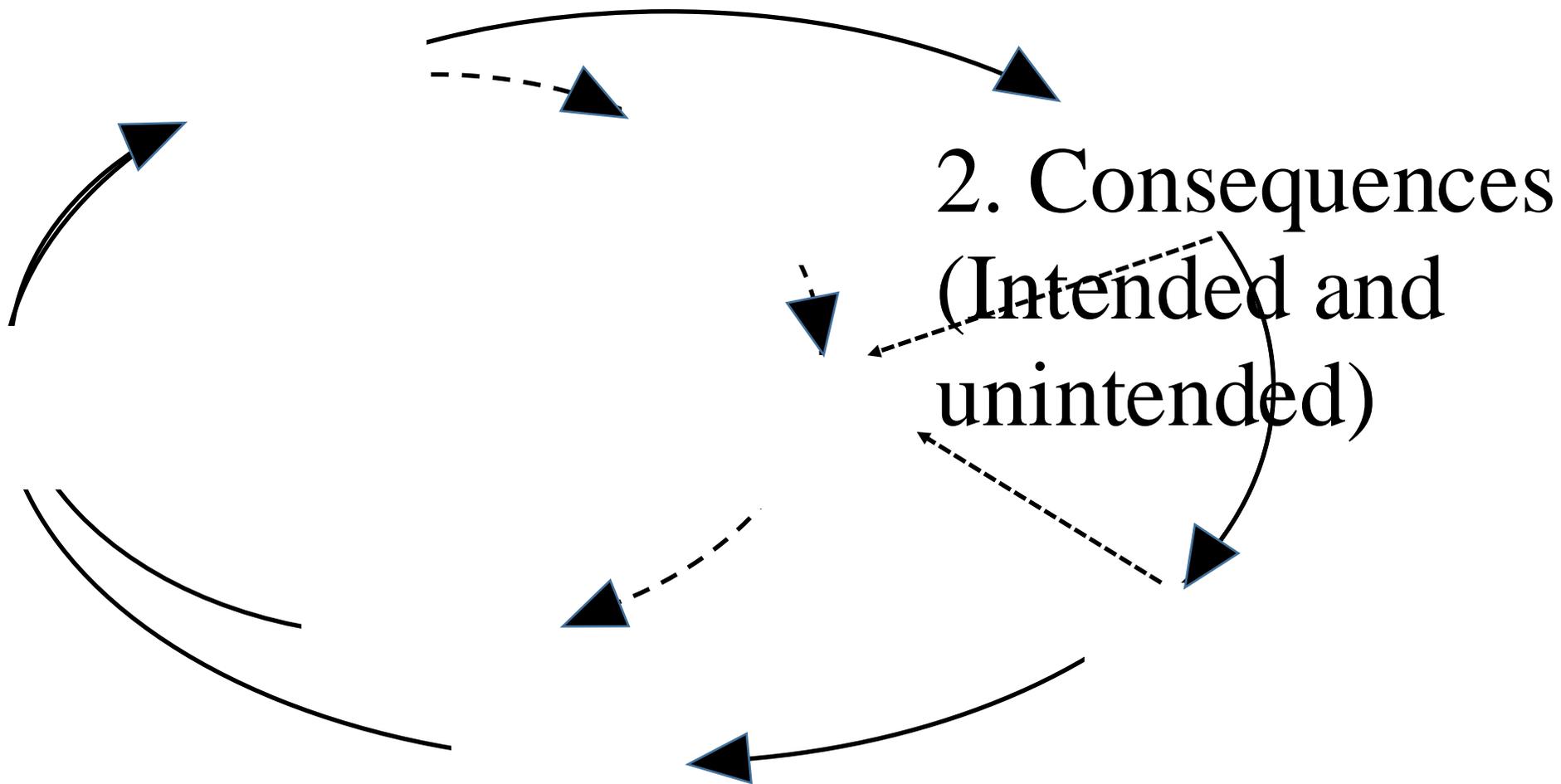


Figure 5.1: Colin Hay 'crisis narration' policy model. (Hay, 2004).

...our curriculum and examination system is not oriented as it should be – towards asserting the importance of liberal learning and rigorous educational achievement. (Gove 2009: 5).

...in making schools institutions which seek to cure every social ill and inculcate every possible worthwhile virtue – we are losing sight of the core purpose, and unique value, of education. (Gove 2009: 6).

Based on Hay's model of crisis narration these statements locate within a paradigm of external perceptions of policy failures (item 3b on his model), I argue that these were articulated so that if elected, there would be an existing cadence within a new government for proposed reforms. Following Hay's model in making this argument I locate the Conservative Party, in opposition to the government at that time, as 'external' to the 'elite', as there were no guarantees they would be successful at the Election and have the opportunity to implement these proposals as firm policy.

Much of what the incoming Secretary of State proposed for the future of education was not wholly dissimilar to the narratives of the previous Labour government, particularly surrounding increasing standards (Hill, 2006). It should therefore be acknowledged that it was successive Labour Administrations between 1997-2010 that began the process of change and additionally, was often criticised for the level of assessment and target generation it imposed on schools (Heath, et al: 2013; Lupton and Obolenskaya, 2013). Recognising that some of the strategies were located in earlier Acts of Parliament (for example the Education Reform Act 1988), it could be argued for example, that the 2001 White Paper, Schools – Achieving success (Cm. 5230), laid out many of the components for later proposals for changes in schools' structures such as:

- More freedom on budgets and less LEA control.
- More private/ state interaction.
- External support for failing schools.
- Widening the parameters of secondary education; more ‘specialist’ schools and ‘city academies’ sponsored through the private sector.
- Focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards.
- Reduction in attainment gaps based on ethnicity, geography and gender and increasing opportunities for BME and other minority groups.

(Cm.5230, 2001)

Many of the proposals in the white paper were subsequently enacted by the Education Act, 2002. A persuasive argument could be constructed therefore which supported the view that Coalition government reforms were simply a different iteration of what had gone before rather than anything particularly radical. This view is upheld by Stevenson (2011) who argues, as implied above, that policies enacted by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition bore the hallmarks of strategies which were first proposed in the Education Reform Act 1988. Keates (2012) however argued that there were distinct differences, especially in the Coalition’s flagship Academies Act 2010. Whilst the Academies programme was instigated by Labour, Keates believed that the programme promoted under the 2010 Act were markedly dissimilar to the principles which underpinned Labour policy.

*Prima facie*, it is problematic to align recent policy changes simply with an ideological shift or as a result of a discourse of failure generated by a Political Elite. Whether it is possible to state with any degree of certainty that policies are the result of adopting any single model of change is questionable. Grindle and Thomas (1991) for example, suggest attempts to resolve issues through a logical and rational period of reflection, results in a ‘Linear Model’ of policy-making. The language of rationality which underpins the linear model of policy making is a fundamental

principle in the (separate) work of Lasswell and Simon who explained policy as a series of rational, evolutionary stages and an ‘end-means’ model where the objectives of policy determine the methods by which those objectives are met (Lasswell, 1936, 1951; Simon, 1997).

This as a process where those who make decisions behave in a logical manner and where it is apparent that considerable energy has been invested in each policy, over a distinct period of time. The rationale for changes does not develop overnight, rather is predominantly driven by enduring political ideologies. Nevertheless, there is also sufficient evidence to support an assertion that there is similarity with the incremental model of policy making associated with the work of Lindblom which rejects policy-makers as rational actors arguing instead that in practice they simply cope or ‘muddle through’ (Lindblom, 1959). Evidence of this is provided by successive Acts of Parliament which seek to build on previous legislation. Various instruments of legislation for education since the ‘New’ Labour government were elected to power are good examples; *Education (Schools) Act 1997*, *Education Act 2002*, *Education Act 2005*, *Education and Inspections Act 2006*, *Education and Skills Act 2008*, all evidenced incremental change.

Carter (2012) argues that policy evolving in this way exhibits the traits of a ‘palimpsest’, “... [H]istorically, palimpsests were parchment rolls re-used and reinscribed. A palimpsest such as the Archimedes scroll changes but paradoxically might be said to be the same ...” and in justifying the analogy goes on to describe that “... the analogy takes account of both change and stasis, sensitising us to the asynchronous time zones of generational change, performance-driven policy ‘quick wins’ and deeper, long-running, historically sedimented social practices ...” (Carter, 2012: 424). The argument of Carter tends to support analysts of the Coalition

Government who emphasise that the approach to education policy was largely located in an ideology set out in the 1988 Education Reform Act.

Stevenson (2011) in a journal article entitled ‘Thatcherism’s Long Shadow’, is a noteworthy exemplar when he asserts that it [Coalition education policy] represents a realisation of the ‘1988 project’, at the heart of which was to introduce a ‘state sponsored free market’. Similarly, Higham (2014), of the Institute of Education at University College London, locates the free schools and academy structures created by existing policy firmly in pathways towards privatisation and self-governance. In identifying that these structures tend to be administered by interest groups, sponsoring organisations and existing educational institutions, he later argues that the capability of self-governance threatens the traditional concept of state education. Whereas schools which remain in the state sector are somewhat constrained with no flexibility to set any real agenda, the freedoms enjoyed by free schools and academies to set their own schema can shape education towards their own interests. These themes also appear in research conducted for the examinations board and educational charity AQA where Acquah (2013: 11) identified that:

Reflecting on the policy history, the existing regime in England is heavily focused on hierarchical and market accountability and the reforms of the current Coalition Government have served to strengthen the dominance of these forms of accountability, by increasing school ‘floor’ targets and making it easier for schools to enter and exit the ‘market’.

Before concluding that “... There seems to be broad consensus that some form of public accountability is desirable ...” (p13).

Nevertheless, following the 2010 Election of a Coalition government an almost seismic shift occurred, more in line with Hay’s argument for ‘paradigm shifts’ within

policy discourse, which determine policy changes (Hay, 2004). The determination of the Conservative-led Coalition Government to press on with reforms whilst contemporaneously narrating a form of ‘crisis’ of failure in the education system led to criticisms that policy is being generated on the grounds of political ideology rather than for the good of the education system. Those changes were not widely accepted by the profession and strongly resisted in certain quarters.

It is perhaps no surprise therefore that throughout the literature review stage of this research study, the prevailing discourse on education policy in England was found to be overtly focussed on concepts of attainment and raising standards at Key Stage 4. In other chapters, a number of features have been identified which indicate that this approach may be flawed and, certainly in the case of the individual, a different articulation of “success” may be needed to determine performance.

Discussions on child development in chapter 4, for example, highlight that young people develop in vastly different ways. Using Rawls definition of equality of opportunity as recorded in 4.1a above, this signposts towards a number of pupils entering secondary school at age 11 who do so from a position of considerable disadvantage (Rawls, 2001). Chapter 4 addressed a number of issues, which crystallised this notion of an unequal starting point, deliberately focussing on an examination of the two terms attainment and achievement, which are often used interchangeably (see, for example, Laws, 2013) and how alternative measures of successful transitions could be structured.

## 5.2: The Policy Climate.

This thesis contains an explicit acceptance that the education system in England readily celebrates achievement. Year-on-year evidence for this is provided by the plethora of banners attached to school gates and other publicity materials on websites and in school prospectuses which announce GCSE pass rates and the latest Ofsted performance ratings. (Perhaps understandably for the latter, this type of announcement generally only occurs with schools classed as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’). Key Stage 4 is the point, nominally at age 16 or school year 11, where pupils traditionally undergo testing via GCSE examinations or Vocational Assessment through other mechanisms such as BTEC. This measure has a duality as both school performance and how well individual pupils have performed during their time at secondary school can be articulated.

It is recognised in certain areas of academia that General Election manifestos are useful documents to examine to help understand a number of political party aims which can often lead to later government policy (c.f. Janda et al, 1995; Pearce, 2004; Bara, 2005). Pearce, (2004: 250, emphasis in original) for example, argues that “... No other *single* document produced by a political party has the power to generate such an extensive discursive chain ...” before further asserting that “... The amount of space allocated to a social domain gives a broad indication of its prominence amongst the current preoccupations of a political party ...” (p. 251). In supporting this assertion, Pearce states that in 1974 the Labour party allocated 1% of its manifesto to education issues but almost 10% in both 1997 and 2001 (Pearce, 2004).

Many examples exist of academic research which has either informed or directly influenced party manifestos. As this relates to secondary education, the reports of

Dearing, 1996; Crick, 1998; Moser, 1999; Tomlinson, 2004; Steer, 2005 and 2009 are influential and provide evidence of promises made in party manifestos from which later policy initiatives can be understood. When in government, these research documents are frequently translated into Green Papers as consultation documents or White Papers as policy proposals. Particularly the Education Acts of 1993, which introduced the concept of establishing new schools by local authorities or 'promoters'; 1996 which consolidated previous Education Acts into one document; 1997 provided for 'baseline' assessment schemes; and the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 which permitted selection of pupils by aptitude, seem influential as transitions from White Papers to Acts of Parliament.

This section uses summaries from General Election manifesto documents of the three main political parties from the UK elections of 1997 to 2010 and subsequent analysis of education policy from institutions such as the London School of Economics and the University of Oxford. An argument emerges that current education policy, is to a significant degree, grounded in principles emanating from the mid to late 1990s and concomitant with the principles of Hay, firmly rooted in internal perceptions of policy failures. Amongst these are ideas articulated in the influential Party Conference speech by Party leader and future Prime Minister, Blair in 1996 (Blair, 1996). The Blair speech was perhaps much more profound on the topic of education than simply the 'education, education, education', mantra embraced by a large proportion of the print and broadcast media. The speech indicated, despite the connotations of the adopted mantra, that under a potential Labour government, education policy would be evolutionary, rather than revolutionary; much of what was already in place under the Conservative administration before 1997 would be retained.

Key themes emerged which can be readily identified from within the Labour party's subsequent General Election manifestos of 1997, 2001 and 2005 (The Labour Party, 1997; 2001; 2005). Promising to increase the proportion of national income spent on education Blair (1996), for example, reinforced themes of target setting to measure increases in overall standards and notions of equity in education that later led to the Academy Schools' programme "...What kind of world is it where the best education, jobs and skills are available only to the few? It is a world in which some can succeed ...". These were significant departures from existing policy perhaps as a result of a growing consensus of protest against education policy from within the profession.

Written subsequent to the 1996 speech, the Labour Party 1997 General Election manifesto organised Blair's education pledges, from his speech, into six themes or 'promises'. Those relating to nursery places and lifelong learning are broadly beyond the scope of this thesis as they do not directly affect policy towards 11 – 16 education. The remainder however, access to computer technology, provision of lifelong learning, increasing spending on education relative to decreases in unemployment and, importantly an 'attack' on low standards in schools are pertinent yardsticks by which to compare current policy trends. Later research for the British Educational Research Association, in an analysis of policy relating to that time, Hodgson and Spours (2013) argued that in the 14 – 19 purview, policy favoured 'middle attainers'. This is relevant to the main themes of this thesis, as from that conclusion it could be argued that despite the Education x3 mantra, there had been little attempt subsequently to cater for low attainers, or if there had been attempts they were neither especially well articulated nor successful. The narration of the 'story' in terms of Hay's model of policy making was being set at an internal perception of policy failing and the discursive reconstitution of the education system

articulated around a cohort of pupils who already had a better chance of success than a number of their peers.

At the same time, the Conservative Party manifesto of 1997 was continuing to highlight themes of ‘choice’, ‘diversity’ and ‘high standards’ (The Conservative Party, 1997) in a continuance of prevailing policy and resonant with the contentions of Stevenson (2011) and Carter (2012) as identified above, who argue that policy frequently represents realisations of what has gone before. The Conservative Party introduced a series of ‘pledges’ in their 1997 manifesto, amongst these pledges were a number of pertinent ideas which remain relevant in the current policy climate, namely:

- \* The setting of national targets for school performance.
- \* Individual school improvement plans.
- \* Increase information available to parents.
- \* Ensure action is taken to bring up to standard underperforming schools.
- \* Rigorous teacher assessment.

Perhaps more importantly, in terms of what can be identified in the education policy of the Coalition Government 2010-2015 towards free schools, are commitments to extend autonomy to schools on budgets, recruitment of staff and admissions policy, ownership of school assets and setting up more specialist schools. Here again, these themes resonate with ideas identified in the previous section, particularly in the studies conducted by Acquah (2013) and Higham (2014) where they emphasise the increased use of data to hold schools to account and resonate with concepts of elite (re)definition of a policy problem.

As the government at the time of the 2001 General Election, the Labour Party manifesto was very much concerned with building on a number of achievements claimed by Labour since being elected to power in 1997, again highlighting themes

of continuance rather than substantial change. This was much more in keeping with a 'rational', slowly evolving style of policy making rather than crisis narration.

Examples cited included the introduction of IT systems into a number of schools and a significant increase in investment in schools, both of which were manifesto pledges in 1997 (The Labour Party, 2001). Whilst stating that education remained their primary priority, matters of education formed a relatively small but still extremely significant part of the overall manifesto. Even so, Labour argued that "... Transforming secondary education is the critical challenge of the next decade ..."

(The Labour Party, 2001: 18). Improving standards through a revised curriculum, giving Head Teachers the resources to effectively manage their schools and authority over budgets and an increased focus on specialist schools, faith-based schools and City Academies were quoted as some of the key drivers for the remodelling of secondary education.

At the same time, the Conservative Party continued to narrate a crisis and had an extremely focussed manifesto on education creating the nomenclature and providing the rational foundations that distinguish current free schools from those which remain in LEA control.

"...Conservatives will introduce "Free Schools". We will free every school in the country from bureaucratic control and allow them to shape their own character ..."

(The Conservative Party, 2001).

In so doing, the Conservatives were beginning to advance a rationale for the both the marketisation of state education, with a concomitant reduction in local authority influence and a narrative of inherent failures in the existing system which required a more selective, criteria-based, approach to admissions. Responsibility for the

management of these free schools would rest solely with Head Teachers and Governors. Together, they would be able to set pay and, in part, introduce a selective criterion to admissions policy "...they will be able to use, as a criterion for admission, the willingness of a pupil or parent to subscribe to a home-school agreement which sets out the responsibilities of students and their school to each other ..." (ibid). In addition, this manifesto promised that faith groups, charities, companies and groups of parents would be allowed to set up new schools. There is no apparent ambiguity that these Manifesto pledges constitute embryonic development of later policy in relation to the free school project.

At the time of the 2005 General Election a slight shift in priorities was advocated by the Conservatives. As evidenced by the subtitle which introduced manifesto pledges, "... What's wrong with a little discipline in schools ...?" the Conservative Party retained the commitment to allow schools the freedom to set their own budgets and priorities but adjusted its discourse towards an attack on behaviour and disruption in classrooms.

A Conservative Government will put the right values at the heart of our education system. We will ensure proper discipline in schools by giving heads and governors full control over admissions and expulsions. We will not allow a minority to ruin the education of the majority

(The Conservative Party, 2005: 7)

Perversely, given what has followed with later Conservative education policy and a pointed focus on academic qualifications, the 2005 manifesto also contained a significant section which promised to recognise the value of vocational qualifications and the role that sport has to play in ensuring the personal wellbeing of young people.

“... We will end the snobbery that has damaged vocational education ...”

“... Education should be about more than academic learning. Under Labour, sport has been squeezed out of the curriculum and child obesity has risen alarmingly...”

“...We will give every child the right to two hours of after-school sport with our Club2School programme, at no cost to Parents ...”

(The Conservative Party, 2005: 9)

These themes will be explored in greater detail in a later chapter of this thesis. There it is argued that, contrary to prevailing discourse at the time of this study, transitions through the secondary school process can be measured by methodologies which do not wholly relate to performance in examinations.

In a considerably more extensive set of proposals than either of their main political rivals, the Labour Party, still in government in 2005, retained education as their ‘number one priority’. In renewing promises to allow equal opportunities for all pupils, a reform programme was introduced which proposed an individual learning package for each pupil, the embedding of a philosophy of high expectations and the ambition of delivering the highest standards ever. The manifesto reinforced Labour’s commitment to the Academies programme and Independent State Schools particularly in areas where significant proportions of the school population was derived from disadvantaged families “... where low aspirations and low performance are entrenched ...” (The Labour Party, 2005: 38)

In an apparent move towards certain approaches of the Conservative Party, the 2005 Labour Manifesto affirmed that whilst local authorities should retain considerable responsibility for the provision of support services such as Special Needs Education,

Parental Partnerships and consequent home-school support networks, the responsibility for budgets and day-to-day running of individual schools should fall to Governors and Head Teachers (pp. 33-39).

### **5.3: Education Policy under ‘New’ Labour 1997-2010.**

A number of leading academics have conducted ‘after the fact’ analysis of the performance of the Labour Government on education, at various stages, whilst they were in political control. For example, Glennerster (2001), Pring (2005), Whitty (2008) and Lupton and Obolenskaya (2013).

Once again resonating with notions of crisis narration, key themes emerging from the Labour Party manifesto of 2010 included a concept that failing schools could be taken over or merged with higher-performing establishments “... Our task now is to devolve more power and responsibility to strong school leaders and to spread excellence ...” (The Labour Party, 2010: 3.3) There was nothing especially new in this as a policy as both ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ Federations of schools had been in existence since these were permitted by the Education Act 2002. It was, however, a relatively new discourse and the commitment to achieve this through “...a new generation of not-for-profit chains of schools with a proven track record ...” (p 3.4) which *was* a significant departure from previous policy, as was the pledge to allow parents the opportunity to force mergers, where they were dissatisfied with a school’s performance. “... Where parents at an individual school want change, they will be able to trigger a ballot on whether to bring in a new leadership team from a proven and trusted accredited provider ...” (p3.4) The onus on local authorities to ensure these mergers were implemented was however a departure from the original

provisions of the 2002 Act which inferred that federations would be at the behest of the schools involved.

The 2010 manifesto also contained the by now familiar, commitments to improve teaching and learning standards generally and continued focus on progress measures for disadvantaged pupils, especially those with additional requirements. This would be made possible by the introduction of personal tutors, a pupil premium, one-to-one tuition small group and catch back sessions for slower learners and further reduction in disruptive behaviour by strengthening Home-School agreements (p 3.5).

Principally and importantly when considering what happened subsequently, the main policy for Conservatives in their 2010 manifesto was the offer for parents, charities, faith groups and private companies to set up and manage their own schools inside the state sector but outside of local authority control. Once again, the concept of a ‘policy palimpsest’ argued above by Carter (2012: 423) as a “... gadget for recognising the discursive and temporal nature of policy ...” and of recognising a crisis narration as promoted by Hay, emerges and synergies with the findings of Higham (2014) in relation to school governance and ‘ownership’ of schools, are evident. These so-called free schools were modelled on principles of Charter Schools in the United States and Kunskapsskolan schools in Sweden both of which claimed to enhance educational standards and improve school discipline.

Since the free schools programme was established in Sweden, over 1,000 new schools have opened. They have been founded by foundations, charities and others – and they have attracted pupils by offering better discipline and higher standards. Because any parent can take the money the Swedish government spends on their child’s education and choose the school they want, standards have risen across the board as every school does its best to satisfy parents.

(The Conservative Party, 2010: 50)

There remained an insistence (p51) that standards should be improved whilst reducing the attainment gap; the difference in performance between the ‘richest’ and ‘poorest’, predominantly understood as an alternative expression for ablest and least able students. Matters of discipline remained high on the agenda, Head Teachers would be given enhanced powers to discipline disruptive behaviour and a number of initiatives proposed “... to get experienced, high-quality people into the profession ...” (ibid.) These included the employment of former Armed Forces personnel under a ‘Troops for Teachers’ programme and ‘Teach Now’ for individuals who were looking at career changes.

The Liberal Democrat manifesto of 2010 could be considered relevant given that the party entered into a Coalition Agreement with the Conservatives following the General Election of that year. Notwithstanding the subsequent claims by the party elite, the extent to which Liberal Democrat proposals affected consequent policy is not readily apparent. Under a Manifesto pledge of ‘A Fair Chance for Every Child’, themes included reductions in class sizes, funding to target help towards struggling pupils, enhancing the power of schools individually and initiatives to improve the training of teachers. A noteworthy introduction to the manifesto however was the pledge to dispose of the National Curriculum and replacing it with a much narrower ‘Minimum Curriculum Entitlement’ in every state funded school. Whereas in 2001, local authorities had a ‘key role in providing education’, in a major policy shift, Liberal Democrats now believed that:

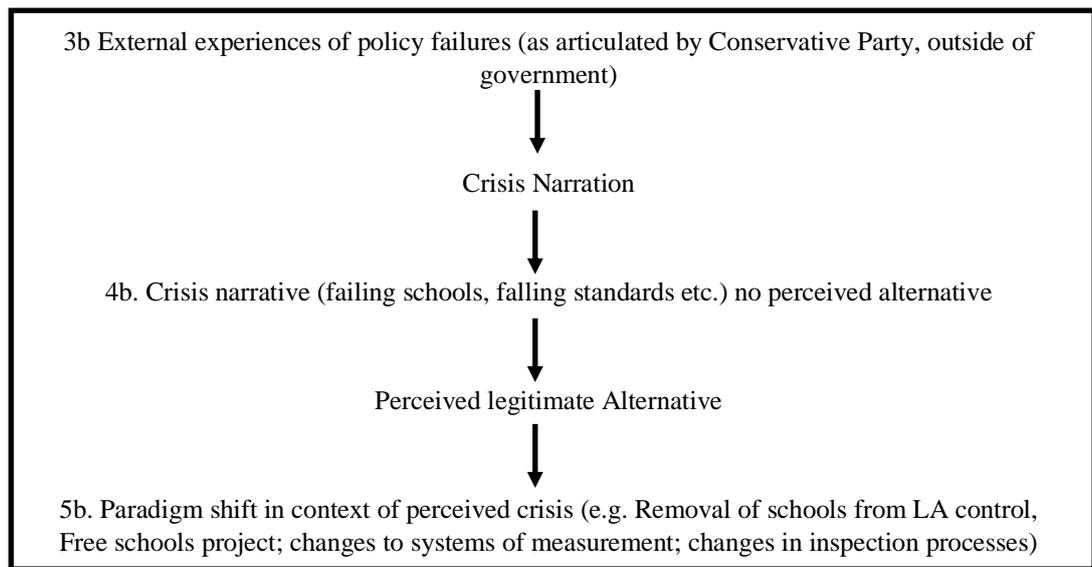
Local authorities **will not run schools**, but will have a central strategic role, including responsibility for oversight of school performance and fair admissions. They will be expected to intervene where school leadership or performance is weak.

(The Liberal Democrat Party, 2010: 37, emphasis added)

The proposal for LEA oversight and admissions were not adopted as part of the Coalition Agreement Document following the 2010 Election, which is relevant in the context of a possible move towards marketisation by their dominant Conservative partners (see section 5.2) a theme which is also playing out in the National Health Service and the Social Welfare system. In the NHS, Junior Doctors are being branded uncooperative and uncaring towards their patients by a government intent on imposing changes working conditions which, doctors argue, would have a direct, negative impact on patient safety (Royal College of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians, 2015). In welfare, benefit reforms such as the move towards Universal Credit, have been branded as controversial, with discourse targeted towards ‘benefit scroungers’ and benefit cheats’ (Local Government Information Unit, 2012). In both cases, government rhetoric has been firmly cast towards a group of individuals by the power-elite in a classic case of ‘othering’ as described by De Beauvoir (1949).

The implications of these pronouncements is significant I argue to a study which has at its focus, a concept of educational disadvantage as a result of systemic failings. Whilst in earlier manifestos the education discourse can be seen as important, it was not until the 2010 General Election that a ‘crisis narrative’ began to emerge from the Conservative Party which, I argue, was external to the elite within the policy-making model promoted by Hay discussed in section 5.1 above. When elected into government, albeit in Coalition, the Conservative Party, principally, followed the lower half of Hay’s model (extract in figure 5.2 below) as the rationale for the reforms which followed.

**Figure 5.2: Path of Crisis Narration.** (Adapted from Hay, 2004).



#### **5.4: The 2010 Coalition Government and Beyond.**

Based on an assessment of manifesto promises from 2010, Lupton and Obolenskaya argue that "...a broad consensus appears to have emerged in English politics about the importance of reducing educational inequalities between richer and poorer pupils, as well as improving educational standards overall ...” (Lupton and Obolenskaya, 2013: 5).

In complete accord with the findings of Lupton and Obolenskaya, a Coalition Document, set out the policy agenda for the new Coalition Government in 2010. With the Conservatives being the major party, this document firmly reflected the issues articulated in the crisis narrative argued above, couched in joint pledges to reduce gaps in attainment which had featured in both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Election manifestos. Certainly, the predominant discourse as it related to secondary education concerned a ‘driving up’ of educational standards and major changes to school structures aimed at ‘closing the gap’. The former is assumed to

mean an improvement in examination results at GCSE level, the latter the Conservative-led focus on free schools. A number of key policies and initiatives underpin such thinking on education. The English Baccalaureate, Pupil Premium and ‘Attainment 8’/ ‘Progress 8’ have been described in terms of how they would improve examination results at age 16. Similarly, legislation to allow free schools has created a major channel shift in the way that schools can be set up and administrated (Department for Education, 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; 2014f; 2014g).

Anderson (2014) describes changes made by Coalition Policy as ‘significant’ and “... strongly supportive of a predominantly academic curriculum until at least age 16 ...” (Anderson, 2014: 16). This focus on academic learning and the Coalition reforms, generally, have been criticised as ignoring requests from, amongst others, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) who argue that the curriculum does not cater for a broader range of [non-academic] skills which young people require to allow a successful transition from education into the workplace. Anderson (ibid, emphasis added) reports that:

In response, on 22 April 2013, Matthew Hancock, Minister for Skills, announced the introduction of a **Technical Baccalaureate** (the TechBacc) from September 2014. This is not intended as a qualification; rather it is a performance table measure that records the achievement of some students taking advanced (Level 3) vocational programmes. The programme must include a DfE approved Technical Level qualification, a core mathematics qualification and an extended project.

Recognising that there exists a significant corpus of policy history around vocational education, which is too extensive to form a part of this study, the ‘TechBacc in itself has no direct relevance to 11-16 education as it is aimed at Level 3 (‘A’ level equivalence) students. However, there is a presumption that students at level 3 have

some sort of academic competence, in the form of GCSE/ level 2 qualifications, which gains them entry into level 3 study.

TechBacc is one of a number of performance measures and policy initiatives that the Coalition Government proposed to introduce to reinforce the stated intent to increase standards. What these would do to assist the cohort of pupils who enter the education system with low KS2 scores is questionable. There are recognisable characteristics within each proposal from which arguments can be made that no advantage would be forthcoming for that cohort.

**The English Baccalaureate (EBacc):** This is described by the Department for Education (2014f) as “... a performance measure, not a qualification ...” Although it is not compulsory for schools to adopt EBacc, Ofsted will take it into account when schools are inspected. Using a benchmark of a GCSE grade C or above, EBacc measures performance across five core themes, English, mathematics, history or geography), the sciences and a language. The extensive list of qualifications that count towards EBacc is too large to replicate here but as of July 2014, was available through the Department of Education at [http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/secondary\\_13/documents.html](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/secondary_13/documents.html) under the subtitle ‘List of qualifications that count in the EBacc’. Conversely, Steers (2014: 8) argues that when the government announced the introduction of the EBacc “... An immediate issue was the lack of any clear rationale for the ‘limited’ range of academic subjects to be included ...” and identified a corpus of opinion as to the reasoning for the omission of subjects in the arts, design, citizenship and religious

education. Earlier, Exley (2011: 22) had contended that nearly half of schools had changed their approach to the curriculum to compensate for the requirements of EBacc. Once more, this can give rise to accusations of elitism. As such, it can be argued that the intent behind EBacc was not advantageous to students considered to be low attainers; the reliance on academic results as the key metric of performance would still distance low performers from their abler peers.

**The Pupil Premium:** For the 2014 – 2015 financial year, secondary schools were to receive £935 of funding for each registered pupil eligible for free school meals (FSM)<sup>1</sup> at any point in the previous 6 years. The funding increases to £1,900 for pupils who are classed as ‘looked after’<sup>2</sup>. The pupil premium is “... additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers ...” (Department for Education, 2014e). For schools under local authority control, the pupil premium is not paid directly to schools. Rather, the local authority is used as a conduit and decides when to pass payment on to the schools. Academies and free schools receive direct payment from the government via the Education Funding Agency (ibid). The effect of pupil premium is measured by school performance tables, details of how individual schools are spending the pupil premium and through Ofsted reporting procedures. At each point, an assessment is made of the performance of disadvantaged pupils compared with their classmates.

Independent research for the Department for Education conducted in 2013 by the Centre for Equity in Education, based at the Universities of Manchester and

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<sup>1</sup> Eligibility for FSM is used as the main measure of deprivation at pupil level

<sup>2</sup> Pupils recognised as being in local authority care, adopted or subject to guardianship/ residency orders

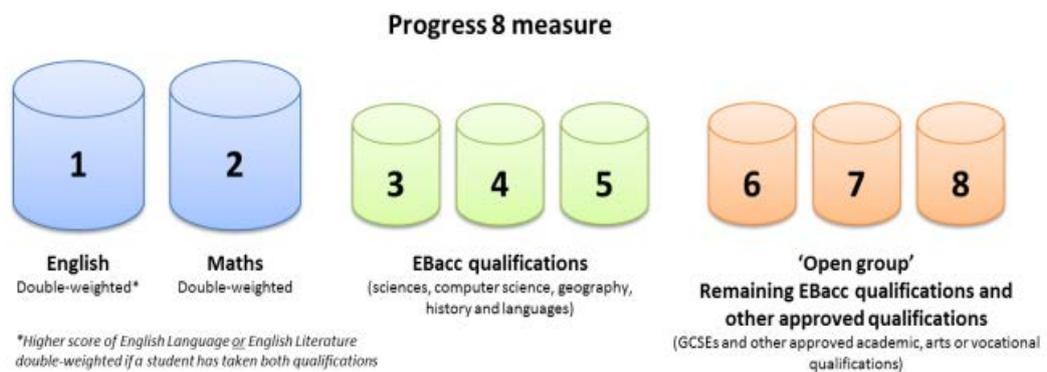
Newcastle, found that the process for identifying students who qualify for Pupil Premium varied between schools. In some cases, the ‘simple’ measures of FSM or ‘looked after children’ was not favoured and wider definitions used based on teachers’ assessments of other known factors which act as barriers to learning “... the most common resource they used when deciding how to spend the Pupil Premium was their own experience of what works ...” (Carpenter et al, 2013: 10). In addition, rather than a Pupil Premium being used solely for the benefit of the student for whom it is intended, it is ‘rolled up’ into a total amount for all students and then used for interventions and activities which are targeted at a range of disadvantaged students, not simply those who attract Pupil Premium. Not all support was focussed on raising attainment although the majority of the expenditure was centred on support to access the curriculum, including managing behavioural issues.

Whilst identifying that schools were good at monitoring support for the students they targeted, the report concluded that insufficient data existed to assess whether intervention strategies funded by Pupil Premium had been successful on raising attainment.

**Attainment 8/Progress 8:** These are complementary measures to which the government appears committed, over time, for recording school performance, individual educational outcomes and an interpretation of progress at KS4. The first stage is currently targeted for implementation in 2016, although the government have released illustrative statistics in 2014. The proposal is predicated on an ‘Attainment 8’ measure replacing the current benchmark of 5 A\*-C passes at GCSE. Attainment 8 will calculate and report the average GCSE grade per pupil based on their best

eight results; these must include the EBacc subjects, supplemented by three additional subjects, either other GCSE subjects or vocational subjects from within an approved list, known as the open group (Department for Education, 2014d). The intention is to use Attainment 8 alongside a second measure, ‘Progress 8’, incorporating both into the mechanisms for assessing performance and outcomes. The following representation of Progress 8 provided by the Department for Education is indicative of the structure of both measures:

**Figure 5.3: Progress 8 – required qualifications.**



(Department for Education, 2014d: 3)

The Department for Education (2103b: 21) describes the proposed Progress 8 measure as aiming to:

[C]apture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. Progress 8 is a type of value added (VA) measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with the same prior attainment.

As such, this is a revision of the quantification of improvement made by pupils from KS2 though to the end of KS4 currently measured by expected levels of progress. Using an intricate statistical model to predict outcomes across a set of eight GCSE subjects and comparing these with actual results, a 'value added' measure of

progress can be produced. At the first stage of this process, the statistical model is used to calculate an estimated KS4 Attainment 8 outcome for all pupils nationally using the actual performance of other pupils with the same prior attainment.

Writing for the Times Educational Supplement Stewart (2014) identifies a number of concerns with the proposed Progress 8 measure and describes what he terms the ‘dramatic changes’ that will ensue. Citing an example of a school in which 98% of students reached existing the benchmark of 5 GCSE passes at grade A-C (including English and maths), he infers that previously ‘good’ schools will no longer be reaching floor targets of achievement. Conversely this new arrangement will refocus attention away from schools traditionally seen as having low standards, towards those schools which were not previously considered as failing. In later analysis, Harbourne (2014) Chief Executive of the Edge Foundation, an independent education foundation which promotes practical, technical and vocational learning, argues for a National Baccalaureate which encompasses all achievements, not just the academic. Measures such as EBacc and Progress 8, he argues, place considerable constraints on what a student is permitted to study. The National Baccalaureate, he argues, whilst having a firm foundation in academic subjects including English and maths, would release those constraints by allowing for success in non-academic subjects to be considered in the measurement schema. Importantly, as will be argued elsewhere in this thesis, this more holistic view of success would recognise success in those practical, creative and technical subjects which are generally considered non-academic and give some tangible perspective to what a student is capable of achieving away from the wholly academic outlook used currently and proposed as the next iteration of school and student performance measurement.

**Free schools:** This is the ‘flagship’ policy on education of the government’s since 2010 and the subject of a polarised debate in both the realms of politics and education. For many, free schools are viewed as an ideological ‘pet project’ of the Conservative Party; although heavily associated with former Secretary of State (cf. Gove, 2011) the agenda was continued, albeit more inconspicuously, by his successor following his subsequent removal from post. For supporters of the project, free schools are an integral part in the ambition to improve overall standards in education, specifically by delivering on Coalition Priorities ‘*Increase the number of high quality schools and introduce fair funding*’, ‘*Reform the school curriculum and qualifications*’ and ‘*Reduce bureaucracy and improve accountability*’ (Wormald, 2014).

Aside from the free school agenda, much of current policy and as a consequence the above initiatives, is underpinned by the Wolf Report of 2011 commissioned by the former Secretary of State, who termed the report ‘brilliant’ and ‘ground-breaking’ (p4), as a review into the provision of vocational education for those age 14 – 19 (Wolf, 2011).

Amongst the recommendations of Wolf’s contained in the report, there were twenty-seven in total, were a number identifiable as influencing the prevailing policy discourse:

- That the Department for Education should clearly distinguish which vocational and academic qualifications contribute to performance indicators at KS4.
- That schools should be free to award any qualifications they choose from regulated Awarding Bodies.

- Non-GCSE qualifications should make a limited contribution to an individual's score.
- Current policies for the lowest attaining 20% of pupils at KS4 to be reviewed to allow a larger proportion to move towards level 2 (GCSE) programmes post-16.
- Programmes for pupils with learning disabilities and low attainers should focus on core academic skills, English and maths and on work experience.
- Students under age 19 without GCSE A\*-C in maths and/ or English should be compelled to follow a course leading directly towards these qualifications.
- Enhanced opportunities for Continual Professional Development (CPD) for maths teachers, particularly those engaged in teaching post-16 students.

(Wolf, 2011: pp13-15)

As of September 2014, there were 314 free schools operating in England, 172 of which are secondary schools (Department for Education, 2014h). This is some way short of the government target of 3,000 set in 2010 and less than fifty percent of the seven hundred 'expressions of interest' identified in a 2010 report on their introduction (Croft, 2010).

As outlined earlier in this chapter, certain authors regard free schools as nothing more than an extension of a wider set of policies towards the privatisation of state education. Kitchener (2013), for example, describing this as 'insidious'.

Nevertheless, it is apparent from the attitude of the government towards free schools that that it will continue the strategy of pursuing 'excellence'. The relevance of this

strategy to the arguments proposed throughout this thesis is because such a pursuit of excellence would create even wider gaps between the ablest students and those who are at risk of being 'left behind'.

There is little evidence to support this quest for excellence through a free school strategy. Very few robust studies of free schools have been conducted since the first ones opened in September 2011 and those that have tend to rely on input data rather than a study of results-based performance (Porter & Simons, 2015). Based on performance output data, the conclusions of a 2015 study for the right-leaning think tank the Policy Exchange, largely supportive of the incumbent government, unequivocally supported government assertions that standards were being raised as a result of free school policy. Benchmark GCSE results from 171 free schools were compared with a dataset compiled from outcomes of their three geographically closest 'similar' schools. ('Similar' was not explicitly defined other than the schools being within the same local authority). After compiling a dataset from which to compare respective schools' performance, the study asserted that;

data suggests, for the first time, evidence of the wider effect which is taking place at the time that new Free Schools are opening in local communities. Free Schools are helping to raise standards not just for the pupils who attend them but for other pupils across the local community – especially for those in lower performing schools

(Porter & Simons, 2015: 6)

The report recognises however that other factors, such as staff changes and financial management could be influential in results. Furthermore, as conclusions are based on relatively small sample sizes in some cases, "... correlation should not be mistaken for causation ..." (ibid).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the view of the Policy Exchange study is contested from within the education profession, with research from the National Union of Teachers explicit in stating that "... There is no evidence that free schools improve standards ...” (National Union of Teachers, 2015: 1) To support this claim, the NUT cite the 2015 report from Ofsted which concluded after inspecting 158 free schools that their inspection outcomes were ‘broadly in line’ with outcomes for all schools. The NUT paper also highlights a number of concerns expressed earlier in this chapter surrounding issues of governance, funding and accountability. Specifically, the NUT argue that the government has decided that all new schools are to be labelled as free schools, regardless of how they were conceived. Consequently, schools opened by academy chains will be so regarded and enjoy the commensurate autonomies.

Ostensibly, the debate on performance-based outputs from free schools will remain contested until sufficient data is available and robust studies undertaken. The structural underpinnings of schools’ governance and schools’ autonomies from local authorities are possibly *prima facie* easier to explain and less contested, as argued in an editorial piece in a recent Educational Journal:

In the past the Local Authority (for over a century in the form of the Local Education Authority) would have oversight of the whole system [...]. It would be their role to ensure that old schools were updated or closed, to ensure that in areas of over provision schools were downsized or shut down and, crucially, to ensure that new schools were built where they were needed. If the Local Authority role is to continue to diminish then one must ask who will take on these crucial functions.

(Editorial, Education 3-13, 2016: 113)

Analysing what these changes might mean for those pupils who are disadvantaged by the education system is problematic. A number of authors have reached

consensus that these proposals were transformative (c.f. Waters, 2015, Lightman, 2015) however the way in which implementation, was effected - described by Burn (2015) as 'frenzied' and Lightman as 'tumultuous' – demoralised the teaching profession. An inability to engage the profession in implementing the changes would have fairly clear implications for all pupils, let alone a cohort which is classed as low performing.

Furthermore, the focus on testing, the notion of which forms one of the fundamental elements of this thesis, was argued by at least one author to be of little benefit to pupils (Waters, 2015). Once again, if no benefit derives for all pupils, no positive outcomes can be evidenced for those who are disadvantaged. Changes to systems of measurement which are predicated on academic prowess, such as EBacc and Progress 8, similarly would not benefit pupils who are low performers. Extending the number of GCSE subjects as a metric from which overall progress can be drawn, whilst maintaining that floor targets remain as passes at grades A\*-C, is of little significance to a group of pupils who have little chance from the outset of reaching grade C passes in any of their taught subjects.

Neither is there any real evidence that the 'flagship' policy of free schools will offer any real opportunity for low performing pupils to close an attainment gap grounded in academic performance. As argued by Kitchener (2013), the free school project is 'insidious' and a precursor to the privatisation of state education which would lead to the socio-economic argument of a 'race to the bottom'.

The philosophy which underpins pupil premium awards seems sound. Targeted support for individual pupils is an admirable proposition. If used proactively for interventions such as 1:1 tuition and the provision of funding for alternative

activities, such as the enrichment programmes offered in concepts of Character Education (see section 4.2b, above), prospects for low performers might improve (Department for Education, 2014e). Nevertheless, this should be tempered with a recognition that insufficient evidence currently exists to support the DfE claims.

### **5.5: Representing the ‘problem’.**

Section 5.1 above identifies models of policy-making and discusses the concept of a ‘crisis narrative’ as a key driver for policy implementation. Arguing from a conflict perspective, as described in chapter 2, allows for a proposition that the ‘problem’ is that successive governments have articulated (created) a crisis narrative around attainment to suit their own ideologies and political agendas. One of the ways that this can be analysed is by using an approach credited to Bacchi who argues that policies have implicit representations of the ‘problem’. In addressing a research question that argues the current education system is failing a particular cohort of pupils, policies which are introduced to increase standards in secondary education, implying that ‘standards’ are currently too low, need to be critically examined.

Following Bacchi (2012), it is necessary “... to read policies with an eye to discerning how the ‘problem’ is represented within them and to subject this problem representation to critical scrutiny ...” (Bacchi, 2012: 21). According to Lister (2010: 152) this offers a method of “... analysing policies in which nothing is accepted as given ...” Bacchi (ibid.) suggests that this can be achieved by adopting a six-stage process to interrogate policy and policy proposals.

It is not the intention at this point to interrogate the whole suite of policies, such as the Free schools and Academies Act, changes to mechanisms of measurement

(‘Progress 8’) or Pupil Premium, which have been implemented under the guise of increasing educational standards. Rather, using the debate around educational standards as a universal term which encapsulates these changes, I illustrate below how the process can be followed by responding to the questions which Bacchi poses by interpreting aspects of what certain of the literature is reflecting.

**Table 5.1: Exemplifying Problem Representation; Bacchi’s 6-stage approach.**

Question (Bacchi, 2012: 22)	Response - applied to the ‘standards’ debate
1. What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?	A lack of ‘attainment’ at GCSE level (Gove, 2009: pp19-20)
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?	Schools are underperforming; Pupils need to be taught ‘academic’ subjects to have the necessary qualifications to compete in the labour market. (Winch, 2013)
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?	Internal reform agenda/ crisis narrative by government (Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Hay, 2004)
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?	If lack of attainment is represented in terms of school underperformance, debates about lack of work opportunities after schooling are not problematised. Equality debate ignored. (Taylor-Gooby and Martin, 2010).
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?	Principal representations of school underperformance deflect from potential inadequacies in policy and inability of the education system to recognise pupils as individuals. ‘One size does not fit all’
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?	Government creation of a ‘crisis narrative’ discourse. (Gove, <i>ibid</i> ). Power- elites control the discourse; Pupils do not have a voice. (Each of those exhibits a conflict perspective). Alternative mechanisms of recognising transitions from KS2 through to KS4 (Romney et al, 1979)

## **5.6: Summary.**

The significance of the above to both the overarching research question and the supplementary questions developed from that broader proposition should not be undervalued.

Taking for example the question ‘do all pupils entering the secondary school system have realistic chances of reaching attainment benchmarks?’, it is readily apparent that they do not.

Leaving aside an argument based on Rawls’ fair equality of opportunity, a system predicated on floor targets upon which all pupils are measured, with no concept of personalised benchmarking outside of a restrictive GCSE grading system, is substantially at odds with many of the models of child development cited above.

Each of these generally recognises that young people develop in different ways and at different rates of progress. In this regard, it can be argued with some justification that, for many pupils, GCSE passes are not an adequate measure of a successful transition from KS2 through to KS4 and to judge them all by the same floor targets is therefore systemically flawed. What might be offered as alternative representations of individual performance are discussed in the chapter that immediately follows.

Similarly, when asking whether pupils have control of their own outcomes, issues identified in the sections above on policy-making and individuals’ ability to act, reveal that within the current education system pupils have an inert relationship with what they are directed to do.

## **Chapter 6:** **POLICY AND PRAXIS:** **EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS and** **EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES**

“Success” is a subjective and of necessity a context dependent term and very significant for pupils classed as low performing at key stage 2. When measuring at an individual level and in particular within the context of performance in school, success can be extremely difficult to quantify. Competing outcomes of the secondary school process can be argued to have authority. Prevailing discourse is located in the requirements of government policy. Nevertheless, how schools report pupil success internally, the needs of business, parental expectations or at the level of the pupil itself, a child’s aspirations, there is little doubt that success can be viewed in a number of entirely separate ways.

For research with an ambition to celebrate the potential capabilities of low performing pupils, rather than basing judgments entirely on how well they can perform in examinations, an acceptance of context-dependency is critical. An accurate differentiation between what constitutes “attainment” and representations of “achievement” is undoubtedly one way of establishing context. The separation of these terms is problematic to a large degree as they are often used to mean the same thing, as evidenced by a number of speeches and publications from Ministers and the Department of Education, notably Schools’ Minister, Laws “...We still have some way to go to raise levels of *attainment* to acceptable levels in all schools. Only half of the journey is yet completed. But today I want to focus particularly on the issue of closing the *achievement* gap ...” (Laws, 2013, emphasis added).

It is widely regarded that family background, school and perceptions of self-worth are key determinants of whether a child will succeed in later life. Definitions of success and who is making those judgments therefore become very important concepts to define and understand within the framework of this research. These “critical to success” factors have been the subject of considerable investigations over time and whilst there is no real intent within this thesis either to retrace or re-examine what has gone before, some description of the overarching concepts will be necessary. Likewise, it will be necessary to explain how terms will be employed whilst conducting the research. Shaping the terms attainment and achievement, which are frequently used synonymously, will be central to the later examination of my own empirical studies. In Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definitions, whilst both refer to reaching an aim of some kind differences are evident which distinguish one from the other.

*Achievement* “...a thing done successfully with effort, skill, or courage ...”

*Attainment* “... the action or fact of achieving a goal towards which one has worked ...” (OED, 2012).

“Achieving” is, therefore, slightly different from “attaining” a predetermined target, a difference which is not entirely accepted by the principles which govern school inspections undertaken by Ofsted. Under current inspection criteria, achievement is recognised as dealing with “...academic achievement [...] When judging achievement, inspectors have regard both for pupils’ progress and for their attainment ...” (Ofsted, 2013a: 17). As I argue throughout this thesis however, the system is slanted much more towards the recognition of attainment, to the detriment of concepts of ‘progress’.

## 6.1: Interpretations of ‘Success’.

A considerable corpus of academic analysis exists on the topic of educational success. Many of these highlight factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity as predictors of achievement using models such as the National Qualification Framework (NQF) or later Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) as a benchmark. These systems, as with many other similar measurement classifications, are graduated assessments of academic prowess largely predicated on the passing of examinations or reaching specific non-examined targets. Classifications most relative to students at key stage 4 are:

### QCF Framework:

Level 0	No qualifications
Level 1	GCSEs less than five grades A*-C, includes grades D-G, City and Guilds, BTEC and RSA first certificate.
Level 2	GCSE five or more grades A*-C, City and Guilds, BTEC, RSA first diploma.

(Note: There was an intention to replace the QCF system with a new set of guidelines, effective from September 2015. This does not, however, change the levels of classification). (Perry and Francis, 2010; Lenton, 2013)

As argued throughout this research study, the concept of success is markedly different from attaining or achieving qualifications. Romney et al (1979), for example identified fifty criteria of success by interviewing over 500 people and asking for respondents’ views on how they perceived “success” and “failure”. None of the fifty criteria were overtly connected to academic prowess, the majority relating to attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. Examples included “... He’s ambitious

...”; “... He is dynamic ...”; “... He has the ability to figure out problems ...”; “... He learns quickly ...”.

Similarly, although “... He has a lack of education ...” was one of the statements which characterised “failure”, this concept was not overtly perceived as an individual having no academic qualifications. Rather, characteristics such as “... He accepts no responsibility ...”; “... He lacks organisation ...” and “... He’s lacking in self-discipline ...” were used to identify a lack of individuals’ success (Romney et al, 1979: pp309-310)

This difference between success and academic prowess, as measured by the interchangeable terms attainment and achievement, is not entirely accepted by successive governments. The passing of examinations at benchmark grades is much more akin to theories of Goal Attainment (GAT), such as that proposed by King, than it is to the wider holistic concepts of success identified by Romney et al (cf. King, 1992; Pekrun et al, 2009). GAT is equally in evidence within the principles which govern school inspections. Under current inspection criteria, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) recognise achievement as dealing with “...academic achievement ... When judging achievement, inspectors have regard both for pupils’ progress and for their attainment ...” (Ofsted, 2013a: 17).

In arguing that success and achievement are different entities, it is apparent that the Ofsted judgement of achievement is located in how well pupils are able to reach predetermined academic benchmarks. These can be overt or opaque - the highly prized passing of GCSEs at appropriate levels, or the more guarded recognition of making ‘expected progress’ between KS2 and KS4. Whichever of these is in play, a level of learning performance is measured rather than any assessment of alternative methods of measuring progress. In drawing a distinction for the purposes of this

research project it is argued that measuring learning performance is not always possible but that the student can still make progress in a number of other ways. There seems little disagreement within the literature with this proposition. Pring (2013: 12) for example, stating that education is about much more than academic accomplishment "... Why, for example, should the 'educated young person' be assessed solely on academic achievement, howsoever practically incompetent he or she might be? ..."

Nevertheless, the policy framework within which educationalists are compelled to operate continues to privilege academic prowess above all else.

Numerous studies attempt to define whether a student has done 'well' at school. As identified in earlier chapters, and in an analysis that remains appropriate, Benjamin (2003a; 2003b) identified that the prevailing educational policy of the time was predominantly set by a 'standards agenda', targeted at improving results in examinations. This is reflected within the policy agenda set both by the Labour government (1997-2010) and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010-2015), both of which located an improvement in overall standards at the heart of their educational discourse. The impact that this has on educational inequality is indeterminate although it has been stated that "... it is difficult at present to be optimistic about...the majority of the specific policies implemented [to improve social mobility] so far ..." (Portes, 2011: 5).

Although this is subject to future change, successive governments have favoured a target of a minimum of 5 A\*-C grade GCSE passes, to include English and mathematics, as an indication of a successful transition through secondary school. The measure is taken from the point of entry into secondary school at age 11 (Key Stage 2) through to the phase at which the next measure is taken, nominally at

around age 16 (Key Stage 4) when GCSE examinations are taken (Ofsted 2013a; Department for Education, 2014(a)). DfE expectations of success are very clear in stating that:

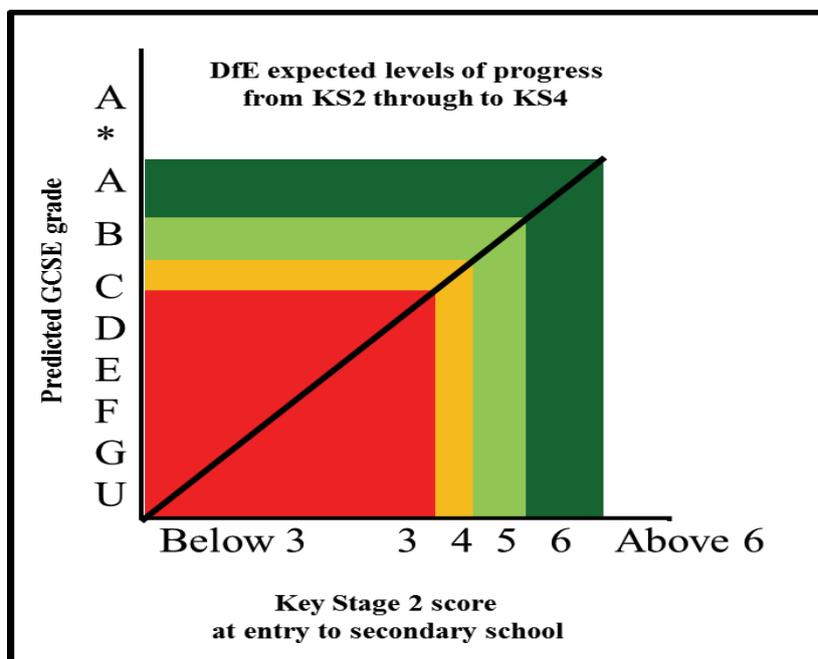
The majority of children are expected to leave KS2 (age 11), working at least at level 4. By the end of KS4, pupils who were at level 4 should progress to achieve at least a grade C, at GCSE; while pupils working at level 6 should be expected to achieve at least an A at GCSE...These are minimum expectations.

(Department for Education, 2013)

As these are minimum standards there is an unwritten acceptance that some pupils may exceed expectations. That acceptance is recognised throughout this thesis.

Nonetheless, I continue to argue that it is more hope, than expectation, that a pupil entering the secondary education system with a KS2 level of 3 or lower, will reach the government’s lower benchmark of a grade C, at GCSE. As indicated in the graph below, pupils’ trajectory is mapped out by government statistics.

**Figure 6.1: DfE expected levels of progress.**



(Department for Education, 2013)

It is also recognisable from annual statistics published by the DfE that significant improvements have been witnessed in the years 2008-2013 (inclusive) in the headline measure of 5 A\*-C passes at GCSE level – from 48.2% in 2008 to 60.6% by 2013. Equally obvious, using an underlying calculation from 2011 – 2013 inclusive, is that the percentage of pupils making ‘expected progress’ shows little variation in English although there has been a perceptible upward shift in Maths. ‘Expected progress’ figures at a national level are not readily available before 2011, the point at which a methodological change occurred and consolidated figures for this measure were published. The counterpoint to this is therefore that the level of pupils *not* making expected levels of progress remains fairly consistent (in the region of 30%).

**Table 6.1: GCSE Performance data 2008-2013 – England, state funded schools.**

						% of pupils making expected progress					
						English	Maths				
						2013	70.4	70.8			
						2012	68	68.7			
						2011	71.8	64.8			
						<i>% achieving 5+ A*-C passes (or equivalent) including English and maths</i>					
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013						
		55.2	58.2	58.8	60.6						
	50.7	55.2	58.2	58.8							
48.2	50.7	55.2	58.2								

(Department for Education, 2014(b))

### **6.1a 'Education for all'.**

Pring (2013) argues very strongly that the idea of secondary education as suitable for all children is a misnomer. A constant theme is that an elitism exists within the education system and he argues that society recognises that only a few can be truly educated. A view of education which follows principles set out initially in Plato's *'Republic'* is outlined, where a guardian class holds sway and the remainder 'know their place'. This view resonates with many authors' and commentators' conclusions on the position of recent education policy. Notably, Milburn (2014) identified in a government-sponsored report on social mobility, that throughout a range of professions, Politics, the Media, Public Sector, Business, Creative Industries and Sport, the top jobs are most likely to be held by people with most qualifications. Disproportionately, these emanate from a geographical location of South East England in a background of independent schooling and attendance at a top university, such as Oxford or Cambridge.

60% of those pupils who are largely at the focus of this thesis are identified as not achieving the benchmark 5 A\*-C passes at GCSE level (Milburn, 2014). Their prospects in later life given this recognised inequity is therefore a valid object of enquiry and one of the central tenets which can be investigated at the empirical stage of this study using, primarily, the overarching research question 'why does the UK education system fail a number of pupils who enter the secondary education process with low key stage 2 scores?'

A concept of elitism is, however, consistent with a view of 'Education for All' as argued by Ponte and Smit (2013: 467) who conclude that:

[Education for All] is not about a policy for specific target groups, such as students with special needs, but about the proactive creation of tailor-made education, where differences between children are the norm and not the exception. The key question for us is what mechanisms in the daily thinking and acting of teacher educators, teachers and pupils lead to Education for All as socially just education.

Announcements by the Secretary of State in June 2012 concerning the reintroduction of 'O' level examinations, clearly indicated that along with this there would be a return to streaming by ability (Shipman, 2012). The revised system was predicated on a return to end of course exams, rather than modular assessments. This aligned with a number of announcements and initiatives on matters of perceptions of under-performance in education by the government at that time. It has been argued that most notable of these was the introduction of Free Schools and the extension of the Academy programme through the Academies Act, 2011, as an extension of the Academies programme implemented by the previous Labour administration which overtly had a commitment to 'raising standards' (Ball et al (2012). Free Schools and Academies are centrally funded; rather than being maintained and accountable through the Local Education Authority (LEA), they receive grant-funding direct from the government. Whilst remaining accountable to the Department for Education, Free Schools and Academies (together with Private Schools) are permitted to deviate from the new National Curriculum. The DfE clearly states that "...Other types of school like academies and private schools don't have to follow the national curriculum. Academies must teach a broad and balanced curriculum including English, maths and science. They must also teach religious education ..."

(Department for Education, 2014(a)). This is perfectly acceptable according to the argument presented by Ponte and Smit who state that "... the scope for autonomous

action and the scope for rational decision-making [...] mirror hope for change ...” (Ponte and Smit 2013: 468).

Arguments are nevertheless developing which maintain that this separation is unfair to those maintained schools which remain in full LEA control and simply represents streaming by another means. At the crux of the argument is that the ablest pupils will tend to gravitate towards Free Schools and Academies, leaving those in LEA control to provide only for the residuum. If existing schools convert to Academy status or new Free Schools are provided, rather than witnessing improvement in standards in both strands, this would only serve to increase educational inequalities (Carswell, 2013; Dorling, 2013; Gorard, 2014). Furthermore, a significant number of commentators argue that the rationale of raising standards embedded in the Academy-Free School ‘project’ is flawed.

(Dorling, 2013) and McInerney (2013) for example are amongst a number of critics who argue that finance and ideology lie at the heart of the programmes, not any great desire to improve standards. Amongst the conclusions of a study conducted in 2014 was a claim that an “... unequal distribution of capital and resources ...” exists in localities of disadvantage when compared to more affluent areas (Higham, 2014: 137). As identified by Milburn (2014) and mentioned earlier in this chapter, these disadvantaged areas are where a disproportionate number of pupils fail to reach recognised attainment benchmarks. Gorard is amongst a cohort of education-oriented academics who also maintain that Academies do no better than the schools they have replaced in improving educational outcomes which tends to undermine the foundation for their implementation (Gorard, 2005; 2009; 2014). Regardless, the stated position of government, as articulated in a study for the Policy Exchange, concluded that Free Schools are raising standards, particularly in disadvantaged

areas (Porter and Simons, 2015). Relying on government Select Committee evidence to reinforce its findings the report stated:

What can be said is that, however measured, the overall state of schools has improved during the course of the academisation programme. The competitive effect upon the maintained sector of the Academy model may have incentivised local authorities to develop speedier and more effective intervention in their underperforming schools

(HC 258, 2015)

Whilst the Policy Exchange describes itself as independent, it is frequently recognised as being sympathetic to the political right-wing and as such, it is not particularly surprising that it is supportive of the government line. A better assessment of the impact of Free Schools and Academies on standards is a study by the Institute of Education at London University (Connolly et al, 2014). This study, conducted for the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, recognised that a straightforward assessment of the success of differing school structures was complex. However, amongst the conclusions of the study, it was noted that there was little evidence to suggest that Academies and Free Schools had a positive impact on pupil performance.

\*There is mixed evidence on Academies. It is important to note that the available evaluations of Academy schools relate to those schools which were struggling before being converted into Academies. Many of the newest Academies were already successful before conversion, and there is no evidence to suggest that these schools are more successful than schools with comparable intakes.

\*There is not currently any clear evidence available on the effectiveness of free schools.

(Connolly et al, 2014: 34)

To reiterate, Free Schools, Academies and ‘other’ school structures (notably Private Schools) have different governance arrangements and so need to be understood as

being distinct from 'State' schools. Equally a second separation needs to be made between 'formal' education organisations, schools and colleges, from the more 'informal' such as out-of-school clubs, societies and charities. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, this second separation is central to one of the underlying hypotheses contained in this thesis; that informal education can have an effect on raising chances of success for the group of pupils for whom little opportunity would otherwise exist.

## **6.2 The concept of 'informal' education.**

Informal, or 'Community' education organisations should not be confused with 'Community Schools' as the two are discrete entities. Where Community Schools tend to be partnership arrangements between formal school structures and local interest groups, informal education generally has no formal association with school pedagogical structures. Described at a later stage of this chapter, the importance of engaging with their community is seen as an integral part of a young person's successful development trajectory. The relevance to the research questions at the heart of this thesis are tangible. As these processes can offer a substantive assessment of performance which is not wholly related to academic ability, they may represent a viable alternative to floor targets in assessing a successful transition from key stage 2 through to key stage 4.

Studies conducted by Rotherham et al (2012) and Ramey and Rose-Krasnor (2012) are examples of a large corpus of research which identifies the benefits of young people engaging with their community and community activities. This is of particular relevance in communities which are considered to be 'deprived' where it could be

argued, the building of social capital through community engagement may better help to offset some of the socio-economic inequalities which are proven to lead to poor educational outcomes (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007; Portes, 2011; OECD, 2102). Settings such as these have been described as "... community social capital ..." (Rothon et al, 2012). This longitudinal study set out to "... examine the associations between family social support, community "social capital" and mental health and educational outcomes ..." (p697) using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). Pertinent to this thesis, the study relied on the government benchmark of 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C as its measure of academic success. Through a detailed statistical analysis using a variety of measures of social support and social capital, the study concludes that it is the family environment that mostly affects a young person's mental health and educational outcomes. These findings are supportive of results from DfE reports and numerous academic studies which argue similar themes (cf. Walker and Donaldson, 2011: Gorard et al, 2012; Jones et al, 2013). There is however, particularly in deprived areas, some evidence to suggest that social capital acquired through community activities (Rothon et al mostly use girl guide and scouting activities as exemplars but many others exist) can also be of benefit to some degree "... promoting family social support and building community social capital in more deprived communities may be one way in which both mental health and educational outcomes could be improved ..." (p708).

Schucan Bird et al (2013) using a systematic literature review approach to identify and examine existing material, determine that the use of organised sporting activities can help improve educational outcomes and identify that increased participation in sport has been a fundamental ambition of successive governments since 1997.

Contemporaneously, a tranche of academic research has evolved which seeks to

examine the social and economic impact of engagement in sporting activities.

Although when sport is compared to other criteria such as physical and mental health, "...The literature on learning and educational outcomes has been slower to emerge ..." (p265) studies suggest that "... Findings from systematic reviews have been generally positive ..." (ibid).

Two studies, particularly, were highlighted:

**Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2010)** reported "substantial evidence" that physical activity can contribute to the improvement of young people's academic achievement.

Similarly, **Singh et al. (2012)** found that participation in physical activity is positively related to academic performance in children.

(Schucan Bird et al, 2013: 265, emphasis added)

The relevance of this tranche of existing research to this thesis does not locate necessarily in the fact that physical activity can have a positive effect on academic performance. Rather, that it is sometimes easier to quantify an improvement in physical performance as a measure of success for those considered low performers in the academic sense.

### **6.2a: Structures of informal education.**

Le Roy and Woodcock (2010; 1) define informal education as "... that learning which goes on outside of a formal learning environment such as a school, college or a university ..." They also determine that many authors draw distinctions between non-formal learning, which takes place outside of the formal system and informal learning which is absorbed through individuals' background and environment. An illustration of non-formal learning used by Le Roy and Woodcock (pp, 1-2) is that of

the Scout Association. They identify the organisation as a non-formal pathway to education which awards badges, measured against a clear set of learning outcomes, as recognition of proficiency in a variety of areas such as Health, Safety and Fitness. In contrast, they identify informal learning as activities such as researching an area of personal interest. What these methods have in common however and why no differentiation of them will be used for this chapter is that in both, participation is voluntary for young people in the KS4 group whereas formal education, certainly in the English system, is mandatory

Organised activities such as those delivered by the Scout Association other clubs and organisations are widely acknowledged to enhance the childhood experience of many young people. This is particularly true of those from disadvantaged backgrounds although there is recognition that, amongst that group, access to participation may be a problem. Reflected nationally in the United Kingdom, initiatives such as those provided by the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, the Prince's Trust and the Youth Sport Trust, are 'open access' schemes which offer opportunities to young people that many could not get elsewhere (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2014; The Prince's Trust, 2014; The Youth Sport Trust, 2014).

In particular, and understandably given its *raison d'être*, the Youth Sport Trust is evangelical about the power of sport to improve educational outcomes and as a consequence, change lives "...At its core, sport can help improve educational performance across all subjects, develop personal and social skills. It also enhances self- confidence, improves learning and offers a way of realising individual dreams ..." (The Youth Sport Trust, 2013: 8)

It needs to be accepted that, at times, there is an amount of administrative and pragmatic cross-over as elements of these initiatives are connected to the school

environment. This does not then mean that non-formal or informal methods become formal methods, merely that synergies become apparent between each. This synergy is recognised by Le Roy and Woodcock “... It is possible to argue that bringing informal methods into formal (or non-formal) education environments means that it loses its informal methods, however we believe this to be unfair ...” (p3.) Teachers are very often involved in the organisation and delivery of activities some of which such as the ‘Living for Sport’ initiative outlined later in this section, take place on school premises and which are delivered by teachers outside of the normal school day. However, a significant number of non-formal and informal activities are delivered away from formal school settings by people who are not generally regarded as education professionals but who are recognised by a governing organisation as qualified to teach their specialism. This can either be by having subject matter expertise gained via long-term experience, for example the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA) or, increasingly, through a process which leads to a formal qualification such as the National Coaching Foundation (LAMDA, 2015; sports coach UK, 2015). Within those environments a transference of ‘community social capital’ as argued by Rotheron et al (2012) is largely in evidence. As a number of the criteria explored involve community engagement, the argument supported by those authors seems to underpin the fundamental principles of the ‘40 Assets’ approach examined earlier (section 4.2a) for which a transference of community social capital is central to the philosophy. Malecki (2012) proposes that five levels of Social Capital exist:

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Nation              | - National cultures                                   |
| Region              | - Regional culture, regional mentality                |
| Local level (place) | - Local relations, spirit of place                    |
| Group               | - Relations, norms, networks                          |
| Individual          | - Behaviour, preferences, opinions, values, attitudes |

(Malecki, 2012: 1026)

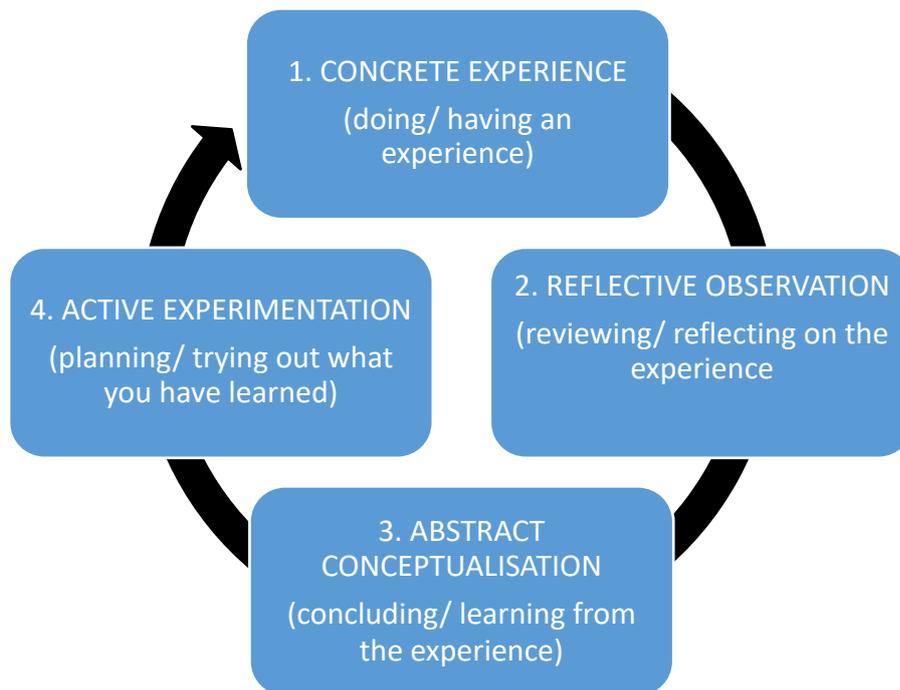
This analysis by Malecki focussed on Social Capital at the ‘region’ level but much of what he deduces is recognisable at the ‘place’ and ‘group’ levels which would be at the heart of a community for example, when he argues that “... social capital is a concept that embodies how people function productively with other people ...” (p1033) this applies equally, at a local and group level where ‘spirit of place’, ‘relations’ and ‘networks’ are more evident. Also discernible from Malecki’s analysis is the relationship between the acquisition of Social Capital and the notion of ‘experiential’ or ‘active’ learning promoted by philosophers such as Dewey and Kolb, which is heavily reliant on relationships and networks, particularly at the group level. Often described as ‘classrooms without walls’, the concept is briefly described in the section which follows.

### **6.3 ‘Classrooms without walls’.**

Consequent to, and influenced by, the works of educational philosophers such as Dewey and Piaget, the term ‘classroom without walls’ encapsulates some of the spirit of Kolb’s theory of experiential learning as articulated by his ‘experiential learning cycle’ - figure 6.2 below, (Kolb, 1984).

This can be termed ‘learning by doing’ or ‘active learning’. Priest and Miles (1990) and Adkins and Simmons (2002) (cited in Roberts (2012: 3)) relate that experiential education is multi-faceted and can embrace any number of differing concepts including those which can be described as “... “adventure education”, “outdoor education”, “challenge education” and environmental education” ...” Roberts however distinguishes functional applications of experiential education as more ‘learning’ than ‘education’ and in so doing appears to ascribe more to Kolb’s original cycle.

**Figure 6.2: Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle.**



Facets of experiential learning, he argues as distinct from the philosophy of experiential education are diverse and can include “... taking a field trip, working cooperatively in a group on a project, volunteering in the community, completing a lab experiment, or learning to ride a bike ...” (Roberts, 2012: 3). Many of these themes are explicitly evidenced in the following examples of intervention initiatives which are generally non-classroom based. Each of the examples also exhibit many of the traits contained within the various child development theories which have been articulated in chapter 4.2 and the 40 Assets approach in 4.2a.

### **6.3a: ‘Living for Sport’: The Youth Sport Trust and Sky Television.**

The subject of an initial academic assessment in 2008, in conjunction with an assessment of the HSBC/ Outward Bound scheme and supplemented by a follow-up

study in 2013, 'Living for Sport' is an intervention-based programme delivered in partnership by the Youth Sport Trust and broadcaster Sky Sports (Sandford et al, 2008; Armour et al, 2013). The scheme operates with nationally known sports people who act as ambassadors (termed by the scheme as Athlete Mentors) for school projects which, within broad guidelines, are designed by a school with specific aims and objectives. Six 'keys to success' are introduced at the outset, designed to empower young people both within and outside of the school setting.

[M]atching pupils' specific needs with programme objectives; locating project activities outside of the 'normal' school context; working closely with pupils to choose activities, set targets and review progress; establishing positive relationships between leaders, mentors and pupils; offering young people the opportunity to work with and for other young people; and making available structured pathways to enable young people to have sustained involvement in further project or complementary activities.

(Armour et al, 2013: 256)

These have been interpreted by the Youth Sport Trust to represent:

1. Mental toughness
2. Hunger to achieve
3. People skills
4. Sports and life knowledge
5. Breaking barriers
6. Planning for success

(The Youth Sport Trust, 2014)

The way in which each of these factors connect with each other to sustain positive impacts from related sports activities was a key theme of both the 2008 and 2013 studies. Each of these threads are relevant to the capacity of a young person to reach academic or vocational attainment benchmarks especially, it could be argued, those relating to self-confidence, engagement in school life and engagement in learning.

These are heavily reflected in one of the scheme's case studies, that of 'Frankie' judged to be

An under-achieving pupil with significant behavioural problems linked to low self-esteem and low self-confidence, Frankie had struggled to engage fully in school life when he started the project. During his time at school, he had more than 100 different behaviour incidents logged against him as well as a number of fixed-term exclusions and internal isolations.

(Sky Sports, 2014)

Between 2003-2007 almost 9000 pupils took part in a Sky/YST project at their school (Armour et al, 2013: 261). According to the authors a number of short-term impacts could be recognised "... In broad terms, data from years 1 – 3 from [both] projects indicate that many pupils improve from their baseline profiles after project involvement ...” (Sandford et al, 2008: 426). Analysis of school-recorded data from years 2 and 3 of the Living for Sport initiatives indicated a slight increase in attendance and a decrease in referrals due to poor behaviour in participating pupils. Commensurate with these, based on teacher perceptions, was an improvement in pupils' behaviour, attendance and self-esteem. Although it was recognised throughout the study that the impact of projects is individualised and context-specific, Armour et al (2013) reported that these improvements had been sustained over time.

Both the 2008 and 2013 studies drew on a significant cadre of academic work on the ability of sport and physical education generally, to positively affect educational outcomes. Whilst accepting that a number of entirely different factors can contribute to overall results, the authors of the 2013 study however concluded that "... the data [presented in their paper] can offer helpful insights into the ways in which six

interlinked mechanisms can lead to sustained positive impact from sport/physical activity interventions ...” (Armour et al, 2013: 275).

### **6.3b: The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme (DofE).**

As with the Youth Sport Trust, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme may offer tangible measures of ‘success’ which are a viable alternative to academic floor targets, for those young people classified as low performers at key stage 2.

DofE is used here as an exemplar of number of outdoor, experiential activities designed to provide young people with opportunities for engagement and development of self-esteem. Outdoor, or experiential, learning (OL) is the subject of a considerable corpus of academic literature. A significant proportion of the literature argues that OL has the potential to elicit sustainable, positive change in a young person’s behaviour. By engaging them in community service and physical recreation activities, OL activities become a conduit for personal development and increased self-esteem (c.f. Barrett and Greenaway, 1995; Hattie et al, 1997; Rickinson et al, 2004; Nicol et al, 2007; Ofsted, 2008; Munoz, 2009). The DofE programme requires that participants undertake a number of activities in three distinct areas: Skills, Physical Recreation, Volunteering and Expedition. The Award is measured at three levels, Bronze, Silver and Gold, which requires a fifth element - Residential. Participants measure progress by means of a self-recorded log, which is however verified by suitably qualified activity supervisors. At every level, the Award is underpinned by the virtues of personal improvement and development exemplified by growing skills, improving attitudes and engaging with the concept of teamwork. (The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, 2015). In the context of viewing a

young person holistically, it may be argued that the elements of ‘Volunteering’ and ‘Expedition’ are especially relevant as these explicitly require that participants become involved in their community and with other DofE participants in a team. Similarly, in the context of personal improvement, improving one’s own Skills and Physical fitness are key elements of the Award scheme and can be considered more widely as desirable outcomes in terms of a young person’s health and wellbeing, both of which are acknowledged as important factors in a young person’s ability to flourish.

Conducted between 2007-2009, a University of Northampton study commissioned by DofE examined the impact of the DofE Award scheme. Terms of engagement were described by the report authors as seeking to:

[...] identify, document and analyse the outcomes of participation in DofE programmes. It had a particular interest in understanding the impact of how young people mix with others with different life experiences and developing a model of distance travelled to support the DofE’s long-term evaluation and monitoring.

(Campbell et al, 2010: 3)

The report concluded that, at every level, the DofE Award enhances the outlook of young people in the way they see their future prospects, the way in which they view themselves by improving confidence and feelings of self-worth and their aptitude and attitude towards facing new challenges. These findings are entirely in keeping with a number of studies and literature reviews on outdoor learning. Hattie et al (1997) for example, in a meta-analysis of 97 previous research studies, concluded that when effectively designed, Outdoor Learning (OL) has the potential to augment personal and social aspects of learning and development. These themes endure in more recent research:

- A report by Ofsted which found that OL, when well planned and executed, had a substantive impact on raising standards and enhancing students' personal, social and emotional development (Ofsted, 2008).
- Two studies conducted for Scottish Government agencies, one which reviewed recent research and another which conducted an extensive review of available literature. Both found that OL provided a number of positive influences on health and well-being.

Amongst the statistics derived by Campbell et al were that young people believed that they witnessed improvement in themselves across a range of skills, for example in teamwork, decision-making, task completion and in appeal to prospective employers. Course leaders and managers were also questioned on these themes and largely supported what the young people were self-reporting; that Award participants benefitted in terms of improved motivation, leadership and teamwork, in organisation skills, perseverance and problem-solving and engaging and learning about others with different backgrounds to themselves (Campbell et al, 2010: 10).

The report used a number of case studies to augment its findings. One example highlighted the circumstances of a habitual young offender who engaged in a group doing mechanics who, through engagement in the programme, achieved a Bronze Award, secured employment and did not reoffend.

### **6.3c: The Prince's Trust.**

The work of The Prince's Trust, in similar vein to DofE, is being used as an exemplar of an educational process which largely takes place away from a formal classroom setting. As such, a large amount of the literature pertaining to OL is also

relevant here, however there is also a separate canon of research which is equally relevant. For example, a 2006 report for the Department for Education and Skills, which provided a definition for education which takes place outside of the classroom:

Education Outside the Classroom (EOtC) has been defined, in its broadest sense, as any structured learning experience that takes place outside a classroom environment, during the school day, after school or during the holidays

(O'Donnell et al, 2006: i).

In a large-scale study of some 1500 schools at secondary level, the report found that most had collaborated with other schools and with outside organisations to deliver activities. In this context, the example of the Prince's Trust is a relevant one to employ.

Described as a 'youth charity', The Prince's Trust is an organisation which supports young people aged 13 – 30 years who are either unemployed or struggling at school and at risk of exclusion from mainstream education. A significant proportion of the young people that The Trust supports are care leavers, those facing homelessness or living with mental health issues or who have been in trouble with the law. Support is offered in a variety of practical and financial ways, designed to bring some stability to fractured lives. In common with the DofE Award and schemes supported by the Youth Sport Trust, the development of self-esteem and enhancement of skills to help get employment are key target outcomes (The Prince's Trust, 2015).

Bentley (1998) identifies the Prince's Trust as providing a framework within which a number of educational opportunities can be provided in a structured environment and with expert support. Amongst the current initiatives used by the Prince's Trust is the 'xl clubs' scheme. Working in partnership with schools and education centres, xl

clubs specifically target young people in the 13-19 age range. They provide a personal development pathway using the themes of experiential learning with an ambition to improve personal skills, enhance prospects for employability and to acquire qualifications. Working together in groups, young people work on ‘practical learning projects’ to augment confidence, self-esteem and attainment and also improve behaviours and attendance. Academic studies exist which tend to support these claims, notably Holmlund and Silva, (2008) for the London School of Economics and McAleavey and O’Hagen (2008) for the University of Ulster, both commissioned by the Prince’s Trust. Many of the findings reported for the xl scheme have subsequently been adopted by the Trust. The xl scheme, it claims is:

- Helping young people re-engage with learning, improving their chances of completing compulsory education.
- Increasing confidence, self-esteem, social skills and behaviour.
- Helping improve attendance and motivation.
- Developing enterprise and employability skills

and in addition –

- Has helped over **60,000 young people** since they started in 1998.
- There are currently over **900** clubs in over **600** schools and centres across the UK.
- **90%** of young people show positive skills development across a range of areas.
- **88%** of young people have gone into further education, work or training upon completion of the programme.
- **94%** of young people would recommend it to others

(The Prince’s Trust, 2015b)

Prince’s Trust qualifications are recognised by Ofqual, the government body which regulates qualifications, assessments and examinations in England and so can claim to be authentic credentials to carry forward. Passes are awarded at a variety of levels, entry – level 3 which broadly correlate to those which can be acquired through more recognisable routes such as GCSE, BTEC, AS and A2.

Amongst other research commissioned by the Trust is a report ‘Abandoned Ambitions’ which, in 2013, specifically addressed the situation faced by school leavers with few qualifications at GCSE A\*-C. The report highlighted the most likely outcome was that those young people would lower their future expectations and ambitions as a result. In the introduction to the report Chief Executive Milburn, used the evidence of the report to determine that young people who are not academically successful faced an uncertain and difficult future. Citing that around 250, 000 young people left school with fewer than the government benchmark of five good GCSEs, the consequence would be that many would struggle to find employment in a constrained jobs market, so leaving them devoid of hope. However, schemes exist which are “... proven in helping young people into jobs ...” not reliant on having a start point of five good GCSEs, which can show young people alternative routes to success. (Milburn, 2013). As an example Milburn cited the case study of a young female who had left school with only two GCSE passes, in English and Art and who was disinterested in other academic subjects whilst at school. Subsequently she began a “... highly destructive lifestyle involving heavy substance misuse and a string of abusive relationships [...] went on to have a son and not long after, she found herself a single mother without warning ...” Following her enrolment in a Prince’s Trust scheme, she secured employment with a major employer and now helps other young people who have experienced similar circumstances. The Trust cites her as saying “... I now realise that failing your exams doesn’t have to be the end of the world. There are so many opportunities out there, and I hope I can inspire other young people not to give up hope because of their exam results ...” (The Prince’s Trust, 2013: 6).

#### **6.4: Attitudes, Aspirations and Behaviours.**

The way in which attitudes, aspirations and behaviours (AABs) affect the ability of young people to be successful has been widely researched (cf. Hirsch, 2007; Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Gorard, Huat See and Davies, 2012). Many of the studies argue that it is only when parents become engaged with an intervention that it becomes truly worthwhile, which would appear *prima facie* to repudiate many of the arguments advanced by Youth Sport Trust, DofE and the Prince's Trust.

Gorard et al, (2012: 40) for example, following an extensive search and assimilation of prior studies found that there was little evidence to support a definitive link between "... aspirations and attitudes in general, motivation, self-concepts and self-efficacy ..." and educational outcomes. These themes were also reported in a subsequent study which summarised three key Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports on education and poverty, including that of Gorard et al and determined that:

It was not possible to establish a clear causal relationship between AABs and children's educational outcomes. A significant factor was the *quality of evidence available* – which currently offers only limited support for the impact of most interventions aiming to improve outcomes through AABs.

(Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012: 1 emphasis added).

The authors do admit that their criteria for including evidence in their study was exacting and that different results may have been possible if the standard of proof had been lowered to include a broader range of existing studies. Nevertheless, the explicit reference to quality of evidence available is especially relevant as, other than in their own assessments of their performance, there are very few genuinely academic studies of the effectiveness of interventions such as those offered by YST, DofE and the Prince's Trust.

Further emphasising the lack of credible and robust evaluations, whereas these organisations frequently claim great success, the authors maintain that, on the available evidence results are not proven to “... produce benefits themselves or that participation in them necessarily results in improved educational outcomes, as there have been few robust evaluations ...” (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012: 8)

Types of ‘extra-curricular’ activity offered by these organisations are classified by Carter-Wall and Whitfield (p8) as either non-academic activity-based interventions, study support or multi-strand extra-curricular interventions. Each of these classifications is evident in the offer of YST, DofE and the Prince’s Trust. Despite maintaining there is no definitive proof that these interventions are successful in raising academic standards, the authors do concede that taking part in extra-curricular activities may, in itself, have a constructive influence on a young person. In terms of their interaction with their peers and the way in which participation in extra-curricular activities may stimulate self-esteem, educational aspirations and attainment, Carter-Wall and Whitfield determine that “... potentially positive benefits for participants ...” might ensue (ibid.) The latter point, on attainment, is seemingly contradictory to what the authors had already argued. They seek to explain this by cautiously differentiating between activities which are predominantly classroom-based and those which are not. Interventions such as study support, which are most likely to take place in classroom-like settings, may benefit poorer pupils. Where activities take place at distance from the classroom setting in ‘classrooms without walls’ the benefits are much less clear:

However, there is debate over whether activities (such as sports clubs) based on school premises enable participants to make better connections with school learning, by linking completing schoolwork with participation in other activities, for example. It is possible that there are potential benefits to poorer children taking part in activities that are separate from school-based provision, as this might enable some to experience success, associate these activities with school and become more engaged in school than they might otherwise have been.

(Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012: 8)

This lack of clarity over the effectiveness of extra-curricular activities in improving educational outcomes leads the authors to suggest that such interventions need to be more specific in their aims and objectives. Proposed interventions should first be challenged in trials which are appropriate in size and balance, having explicit criteria for measuring success and failure and be methodologically sound.

Importantly for advocates of a holistic view of the young person, which does not focus solely on academic attainment as the benchmark of success, Carter-Wall and Whitfield (ibid) determine that "... This is not to say interventions focussed on extra-curricular activity ought not to be implemented for other reasons, as raising attainment is not their only goal ..."

### **6.5: Open to all?**

A significant caveat to the effectiveness of extra-curricular activities emanates from a Sutton Trust report published in September 2014.

Drawing on previous research (cf. Di Maggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004) and data (Office for National Statistics, 2012) from the UK Living

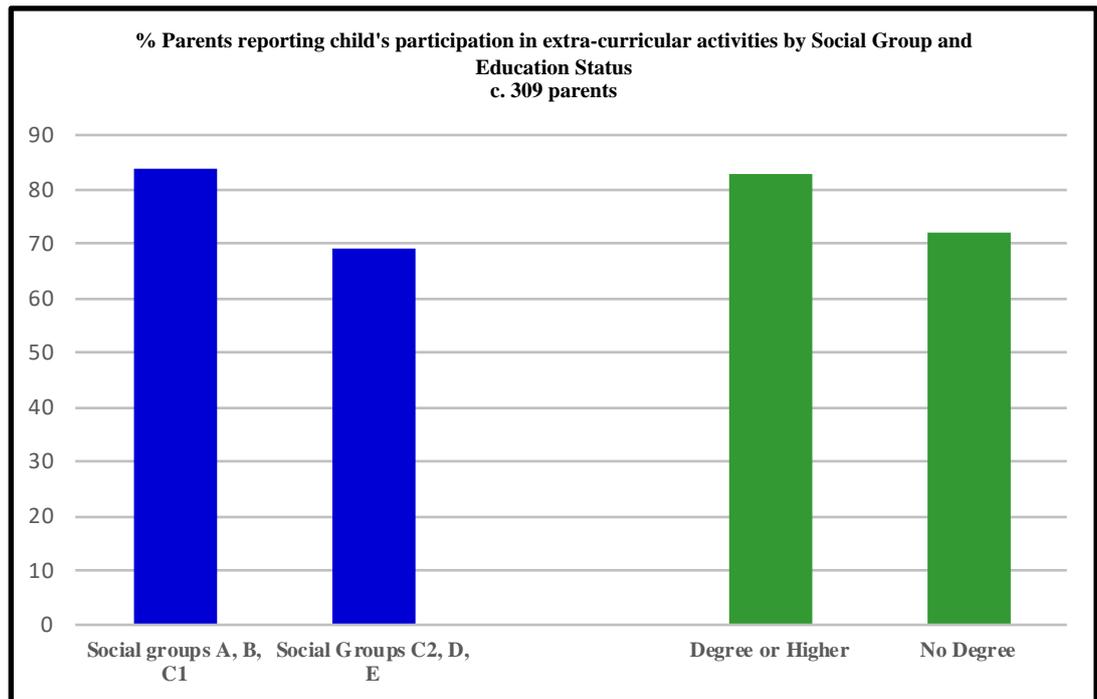
Costs and Food Survey (LCFS), the report appears to be the antithesis of the findings of Carter-Wall in declaring that "... 'softer' cultural experience (cultural capital) and participation in extra-curricular activities like music, dance and sports can have a positive effect on both educational attainment and career outcomes ..." (The Sutton Trust, 2014: 1). A conclusion may be drawn that the apparent dichotomy could be explained by the quality of the data; how the data are analysed and interpreted should still have certain caveats applied. Even so, whereas Carter-Wall and Whitfield complain of the lack of availability of 'quality' data, the Sutton Trust report draws on prior academic studies and government statistics which, in the main, can be regarded as robust and reliable.

Regardless, all of this needs still to be considered in the context of young peoples' ability to access extra-curricular activities and for some the report concludes this is not achievable. Based on certain of the accepted indicators of disadvantage such as Free School Meals and postcode, this resonates with certain of the views expounded by Anthony Seldon who accepts that his school, the Independent Wellington College, does not exhibit many of the traits evident on disadvantaged home backgrounds which largely exclude young people from 'enrichment' activities (Seldon, 2013).

For the first time in 2014, an annual Sutton Trust/ Ipsos MORI survey, part of MORIs Young People Omnibus surveys, asked 309 parents of young people between ages 5 -16 if they had regularly participated in an extra-curricular 'social' activity outside of school in the previous year. The list comprised of a number of activities recognisable from those offered by YST, DofE and the Prince's Trust, including sports and exercise, scouts or guiding, dance and drama, music, social clubs, arts and crafts, sciences and languages. A 'catch all' category of 'other' was also included for

activities outside of these categories. 76% of parents reported that their child had taken part in an extra-curricular activity (figure 6.3). There was, however, a discernible gap between social groups and a significant gap between parents with a degree-level qualification and those without a degree.

**Figure 6.3: Parents reporting child’s participation in extra-curricular activities.**



(Sutton Trust, 2014)

Using an adapted version of the government’s accepted National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), social groups for this survey were based on the occupation of the main wage earner:

- |                                   |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A = Higher manager                | B= Intermediate managers        |
| C1= Supervisors                   | C2= Skilled manual              |
| D= Semi-skilled/ unskilled manual | E= Casual/ lowest grade workers |

Significantly perhaps parents were also surveyed on an ability to pay for extra-curricular activities which showed sizeable variances in spending across the social groups. Over twice as many parents in groups A, B, C1 reported spending £500+ on

extra-curricular activities in the previous year compared with those in C2, D and E. Conversely, 29% in C2, D, E spent 0-£99 compared with 17% in the higher ranked groups. These figures tend to support the findings of the 2013 Parent Power report (Sutton Trust, 2013) and the Living Costs and Food Survey (ONS, 2012), leading the 2014 study to conclude that there is a "... strong social gradient in the proportion of parents paying for extra-curricular classes for their children ..." (Sutton Trust, 2014: 3). The report finds that:

While it is encouraging that large proportions of parents are engaging their children in extra-curricular activities outside school, substantial inequality between social groups is evident. Unlike with private tuition, there are clear differences between the top, middle, and bottom income brackets and social groups – as opposed to a simple disconnect between the top and the rest.

(The Sutton Trust, 2014: 4)

As shown previously the links between educational inequalities and educational outcomes are well documented and a source of ongoing debate as the UK approached a General Election in May 2015. Evidence clearly shows that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to do well at school (cf. Jerrim, 2012; Elliott et al, 2011; Nash, 1990). At the same time, evidence is also being published which seems to indicate that those same young people are prevented from accessing out-of-school activities and other interventions provided by organisations such as DofE, YST and The Prince's Trust. How these schemes can be made available to those who need them most, has yet to be fully determined.

Amongst the recommendations from the Sutton Trust report is an observation that a means tested voucher could be provided from within Pupil Premium funding through which low-income families could pay for supplementary learning support. This could be both in terms of private academic tuition and what they term 'good' extra-curricular activities. The theme of funding private tuition via pupil premium funding

was an emergent theme in the Labour Party General Election Manifesto of 2010 and so is evidently on the Political radar. What is less commonplace is the scheme offered by ‘Tutorfair’, as reported by Sutton Trust, which as part of its model offers, for each child who pays a fee, a free place for a child who cannot afford one.

## **6.6: Summary.**

In this chapter different and competing articulations of ‘success’ have been examined, where it is evident that benchmarks are set against the ability to pass examinations with ‘good grades’, nominally five passes at GCSE level at grades A\*-C. Successive governments in the period 1997-2014 have used this, or a very similar measure, to assess the success of schools and students. Taking, for example, the secondary research question “Are different articulations of success identifiable?”, it is evident that currently outside of this preference for GCSE-orientated floor targets, none are readily recognisable.

The ability of young people to learn outside of the formalised school structure has also been examined. There is a palpable differential between the formal school setting and informal or non-formal education which tends to take place in ‘classrooms without walls’, however the systems are not mutually exclusive and certain synergies exist. Learning which occurs in many non-formal systems such as the Scout Association, Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme and the Youth Sport Trust are understood as non-academic but young people can still acquire valued qualifications on completion of a syllabus of programmed tasks. DofE, for example, has a graduated award system Bronze, Silver, Gold which is widely acknowledged

and respected throughout society as an indication of ability. It was recognised that access to participation is, for some, problematic.

Using the concept of an ‘aggregation of marginal gains’, which was discussed in earlier chapters, particularly in relation to the 40 Assets methodology, seemingly small improvements across a wide spectrum of activities, can result in a much improved overall performance. This is particularly important for young people identified early on as having poor potential to reach required attainment benchmarks at KS4.

Throughout the chapters above, the main argument of this thesis, that the education system fails a proportion of young people, has been defined; similarly, the argument that systemic disadvantage exists. Nevertheless, it is not discernible from the literature how many young people enter the secondary education system with key stage 2 scores of 3 or below who only make their targeted 3 levels of ‘expected progress’; that is, those who leave at key stage 4 without reaching the appropriate floor targets at GCSE and are therefore deemed as ‘failures of the system’.

The gap that this thesis seeks to fill is to begin to quantify that cohort and to understand why they seem more educationally disadvantaged than a number of their peers. Using the Department of Education terminology that floor targets are ‘minimum’ expectations this requires an acceptance that, for whatever reason, some low performers at key stage 2 will overachieve and reach the GCSE floor targets. A second gap emerges from this proposition; what influences overachievement in these pupils and why are these influences not universal to all of those considered to be low performers at key stage 2?

## **INTRODUCING the RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Research findings are presented in 3 chapters. Immediately preceding the findings which relate opinions taken from the survey and interviews, chapter 7 presents an account which relied on an interpretation of quantitative data made available from case study school 1. In the initial stages of field work, as a result of indicators which arose from the interrogation of schools' data available on the Ofsted data dashboard, I had requested from each of the three case study schools, anonymised data which showed pupils' KS2 entry scores and their eventual KS4 outcomes. After their initial refusal to allow access to this data, I requested similar information from the Department for Education and Birmingham City Council for a selection of schools of their choosing and the School of Education at UoB which, I believed had research-privilege access to the national pupil database. At each stage, I was told that access was not possible. Data analysed in chapter 7 results from the eventual agreement from the senior managers at case study school 1, that they would allow very limited access to the previous three years' data for pupils entering their school with KS2 scores of 3 or lower.

Seven distinct sub-themes were identified from responses to the online survey and subsequent 1:1 semi-structured interviews using a system of directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Neuendorf, 2005.) Whereas chapters 4 and 5 focussed on opportunity, child development and issues of government policy, the central themes in chapter 6 were more concerned with articulations of success, opportunities for alternative provision and aspirations.

Analysis was conducted based on themes which represented issues of

(i) educational structures and directly related to education policy, for example Acts of Parliament, Departmental edict, Ofsted inspections, curriculum, floor targets.

and

(ii) representative of factors which are considered outside of the formal education setting; e.g. pupils' context, out of school activities and models of alternative provision. It is accepted that these can be, to some degree, contingent on education policy but are not considered to be fundamentally grounded in education policy.

The seven sub-themes identified and are represented in the code map below.

Following themes identified in the code map, chapter 8 tracks models of child development and how, in the opinion of education professionals, these might impact on educational opportunity. The chapter also presents accounts from a range of professionals on views of why the state becomes involved in education, encompassing the sub-themes identified in the literature, of pedagogy and curriculum, government policy and policy implementation.

Chapter 9 addresses responses from within the education sector using four sub-themes of constructs of success, contextual barriers to success, jobs and skills and alternative provision. Accepting the caveat mentioned above, that some of those may be contingent on policy, it is nevertheless possible to situate each of the seven themes beneath one, or other of the broad headings. In doing so, a methodological approach was used which was rooted in questions of:

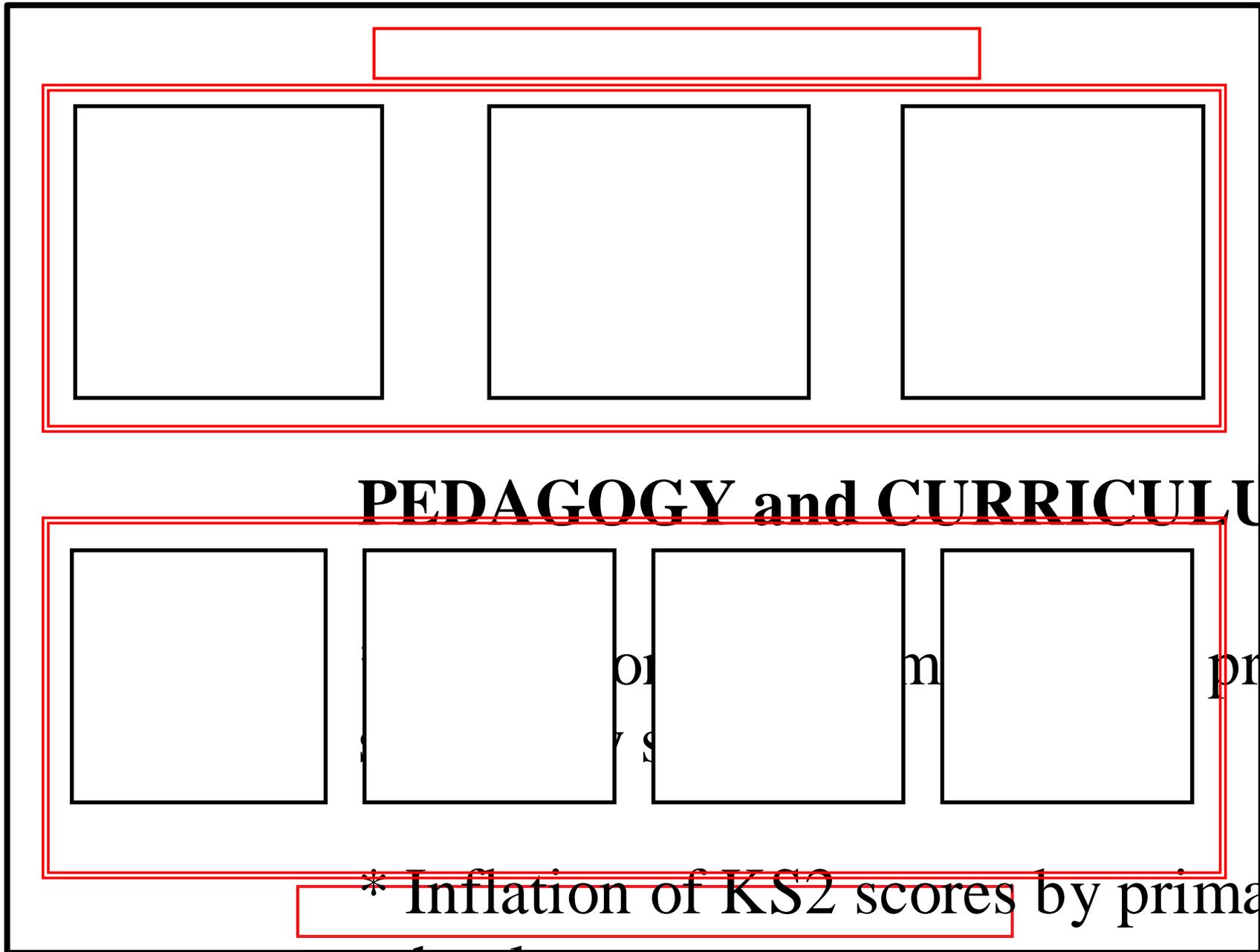
(i) The degree to which the sub-theme was *prima facie* influenced by education policy. Changes to the school curriculum and KS4 assessment criteria are clear examples which sit under the policy issues broad theme.

(ii) Where this was a relevant consideration, how programmes were funded.

For these sub-themes any funding relationships relating to government/schools are understood as examples of policy issues. Sub-themes which relate to third sector, voluntary or charity organisations such as Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and initiatives which are in part or in whole privately funded, for example the Youth Sport Trust/ Sky Sports Academy are located under the broad heading of non-policy issues.

(iii) How organisations involved in alternative provision characterised themselves.

Mostly, these organisations present themselves as independent of formal education links and so sub-themes locate naturally within the broad theme of non-policy issues. A small number of examples exist however, for example with Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programmes, where an argument could be made for an explicit link with education policy issues.



primary

schools

## **Chapter 7: ENQUIRY OF KEY STAGE 2 DATA FROM ONE SCHOOL**

### **7.1: Context.**

To support the ambitions of the research, each of the case study schools were asked, quite early on in the study, if they would allow access to pupils' progress data from KS2 through to KS4. KS2 results of pupils reflect an assessment of ability in English, maths (and in a selection of schools, science) as they exit primary education. KS2 results are graded between 'W' (broadly representing no score or no test taken) through to '7' (the highest possible score). A measure of 'expected progress' (set currently at 3 levels) is located in the belief that pupils achieving a level 4 in English or in maths by the end of KS2, should be expected to achieve at least a C grade GCSE in that subject. The consequence being that pupils achieving a level 3 or below, even if they make their expected levels of progress, will at best achieve a D grade and so would need to overachieve comparative to the testing and assessment regime currently in place. As GCSE floor targets are predicated on the attainment of grades at C or above, it was this cohort (i.e. those with KS2 scores of 3 or lower) which were the focus of this study.

After protracted but understandable deliberation given the potentially sensitive nature of the data, two of the schools declined to make any data available. One school, however, decided to allow access on a very limited basis. Consequently, data were provided for 3 years, 2013, 2014 and 2015 for those pupils entering their school with KS2 scores of 3 or lower.

Any results generated from data examined, for one school over a period of 3 years, cannot ‘prove’ anything of significance; it can however suggest signposts towards issues that might be significant with further study and analysis of a larger dataset.

## 7.2: **Headline data.**

**Table 7.1: School 1 – Low Performers in English at key stage 2.**

<b>English Year</b>	<b>Pupils with KS2 score &lt;3</b>	<b>Pupils who achieved GCSE grade C&lt;</b>	<b>Pupils who did not achieve a minimum of GCSE grade C</b>	<b>% of pupils who did not attain GCSE floor targets</b>
2013	142	72	70	49%
2014	128	62	66	52%
2015*	55	17	38	69%

(\* Note: KS2 results for 2015 affected by ‘boycott’ of testing regime by primary school teachers.)

**Table 7.2: School 1 – Low Performers in maths at key stage 2.**

<b>Maths Year</b>	<b>Pupils with KS2 score &lt;3</b>	<b>Pupils who achieved GCSE grade C&lt;</b>	<b>Pupils who did not achieve a minimum of GCSE grade C</b>	<b>% of pupils who did not attain GCSE floor targets</b>
2013	123	56	67	55%
2014	112	54	58	52%
2015*	49	8	41	84%

(\* Note: KS2 results for 2015 affected by ‘boycott’ of testing regime by primary school teachers.)

The government website Raise Online, (2015) states that “... In 2010, a number of schools boycotted the Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests and therefore, this year [2015], the number of pupils without a test result is higher than usual ...” This tends to devalue any data provided for 2015 and as a consequence any analysis has been restricted to the data provided only for 2013 and 2014.

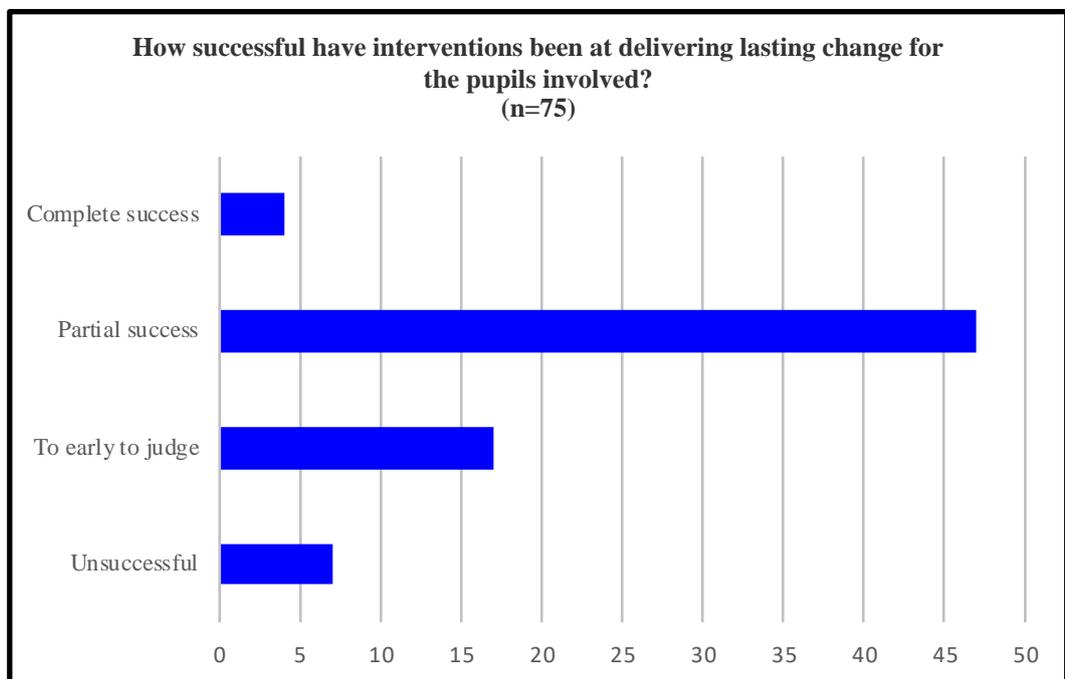
Even with the above caveats in mind it is evident from the data that approximately half of those pupils who entered the school with KS2 scores of 3 or less did not attain the minimum (floor target) qualification of Grade C in English and maths by the end of KS4. I argue that this group is illustrative of a group which I term the “disconnected minority”. Indicative of a conflict perspective, this group lies outside the ‘mainstream’ of recognisable academic results as a result of the intense focus on A\*-C passes at the GCSE stage and are therefore marginalised, or ignored by the systems of measurement which prevail.

A corollary is, of course identifiable, that approximately 50% of the whole cohort, for both English and maths, attained a minimum of a grade C and can therefore be argued as ‘overachieving’. Why this disparity exists cannot be explained at this point. An explanation from within the paradigms of educational psychology and child development, discussed in chapter 4, might simply be the differing rates at which a number of psychologists (as represented in table 4.1 above) argue that children develop cognitive skills (also, c.f. Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). Alternatively, or contemporaneously, results could be enhanced by the school using targeted interventions with a cohort of pupils as described above in discussions on the use of pupil premium. The latter perception generated a short series of questions for the survey which revealed that, according to respondents, schools involved in the research were achieving good results from the use of a variety of interventions. It is known that a proportionate number of respondents were from school 1, which had agreed to the use of the entry data which, to a small degree, helps to authenticate any propositions which might arise from the survey results.

90% of respondents reported that their school was implementing interventions directly aimed at those pupils identified as low achievers at KS2. Interventions included 1:1 mentoring, attendance at ‘Saturday School’ on a voluntary basis, behavioural management and in a small number of cases, support for extra-curricular activities.

When asked, in a supplementary question, whether these interventions were effective, the results as represented in figure 7.1 below, were:

**Figure 7.1: Success of interventions with low performers in school 1.**

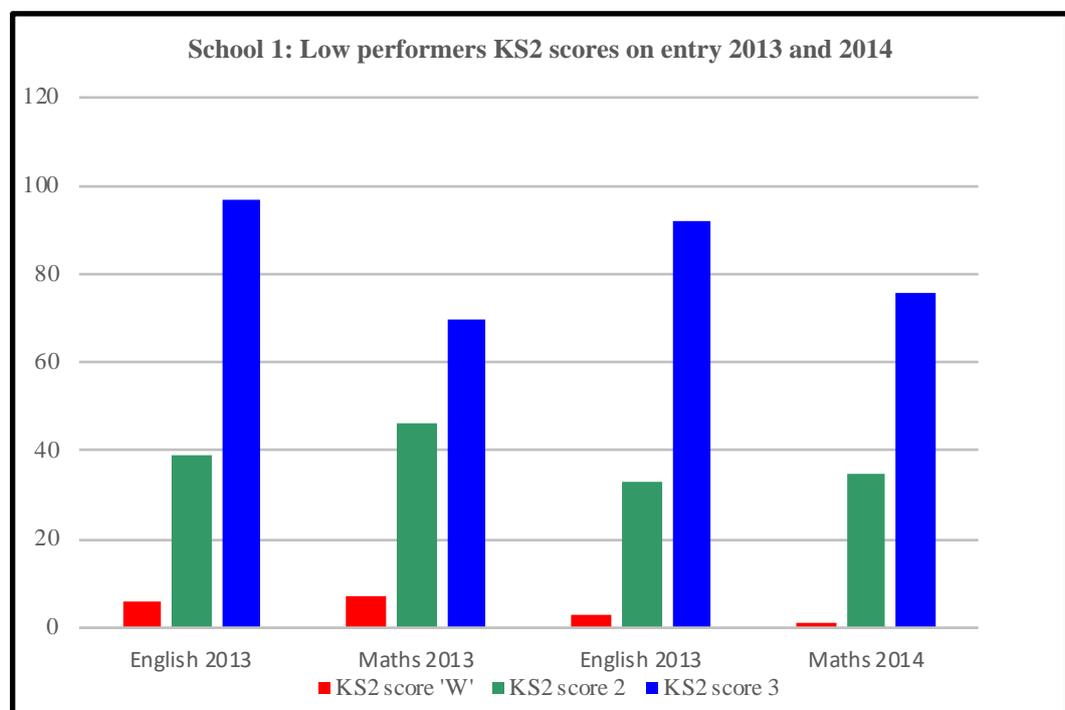


The articulation of ‘partial success’ may begin to suggest a reasoning for the disparity between those who can overachieve and those who fail to reach GCSE grade C but further, more detailed analysis is required in this area; not least because it is not known whether all low performers benefit from interventions or simply a targeted group within that whole cohort. Evidence from the use of pupil premium, described below in chapter 8 suggests that quite often a number of pupils who would benefit from interventions are not included in the initiatives which pupil premium funding supports.

### 7.3: Unpacking the headline data.

The headline data obtained from school 1 can be subdivided according to KS2 score on entry, based on the scale of W – 3. A return of ‘W’ indicates that a pupil was not tested, for example for reasons of absence. As per the rationale offered above, 2015 results omitted. These data might offer clues to why some pupils are able to exceed their expected levels of progress whilst others cannot.

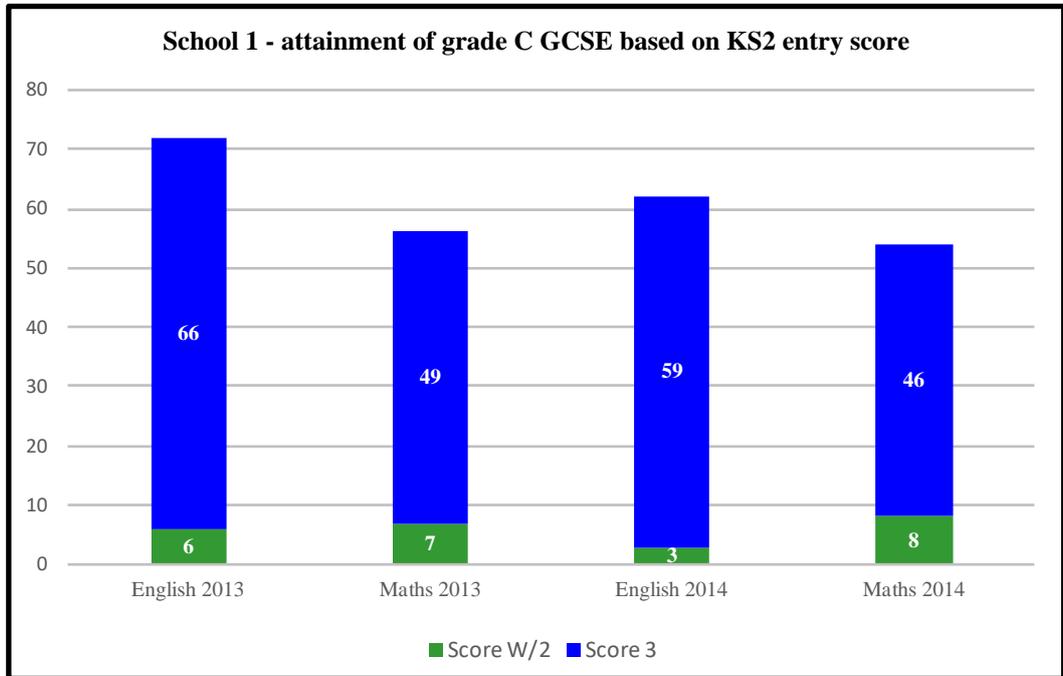
**Figure 7.2: School 1 – KS2 Low performers scores on entry.**



It is evident from the graph that in both years, in both subjects, there were significantly more entrants with the higher KS2 score of 3 than in either of the other groupings. It is a simpler proposition for the majority of those pupils, firstly to realise their expected 3 levels of progress up to grade D at GCSE and then much less of a ‘stretch’ to exceed their expected targets and reach a grade C. This assumption is supported by the school data, represented in the graph below, which shows that for both English and maths,

those pupils who enter with a KS2 score of 3 are much more likely to reach a minimum of grade C than those who enter with scores of ‘W’ or 2.

**Figure 7.3: Attainment of GCSE grade C based on KS2 entry score.**



The total number of grade C GCSE passes achieved by these pupils correlates to the headline data from the relevant DfE figures; in 2013 72% for English and 56% for maths; and in 2014 62% for English and 54% for maths. In each year for this group of pupils, for both subjects, a range of 85% - 95% of grade C passes are attributable to those entering the school with a KS2 score of 3.

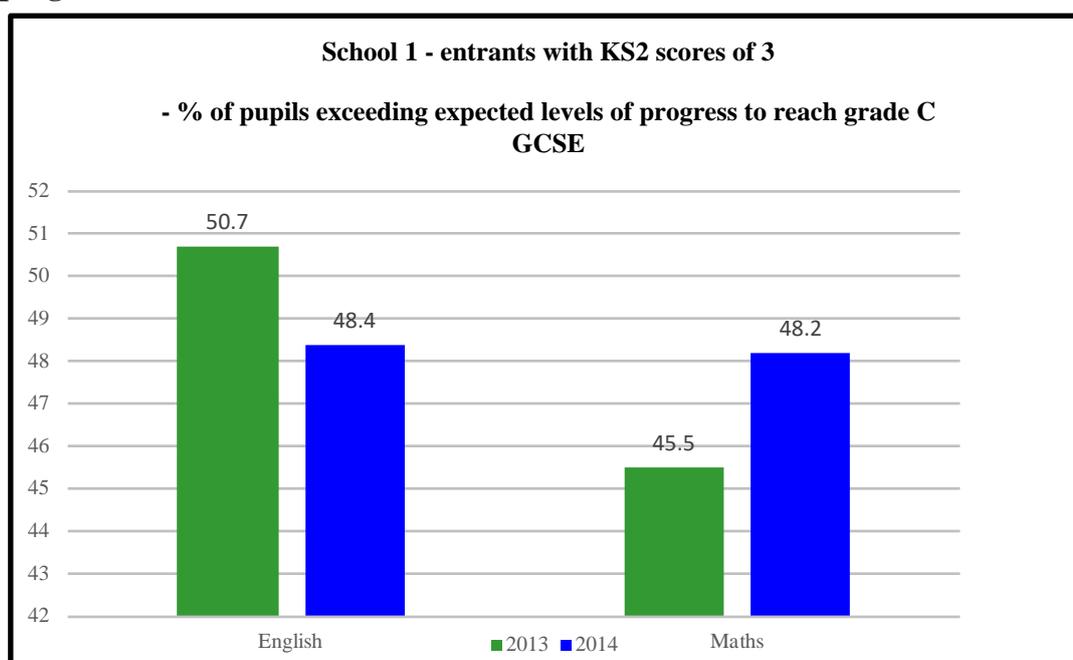
As considerable emphasis is placed on the measure by the education system, it is worth briefly considering how low performers relate to their ‘expected levels of progress’ metric. This has been discussed at some length in earlier chapters. Simply for reiteration, the standard for all pupils is an expectation that, whatever the KS2 score on entry, a minimum of 3 levels progress should be recognisable between KS2 and KS4 benchmarks so that broadly:

**Table 7.3: Expected levels of progress benchmarks.**

KS 2 score on entry	Expected levels of progress	Target KS 4 Result	Levels needed to reach Grade C
W	3	GCSE Grade F	6
2	3	GCSE Grade E	5
3	3	GCSE Grade D	4
4	3	GCSE Grade C	0
5	3	GCSE Grade B	-1
6	3	GCSE Grade A	-2
7	3	GCSE Grade A*	-3

It can be seen that the opportunity for low performers to reach grade C is an infinitely more difficult prospect than for those with higher KS2 scores on entry and yet, a proportion of those pupils are able to make that adjustment as shown in the graph below, based on the data from school 1.

**Figure 7.4: School 1 – percentage of low performers exceeding expected levels of progress.**



Once again, this raises the question of how some pupils are recognised as overachieving whilst others are finding it difficult to simply reach their predicted levels. As nothing is known about the nature of the cohort of low performers that these data represent, a number of variables would need to be considered. Importantly, an identification of types of intervention, who had received interventions, to what extent and the set of metrics used to measure outcomes would be needed initially. Any number of other variables, such as family background, gender, ethnicity, would also need to be factored in to enable full extrapolation of the data. More than 2 years' data from only one school would also be needed before any real generalisations could be made.

#### **7.4: Signposts in the data.**

As they are very limited in size, scope and context, analysis of the data from school 1 can only signpost issues which might help answer the research questions which form the basis of this thesis. The data do, however:

- Help to identify and begin to quantify the cohort which, I am arguing, the education system fails. In school 1 data there are approximately 50% of low performers at KS2 who cannot make the levels of progress needed to reach the grade C target at GCSE. This is important in supporting the argument, made throughout this thesis, that this cohort is ignored or disregarded by the education system. Furthermore, as the discourse on underachievement seems focussed elsewhere (white working class boys, Afro-Caribbean boys, for

example) as a discrete entity, this cohort may be underrepresented in academic literature.

- Contain evidence that informs lines of enquiry for the survey and the later interviews conducted at the empirical stage of the research. For example:
  - In identifying a cohort for whom 4+ levels of progress are unachievable, accepting that they cannot therefore achieve the minimum academic metric of success, GCSE grade C. How can this be remedied?
  - With caveats, the data suggest that interventions work for some but not others. Why is this?
  - Are all low performers at KS2 offered the interventions; if not, why not?
  - Is the “consistent” percentage split (around 50/50) of those that overachieve and those who fail to reach floor targets, suggestive of a structural failure?
  - Is it possible that the ‘failing’ starts when KS2 tests are done; are a proportion of KS2 scores inaccurate, especially for those identified as low performers?

## **Chapter 8: ARTICULATIONS OF A FAILING SYSTEM**

Research findings presented in this chapter explore a number of the key themes which were identified using the directed content analysis and represented in the code map which precedes chapter 7 (p. 174). A number of the themes identified, for example a perpetuating discourse surrounding the increase of educational standards, form the basis of a contested debate between what education professionals and academics articulate and what successive governments seek to achieve through policy implementation. For example, it may be argued that evidence from within the literature suggests that the separate articulations of success as a student leaves KS4 are ambiguous. Furthermore, as I argue elsewhere, these are inadequate as they do not encapsulate all students.

Using the analytical techniques outlined in the methodology for this study, themes are presented using charts, which resulted from quantitative analysis of survey returns and narrative both from survey responses and the semi-structured interviews. Themes which arise are discussed to provide a wide-ranging account of opinion towards current education policy and what in the opinion of respondents, could make the difference between pupils' success and their failure to realise targets set for them.

### **8.1: Issues of the Curriculum and Pedagogy.**

It is to a certain degree self-evident to state that the selection of subjects which is offered by schools and how they are taught is a critical element in educational outcomes. Explicit within that proposition is that a system which fails to provide an appropriate choice of subjects (with achievable end targets, which are appropriately

recognised outside of the school environment) or adequate teaching for all pupils is flawed. These concepts, I argue, are equally explicit in the primary research question which this thesis proposes.

Predominantly throughout the survey and subsequent interviews there was consensus that in terms of curriculum that "... whilst GCSE qualifications are appropriate for most students they are not a one size fits all ..." (Head Teacher, Professional Interview 17, p1).

Also worthy of consideration is that the 'National' curriculum is only applicable to maintained schools in England under Local Education Authority (LEA) control. Academies and free schools are permitted to vary the curriculum, which in their establishments makes it more 'notional' than 'national'. Whilst a number of statutory and regulatory duties are imposed, Academies and Free Schools and other schools outside of direct LEA governance in England are permitted by statute to vary what they teach in a way that 'State' schools cannot. (Academies Act, 2010; Education Act 2011). Schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, have separate arrangements as legislative powers have been devolved by the Westminster Government to the respective National Assemblies of those countries (cf. Scotland Act, 1998; Northern Ireland Act, 1998; Government of Wales Act, 2006).

In September 2014, the curriculum for maintained schools in England was changed for secondary school students in year 7 to 9, those at Key Stage 3. Further changes were planned for implementation in 2015 for Key Stage 4 students, those in year 10 and 11 (Department for Education, 2013). It is the intent of the Department for Education that students of all abilities should have an appropriate and challenging curriculum, which can be a mixture of academic and vocational qualifications (ibid.)

This is particularly important for students identified as potentially low attaining, where the curriculum allows schools an opportunity to offer alternative pathways to qualifications other than GCSEs. Most commonly offered are the vocational qualifications from the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), designed so that students can demonstrate skills and knowledge through practical assessment rather than through examinations. The concept is not, however, without criticism as evidenced by the influential Wolf Report on vocational education; in the report, Wolf concluded that the current BTEC system offered qualifications which were not leading to employment and which should, as a consequence, not be included in schools' performance statistics (Wolf, 2011). This is important in the context of this research as Wolf was relied on heavily by the Coalition Government 2010-2015, to provide the rationale for change and this focus on academic achievement which only recognised GCSE passes.

Respondents to the online survey conducted for this study tended to disagree with Wolf, with a perceptible majority indicating that in their opinion, it is appropriate to include the BTEC qualifications. In the answer to the closed question, "*Vocational qualifications such as BTEC are included within a school's 'academic' results (the league tables). Do you think that this is appropriate?*" 58% of respondents answered positively compared to 42% who disagreed with BTECs being included in performance figures.

Respondents who chose to clarify or rationalise their position by adding a qualifying comment displayed evidence of a somewhat polarised debate, some offering an amount of quite vocal support for the findings of the Wolf Report, whilst others regarded BTEC success as recognisable in measuring the transition from KS2 through to KS4: (emphasis added in each case)

*“...No they shouldn't. It boosts figures without being a true reflection of a school's impact, consequently the government can manipulate statistics to reflect greater progress...”*

(Male, teacher, 35-44)

*“...why shouldn't they be? They are still qualifications that pupils have achieved...”*

(Female, teacher, 35-44)

An interesting response from a teacher of many years' experience highlighted a particular issue which had not been identified through the literature; BTECs were, he argued, included as qualifications equivalent to GCSEs

*“...to make failing schools look good...”*

(Male, teacher, 55-65)

This response is relevant in a number of contexts. Firstly, as school performance measures are heavily tilted towards academic results, there is some evidence that schools are inflating results across the spectrum of GCSE and BTEC returns to inflate their performance. The concept of schools 'cheating' the system to make their performance results look better is widely reported across the spectrum of UK print media and, if those reports and other investigations can be believed, there appears to be some substance in this argument. An extensive literature base exists in the public management arena regarding the 'gaming' of performance measures. A number of factors can be identified which either encourage or deter gaming ('bending' the rules) and cheating ('breaking' the rules) in Performance Management Systems (PMS), (Pollitt, 2013).

Pollitt identifies these factors using a table-format which is replicated below (table 8.1) and which I have adapted to include an educational context, which is derived from my own analysis and interpretations of what appears in academic literature and in a number of responses within the research findings.

As inferred in the table, Pollitt regards gaming and cheating as inevitable within a PMS which does not change and cannot therefore be dismissed as rare phenomena. Citing the 2012 Ofqual study of GCSE English examinations he argues that "... The pattern of controlled assessment marks suggests strongly that [assumed knowledge of the mark that would gain an overall pass] ...influenced the way that many teachers taught, or the way they administered or marked controlled assessment ..." (Pollitt, 2013: 355). Pollitt is not alone in these assertions. Hamilton et al (2013) argue that using test-based accountability causes education professionals to adapt behaviours to respond to the incentives provided by the system. Equally, behaviours could be adapted to avoid any punitive measures which arise from poor performance. Giving certain authority to what teachers report through the empirical research, Ehren and Swanborn (2012) for example identify in a study in Dutch schools, that a number of schools do not comply with test protocols and that students are often excluded from tests.

**Table 8.1: Pollitt – factors which encourage ‘gaming’.**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Educational Context - enquiry</b>
<i><b>Background factors</b></i>		
Political system	In fiercely adversarial political systems a PMS may be seen as ‘owned’ by just one party, increasing gaming by staff of different political inclinations. PMS may be more ‘embedded’ in consensual systems.	UK political system is adversarial. PMSs under recent administrations have been recognisable as politically driven e.g. Labour ‘targets’ in later years of 1997-2010 governments.
Organisational culture	May be more or less favourable to ideas of ‘performance’ comparison and incentives.	Education system was not traditionally subject to PMSs – hence resistance?
Prevalence of corruption	In one way a feature of culture, but treated separately here. An environment where substantial corruption is the norm will tend to infect PMSs too.	Education system was largely ‘trusted’ prior to PMS introduction so not considered institutionally corrupt?
<i><b>Task factors</b></i>		
Complexity	The more complex, the more danger of synecdoche.	Does the part represent the whole, or vice versa?
Observability of outputs & outcomes	Gaming and cheating become more prevalent the less appropriate a PMS design is for the task, e.g. a hard, tightly coupled PMS imposed on a coping organisation.	Was the education system coping prior to PMS or has a narrative of failure been articulated to justify imposition?
<i><b>Features of the PM system</b></i>		
Previous experience with PM	Some studies indicate that lack of previous experience is a negative factor.	As above: system was largely trusted so no outright experience of PMSs.
Available resources	Under-resourced PMSs are more vulnerable to gaming – or just to being ignored.	No evidence of lack of resource & certainly not being ignored by teachers!
Participation of staff in PM design	PMS more likely to be seen as ‘fair’ if staff are involved – therefore less gaming.	PMSs in education imposed by govt. without much consultation. Staff therefore sceptical and uncooperative?
Balance between stability & change	Very difficult. Too much stability and predictability facilitates the growth of gaming and cheating. Too little means poor learning and cynicism.	PMSs for different administrations have been fairly stable – generally a reliance on GCSE measures as KPIs
Tight or loose coupling to incentives/ punishments?	Another difficult balance. Tighter coupling gets results but also increases gaming and cheating.	Argument these are tightly coupled (see below)
Who collects and validates the data	If those being assessed collect the data there is a temptation to game or cheat, especially if there is no independent validation.	Schools do not collect their own data but can ‘collate’; is this the same?
Is the data in the public domain?	If PMS data is in the public domain and is featured by the media this is in effect a form of tight coupling. Media pressure (usually with a negative bias) will increase the temptation to game or cheat.	Much of schools’ PMS data is freely available for interrogation by 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties. Significant media analysis. Therefore, PMS is tightly coupled.

(Adapted from Pollitt, 2013: 359)

The second context in which Pollitt's analysis is relevant is that, government rhetoric and media coverage – particularly in what is regarded as the right-wing print media - has been discoursed towards 'failing schools' and 'failing pupils' rather than failures of policy (cf. Barrett, 2014; Clark, 2014; Paton, 2014; Ofsted, 2015). This aligns both with the factor identified above by Pollitt, regarding PMS data being in the public domain and is commensurate with issues of the power-elite discourse and of arguing from a position of conflict as argued in chapter 2.2. As a corollary, this could lead to teachers' attempts to dishonestly enhance results. This is not a particularly new theme however. A series of academic studies in the United States has identified that the introduction of 'high stakes' testing, holding schools accountable for results rather than simply students' outcomes provides evidence, through robust investigations, that manipulation of data is predictable (cf. van der Linden, 2011; Ehren et al, 2012; Upchurch et al, 2014; Thompson and Cook, 2014).

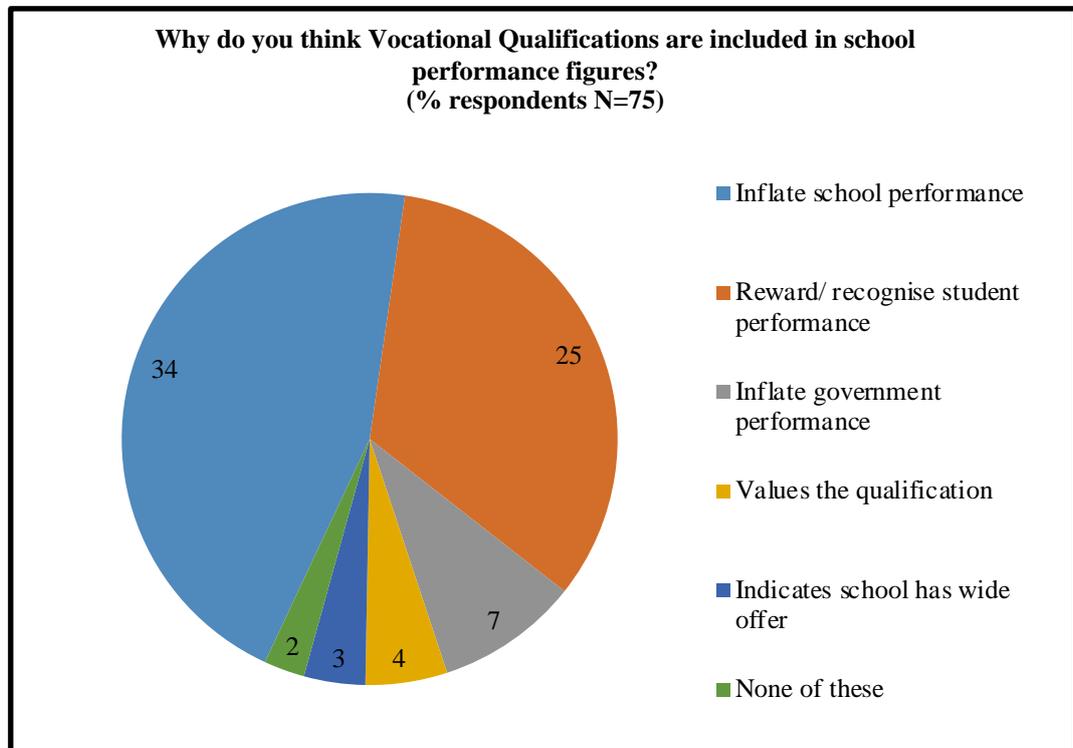
Seemingly, an equivalent to the 'high stakes' testing regime has, in much the same way, been implemented in English schools with a benchmark being measured at KS2 and then between KS2 and KS4. As described later in this chapter, similar issues with teachers re-imagining performance figures can be evidenced.

### **8.1a: Perceptions of BTEC qualifications.**

In responses to one of the survey questions, and as depicted in the pie-chart below, fewer than half of respondents to the survey perceive that the inclusion of BTECs in school performance figures are to reward student's performance or to value the qualification. Respondents were allowed only one choice from the options offered. A

majority of 41 respondents argued that BTECs are included to enhance performance figures at school or government level.

**Figure 8.1: Inclusion of vocational qualifications in school performance figures.**



Evident implications arise from this value-performance dichotomy for pupils engaged in BTEC pathways and that, in terms of how this relates to the cohort which is the focus of this thesis, these schemes do little in terms of educational progress for those students engaged in them. Although ‘success’ at BTEC is recognised by an ‘award’, ‘certificate’, or ‘diploma’ the levels at which some of these are awarded renders them almost unusable in the quest for later employment. Only at the diploma stage are BTECs considered the equivalent of GCSEs (Studential, 2015). This is more important when students may have been ‘guided’ by teachers towards these pathways based on their initial KS2 results and ‘sold’ to pupils on the basis that they are at least as good as GCSEs. Such guidance may have been accepted in good faith

in the belief that it represents an effective measure of educational competence. Each of these themes were established in a study conducted by the Universities of Northumbria and Nottingham Trent (Atkins and Flint, 2015). Amongst the conclusions to the study were that:

- Young people place value on a vocational programme believing that they are useful in the labour market.
- Despite this, young people acknowledge that these programmes lack esteem in society.
- Vocational courses are not ‘chosen’ or based on a rational assessment of ability; rather students arrive on them through ‘serendipity’ and ‘contingent events’.
- Young people misunderstand the type of career to which these programmes can lead.

(Atkins and Flint, 2015: 44-46)

The authors summarise the situation in the following terms, which identifies readily with the cohort of young people which is the focal point of this thesis:

[D]espite the optimism and commitment to their vocational programmes, and despite the promises of policy rhetoric, the most marginalised young people remain unequally positioned within an education system which unequally prepares them for particular forms of labour in a jobs market in which those from more elite social classes will have access to the best jobs.

(Atkins and Flint, 2015: 45)

### **8.1b: An appropriate curriculum.**

Throughout the empirical research stages, respondents to the online survey and in interviews were mindful that vocational options might not be appropriate for the ablest students. Nevertheless, respondents were comfortable with the government’s strategy that regardless of where a student might be on an ability scale they should have the right to a targeted, personalised, learning programme. Even with the

acceptance of this strategy, which *prima facie* is hard to disagree with, there is no guarantee that low achievers would wholly benefit.

*Every curriculum should be geared towards the individual really, even those in the school mainstream. But we are simply not equipped to handle that and in any case, vocational qualifications are not really recognised as being good qualifications so it would still mean that the low achievers would miss out.*

(Teacher; Professional Interview 13, p.4)

For one interviewee the lack of relevance of the current curriculum for a number of pupils and the restrictions imposed on school staff in adhering to it, were important considerations and to some degree mirrors an earlier view that for some pupils it is simply about negotiating the secondary school process:

*What has the curriculum got to do with me if I am a kid of 16 and am going to earn a living by using my wits? For me, it's all boring and it's neither here nor there and the poor quality of teaching that I get as a perceived low achiever puts me off anyway. There just isn't anything that would inspire me.*

(School Based Educational Welfare Officer; Professional Interview 6, p.5)

Amongst survey respondents and the later interviews, there was a strong recognition that an alternative curriculum (or, as is highlighted in chapter 6, alternatives or supplements *to* the curriculum) is most needed by groups recognised as 'at risk' of educational failure, whilst at the same time identifying that alternate provision can be expensive and extremely hard to deliver. This was most strongly articulated in the following exchange. The opening question sought information on interventions which were outside of the normal curriculum but which led to a qualification of some sort.

*Q: Do you use alternatives to the curriculum at your school?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: What do you do?*

*A: For alternative provision we use ASDAN amongst other things.*

*Q: What is ASDAN?*

*A: It's a scheme that offers different programmes and qualifications based on growing a range of skills, not just for academic capabilities but to help get jobs in later life and how to interact with other people.*

*Q: What sort of programmes and qualifications?*

*A: there are quite a few courses. We've got kids going off to learn to be hairdressers, plumbers and builders and if they can't go because we have no staff to go with them they get disillusioned and often play up. There are also sport based programmes and Personal Development.*

*Q: Why can't staff go?*

*A: it means that children have to go off site so we have to send someone, usually one or two teaching assistants with them. As all the children don't go to the same site and there are quite a few of them, it often means that we have several members of staff off site supervising them which puts increased pressure on those that are left behind. We are just not well enough resourced, or maybe just not well enough organised to cope with that so there are times when the children can't go. It's a real shame as they all seem to enjoy it and get something out of it.*

*Q: What about the qualifications?*

*A: We use it for our low achievers so they are enrolled in level one and two mostly; these are for kids working below GCSE level. There are higher ones which are supposed to equate to GCSEs and even A levels but we don't use them.*

*Q: Why not?*

*A: Because GCSEs are the qualifications that are most recognisable at the end of KS4.*

(Teaching assistant; Professional interview 12, p.4).

Without exception, interviewees were able to readily identify the pupils who were most needing of alternative curriculum provision as, for example, evidenced by the head teacher of school 2:

*Q: Who needs alternative provision the most?*

*A: These are children who cannot cope with the school process; either academically or behaviourally. As a consequence, they often get into trouble and so are at risk of temporary or permanent exclusion.*

*Q: What happens then?*

*A: These kids that are taken off roll tend to be from really deprived backgrounds; their parents don't really care if they are at school or not. We have a few here currently that have been in and out of other schools for up to two years before we can offer them a place and others who have come here from our EDGE group who we are obliged to take on trial because of our agreement with other schools in the group.*

(Secondary Head Teacher; Professional Interview 17, p.1)

'EDGE' group(s) of schools are a localised collective in Birmingham who have an agreement on a number of school-related issues to share knowledge bases but who are not federated (Edge Partnership, 2014). One of the agreements is to take on trial any pupil at risk of exclusion. Trials are not always successful with the result that the pupil returns to his or her original school, or moves to another school in the EDGE group for further trial. The ambition is that the pupil will find a school environment within the group into which he or she can settle and improve both behaviourally and academically.

The stereotyping of the parents in this interview ("*parents don't really care if they are at school or not*") as devoid of care, which in itself was a surprising confession from a head teacher, was not however typical. Other professionals, in particular those most engaged with the at risk groups, focussed more on the inability of parents, for whatever reason, to access the support systems required to help their child through the school process and engage with the curriculum, as indicated in an interview response.

*It's really difficult for children who come from backgrounds where the parents simply don't know how to access support services like SEN statements and local Mental Health teams, they want a proper education but find it really hard to get it.*

*Q: Can you expand on that a little please?*

*A: Yes. I know several young people who really have something about them but their parents, or guardians in some cases as they are looked after children, don't know how to negotiate the process. **Especially for the looked after kids you would think that the local authority would do it but most times they don't.** We are quite lucky here that I am on-site so I can work really hard to help these people out. Even then it gets disheartening as having done all the work, it often takes a long time to get something done as other agencies lose the paperwork, or at least they say they do.*

(Education Welfare Officer; Professional interview 9, p.4: emphasis added).

The concept of at risk pupils was emphasised by many interviewees as worthy of attention. Resonating with much of the above commentary from the EWO, it was largely felt that current education policy does not effectively allow for pupils with additional, or 'special' needs. Emphasis has been added to a section of her quote because a failure of local authorities to adequately provide for looked after children had not been evident in the earlier literature, nor was it an issue for other professionals. I would argue that the cohort at the heart of this thesis are likely to include a number of pupils from within this 'looked after' group. It leads to questions which cannot be answered within the remit of this study, for example what constitutes 'looked after', who is *effectively* responsible for the care of these children (i.e. what is the process within the local authority arena) and is suggestive of further systemic failings which may be under researched in the wider educational context.

A general presumption that all pupils can deal with mainstream school life seemed to prevail outside of the school setting.

*Our school uses an alternative curriculum to help additional needs children catch up with numeracy and literacy but we don't admit this to Ofsted because the inspection regime, as it currently is, does not allow for the kind of initiative we provide. We would be penalised as a result.*

(Deputy Head Teacher; Professional interview 5, p.7)

It was largely felt that successive curriculum 'inclusion' policies had been presented to local authorities as *fait accompli* by government departments who had no real idea how they would operate in practice, with the result that many pupils identified as at risk by school professionals were finding the negotiation of mainstream education a notable problem. The 'voice' of these students was not being heard, or being ignored, despite attempts at intervention by school staff.

Of particular interest in this response however is the choice of language employed by this respondent as it offers an interesting insight into how the regulation process is sometimes perceived by a sizeable proportion of the teaching profession as invasive and in many respects not fit for purpose. The inspection process is often argued to be more an inquisition than an inspection and the inspectors more as auditors, than collaborators in improving the school. Thus teachers' perceptions are articulated in one study by researchers at the University of London and Bristol University as an 'endogeneity of Ofsted failure' (Allen and Burgess, 2012). A large and longstanding corpus of academic literature exists to support these criticisms (cf. Cliffe, 2011; Richards, 2012, 2015; Baxter and Clark, 2013; Bokhove and Jones, 2014).

Particularly, as highlighted in the earlier literature review in chapter 5, one of the most significant of criticisms which surround Ofsted is that the inspectorate is heavily reliant on school datasets in making judgements and arrive at schools with preconceptions derived from those data, a practice described by Baxter and Clarke

(2013) as a ‘tick box exercise’, more to serve regulatory expedience than offer any real opportunities for improvement. These views are also reported in areas of so-called ‘grey’ literature and in particular, more recent publications by the think-tanks Civitas and Policy Exchange. These reports are considered relevant in the context of this thesis as they can be considered under the remit of Pollitt’s factors of performance management, namely the use of data by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties to identify or ‘couple’ Ofsted inspections as a performance management system.

Peal (2014) for Civitas, in keeping with the academic study by Baxter and Clarke, argues that the inspection process incites teachers to teach by conditioning (which, it might be argued, in itself could be construed as a form of gaming). The inspection process, they claim, is ostensibly a box-ticking exercise and excessively punitive. Similarly aligned with Baxter and Clarke and as reasoned by Waldegrave and Simons (2014) in a report for Policy Exchange, strict adherence to process and the over-reliance on pre-supplied data calls into question the ability of inspectors to make considered judgments and certainly inhibits their intuition to see ‘beyond’ the data. As it states in the report “...[O]ne of the most significant concerns raised by head teachers and schools in responses to the call for evidence was that inspectors simply did not understand their data, in particular progress measures ...”

(Waldegrave and Simons; 2014 p 39). This was a feature highlighted in the literature throughout chapter 3 above and unreservedly supported by the earlier respondent who went on to say at a later point in his interview:

*It seemed to us that he [the Ofsted inspector] had his own version of the rulebook. We thought he would allow us to demonstrate how the school achieved and even surpassed, the benchmarks set out in the assessment criteria but instead it just looked as though he found what was needed to support his preconceived idea.*

(Deputy Head Teacher; Professional interview 5, p.9)

The corpus of academic analysis into the operational mechanisms of Ofsted, highlights a significant degree of reticence regarding the efficacy of the inspection process; Richards (2012, 2015) for example advocates that the Ofsted regime has always courted controversy and that for both teachers and inspectors some criteria are not realistic. Hevey (2010: 74) argues "... the model of regulation and inspection, based on standards rather than on developmental engagement between professionals and with children, has been heavily criticised ..."

This insight from Hevey is of particular importance to those students engaged in KS4 pathways which are non-academic; as the alternative curriculum provisions described earlier by the interview respondent are not reported in those data, it is likely that if revealed or discovered on inspection, results would be downgraded as a variation or non-compliance from the standards by which the inspection is conducted.

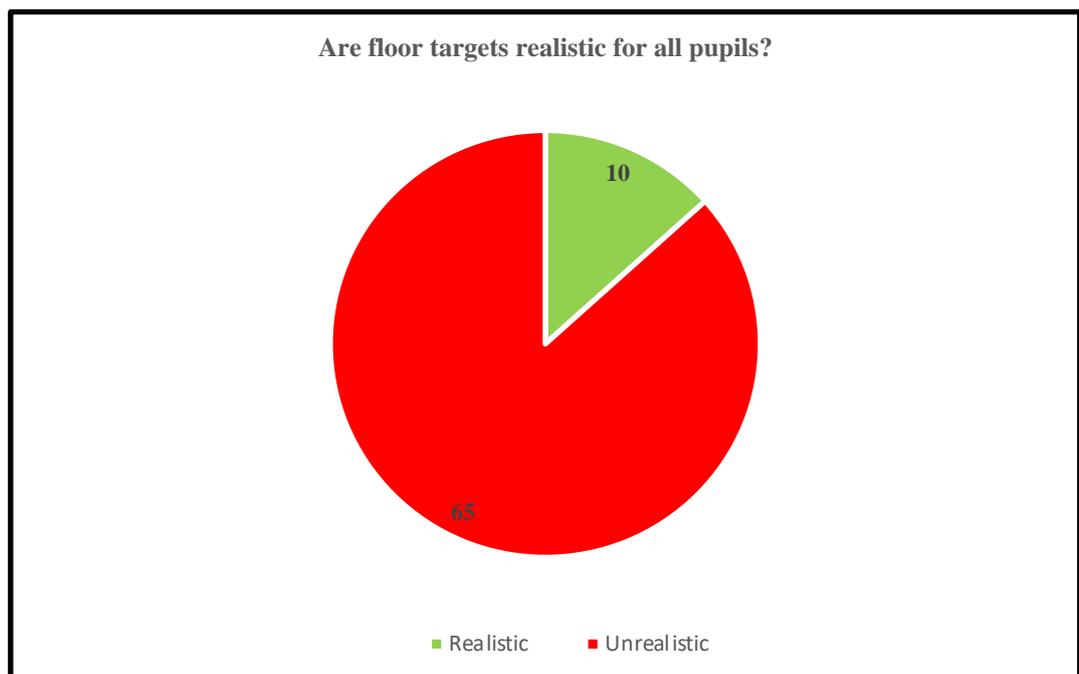
It may be no coincidence that in late 2014, subsequent to the publication of these reports, the head of Ofsted announced 'radical' proposals for change "... some of the most far-reaching education inspection reforms in the last quarter of a century ..." (Ofsted, 2014b) Following a consultation period which ended in December 2014, the proposals were implemented in September 2015. The proposal for shorter, more frequent nature of the inspections however, does not appear to address the issues of competence, distrust and preconceptions, amongst members of the teaching profession, surrounding Ofsted's inspectors.

### 8.1c: The transition from primary school to secondary education.

The survey identified that a majority of respondents agreed with a premise that a number of children enter secondary education with little prospect of reaching the 5 A\*-C benchmark at

GCSE level. Answers to the question “*In your view, is there a cohort of pupils for whom chances of reaching OFSTED levels of attainment or achievement is unrealistic?*” are represented in the pie chart below (figure 8.2).

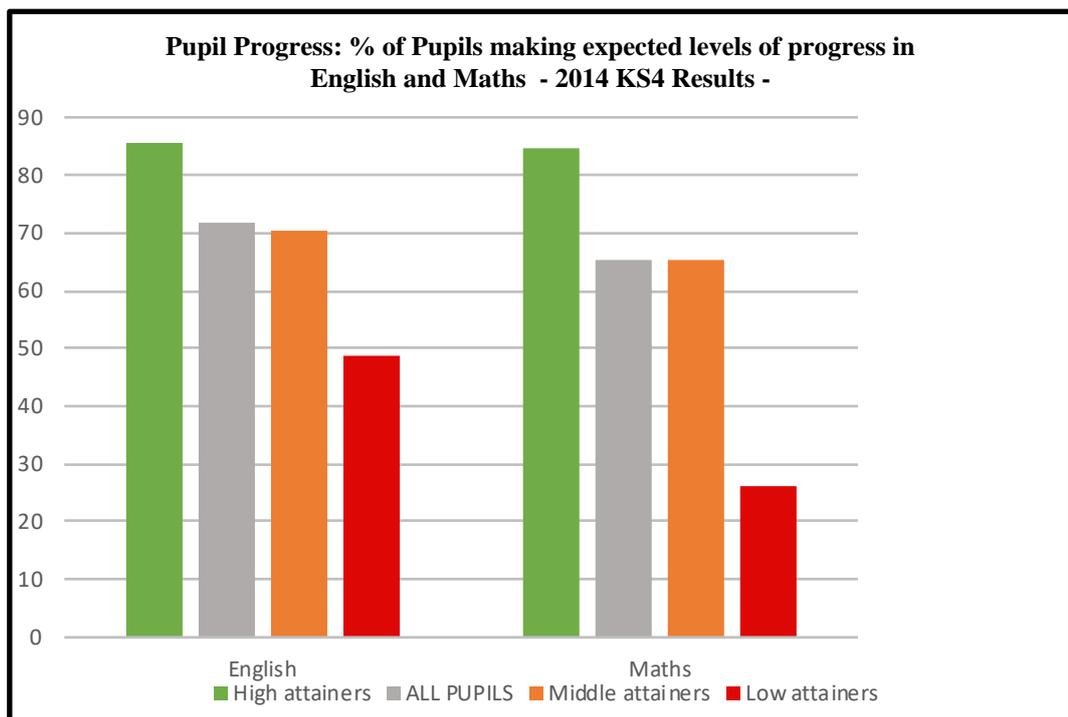
**Figure 8.2: Cohort of pupils for whom floor targets are unrealistic – professionals’ responses**



The statistics upon which this premise had been made were drawn from freely available school performance data from the Department for Education which year-on-year indicate that approximately 30% of all pupils do not reach their expected

levels of progress between KS2 and KS4. However, specifically relative to disadvantaged pupils this figure is somewhat skewed by the performance of higher attainers. When only measuring the performance of low attainers against expected levels of progress, many more pupils do not reach expectations. Analysis of the figures for 2014 (figure 8.3) tend to support this assertion.

**Figure 8.3: Pupils making expected progress – 2014 National returns.**



(Department for Education, 2014i).

According to survey respondents and as evidenced through the later interviews, many of the reasons for this disparity seem entrenched at the point pupils transition from primary school into secondary education.

*In my experience, if a child in the early years hasn't been taught properly then it makes it extremely difficult for the child and the teacher to help them catch up.*

(Teacher; Professional Interview 7, p4)

*If pupils take six years to get to level 3 they can't realistically get GCSE 'C' in less than five.*

(Teacher: Professional Interview 10, p2)

There also seems to be a disconnection at the transitional stage from primary to secondary education with a perception amongst a number of secondary school teachers, some at senior levels, that primary schools sometimes ‘fudge’ the KS2 SAT results to inflate their own performance data whilst also failing to declare pupils as having Special Educational Needs. This is often used as a smokescreen, it is thought, for the primary school failing to recognise at an early stage that an individual has particular additional requirements.

*Q: What factors can influence successful transitions from primary school into secondary education for children with low KS2 scores?*

*A: Unfortunately, there is not enough support and resources to enable this to happen. Much effective intervention would be needed.*

*Q: Such as?*

*A: We need smaller group sizes for these students to support them not classes of 20 plus.*

*Q: Anything else?*

*A: There are limited resources for support in the classroom and allocation of them seems largely to be on a - which parents shout loudest basis. I’ve often found that those who are in most need lack parents engaged enough in their education to be aware that there’s initially a problem but also that there are solutions available. We could support them if they engaged more and given the appropriate resources.*

*Q: What does that mean?*

*A: Many of the issues arise before the child even gets to us. Parents are often told by their primary schools that there isn’t a problem with their son or daughter and because it’s easier for them to believe that than challenge it, they accept it as true. Meanwhile, to keep their own scores up, some primary school staff are hiding the fact that the children are not reaching targets or simply not entering them in to KS2 tests, to manipulate their own figures.*

(Special Needs Co-Ordinator: Professional Interview 11, p5)

These ideas resonate strongly with themes that schools have a propensity to cheat on ‘high stakes’ testing as highlighted in academic studies and by the Channel 4

'Dispatches' investigation (Channel 4 TV, 2015). Interviewees in this study claimed to have 'evidence', although this was unsubstantiated at the time, that staff in primary schools were both inflating KS2 scores and/ or simply not testing a number of pupils deemed too hard to assess or incapable of reaching an appropriate KS2 level. This may simply be 'blame shifting' for which there is a significant corpus of academic study which cannot, logistically, be the focus of an examination in this thesis (though see, for example, Broomhead, (2013). The advantage in inflating KS2 scores for the primary school is that their overall performance figures are significantly improved. The disadvantage for the secondary school is that they have to assume responsibility for the incoming pupil, at whatever level their KS2 score is assessed. There is, therefore, a degree of reluctance in terms of integrating these pupils at this point as they are starting from a very low baseline. This had been articulated in an earlier interview with the deputy head teacher in school 3.

*Q: Why do they cheat?*

*A: Because they haven't done the necessary work with these children. It makes their figures look better if they bump up the scores or don't include those kids in their performance measures in the first place.*

*Q: Surely there is communication between the primary school and your school?*

*A: They don't care that they are simply passing the problem on to us, they just see it as moving the problem on from them.*

*Q: And you have no way of challenging this?*

*A: By age eleven many children's views of education are fixed. These low scores can mask factors such as poor attendance which are difficult to change after this age. I do not think this applies to all children with low scores but certainly it's true for most of those who we haven't been told the truth about*

(Deputy Head Teacher; Professional interview, 14, p.5).

Generally, a feeling existed that these pupils caused more problems for secondary school staff as they would require huge amounts of dedicated support to ‘catch up’.

Subsequent to these interviews taking place and so not in the public domain at the time, was a high profile incident reported in the local press in Birmingham which entirely supported the viewpoint offered. An experienced primary school head teacher and her equally experienced deputy at a school rated as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted were found to have exaggerated KS2 scores to enhance the performance figures returned to the DfE. Having been discovered and the breaches of process proven, both individuals have now been permanently disbarred from teaching at any level (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014).

It could be argued that the recent changes to the National Curriculum which relate to primary education have been made to put primary education under the same pressures to do well with their pupils that secondary educators have been feeling, through various inspection measures, for many years. The statistical evidence indicates that most pupils who are recognised as potential low attainers have been assigned that status on entry to secondary education (cfi Department for Education, 2014h). Whereas statistics can sometimes be misinterpreted, a number of interview respondents recognised this as an authentic issue in their own school environment:

It is unacceptable that after those crucial first six years that so many of them [pupils] are “low attainers”. This should now be a government top priority. The inability to devise an accurate non-invasive regular assessment regime for pupils in those first years so that pupils as they begin to slip can be given extra help to catch up is unacceptable.

(Deputy Head Teacher, Professional Interview 5, p6)

Rather than this being a government priority however, evidence from other interviews suggests that a number of secondary schools are having to informally exert ‘influence’ on the primary schools from which their year 7 intake is drawn although they frequently feel frustrated that they cannot develop wide-ranging connection strategies.

Secondary schools are now having to try to go in to primary schools to help pupils both prepare for secondary life but also to help try to reduce “low attainer” rates. In March, when we know the names of students joining us, pastoral staff visit feeder schools. Students in this category have a more intense and personalised induction. [...] If there were no constraints, we would be able to deliver more specialist teaching in our feeder schools. We already do some but it is constrained by finance and availability of staffing.

(Head Teacher Professional Interview 17, p4)

## **8.2: Government Policy.**

The relevance of the impact of government policies in the context of this thesis cannot be understated. As discussed earlier in this study, there is evidence to support an argument that much of policy is driven by the narration of a ‘crisis’ that educational standards continue to fall and as a consequence substantial changes are required. The exploration of the views amongst education professionals on points arising from the literature surrounding ‘flagship’ Coalition Government policies of Pupil Premium, changes to the means of KS4 assessment and the Free Schools and Academies agenda is extremely pertinent and in no small way, challenges the government discourse. These were issues which consistently arose through the literature, for example as highlighted in chapter 5 and were echoed to a large degree by respondents to the survey and throughout the interview stage of the fieldwork.

Specific issues arising from the literature included the amount of Pupil Premium funding, the way in which it was allocated and to whom, reforms to assessment criteria to include a 'value added' measure of progress and perceptions that the Free School programme was ideologically grounded. Certain of those themes repeated through the empirical study.

### **8.2a: Pupil Premium.**

The present system of funding allocation under Pupil Premium regulations allows schools to provide small group or individual tuition for intervention procedures. One such intervention is the 'Accelerated Reader' programme which is designed to 'catch back' the reading abilities of individual pupils using a reading package tailored specifically for the individual. (<http://www.renlearn.co.uk/accelerated-reader>). Nevertheless, the mechanism for allocating Pupil Premium – pupils who have taken a free school meal at any point in the previous six years - is somewhat arbitrary in identifying potential low attainers and, in some cases is not being used for its intended purpose.

A number of academic evaluations have been conducted on the effectiveness of Pupil Premium notably for the Department of Education (Carpenter et al, 2013), Ofsted (2013c) and by the Centre for Education Studies at the University of Warwick (Abbot et al, 2013). Abbott et al is particularly relevant to this thesis as it was commissioned by the Service Director of Birmingham Local Authority, which is geographically relevant to the schools investigated at the empirical stage of this thesis. The stated aims of the study were to establish how funding was used in schools; identify strategies which lead to positive improvement; identify a range of

initiatives; and make recommendations for future use of funding (Abbott et al, 2013). The study used data from schools which were classified as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted but which had more than 40% of pupils receiving pupil premium. The schools were not identified, however they were described as “... all serving deprived urban areas ...” (Abbott et al, 2013: 8). Regardless of the authors’ description, this could have been assumed given that the level of pupil premium received by schools is an indicator of disadvantage locally. The report identified an absolute commitment to use the additional funding to reinforce values, which were broadly similar across the schools.

- There should be a focus on the highest possible achievement for every single child
- That achievement is valuable in itself not just for being ‘good at schoolwork’

A significant finding of the report was that:

Of particular importance to all the schools visited was the conviction that the Premium money was to be used to support all pupils who needed support for raising achievement, regardless of whether they technically qualified or not. This argument was especially strongly held in those schools where a huge majority of pupils (over 75%) were FSM.

(Abbott et al, 2013: 8)

The study identified that research by Carpenter et al (2013) had concluded that it was unhelpful or impractical to differentiate between Pupil Premium pupils and others and that this should be noted by Ofsted.

Analysis of Pupil Premium allocation in each of the case study schools supports this strategy and although it should be recognised that some of this funding was targeted at an individual level, funding in school 1 was spent under generic headings which

is more suggestive of collective support rather than targeted support for those pupils who attract the premium payment.

**Table 8.2: Pupil Premium allocation in £s, in school 1 – 2014.**

• Staffing Costs (Teaching)	£184,993
• Staffing (Support Staff)	£232,879
• Support for Learning additional staffing (small groups and 1:1 sessions)	£45,465
• Intervention Session Costs	£35,000
• Inclusion/Mentoring Support & Activities	£10,840
• Support for Extra Curricular Activities/Resources	£73,406
• Alternative Curriculum	£25,000
• Special Project contribution	£64,000

This allocation of pupil premium funding may well be the best for that school in the opinion of its senior leaders, however an interviewee from that school in a non-leadership role raised a pertinent issue in respect to one-to-one tuition:

*Q: Will Pupil Premium make a difference to the way you do things?*

*A: Yes, pupil premium will make a difference but the school has to use it in a wise and targeted way if **the student** is to benefit. For example, why not use it to provide one to one tuition for the student? This would be in keeping with the original reason for introducing it.*

*Q: Is that not how it is being spent currently?*

*A: Not entirely I don't think. Instead, I think at the moment a number of schools including ours simply use it on a block basis to plug holes in their budgets. The way in which it is spent needs to be a bit more transparent and **completely targeted** towards the pupils it is designed to help.*

(Head teacher; Professional interview 16, p.3: emphasis indicated by interviewee)

This relies on some interpretation of the 'intent' of how money is spent. With certain caveats, interviewees were accepting that in their experience, the pupil premium is often being spent effectively and discernible results can be evidenced.

However, a particular issue arises for any investigation of potential impacts of pupil

premium on outcomes, on a comparative basis across schools. Each school has its own classification system of how it regards pupil premium support. Although similarities are evident, the ways in which each school articulates its priorities have significant differences. As an indication, the key objectives in spending pupil premium for each school, in 2014/2015, are shown in the table below.

**Table 8.3: Case study schools' allocation of pupil premium.**

<b>SCHOOL 1</b>	<b>SCHOOL 2</b>	<b>SCHOOL 3</b>
<b>Eligible for PP = 600/1169 (51%)</b>	<b>Eligible for PP = 220/683 (32%)</b>	<b>Eligible for PP = 110/846 (13%)</b>
Teaching support staff (Y7 pupils KS2 score <4)	Excellent performance in KS4 English and maths	Attendance support (PP pupils only)
Interventions/ SEN support (PP pupils - whole school)	Raise attainment of abler pupils	Additional English teaching (targeted)
Enrichment/ Extra-curricular activities	Improve attendance	Additional maths (targeted)
Peripatetic music (whole school)	Improve standards of teaching and learning (whole school)	Learning support Y7 & Y8
Support staff (targeted support using TAs)	Equal opportunities for disadvantaged pupils (extracurricular activities etc.)	Enrichment activities
Teaching and Learning Development (underperforming pupils – whole school)	Support disadvantaged in academic progress	Educational Psychiatrist (PP pupils)
Self-Assessed learning (individual – focus on improving attainment)	Alternative provision for disadvantaged pupils	Alternative curriculum (KS4 pupils only)
Careers guidance (All KS4)		Curriculum support course
Communication/ performance (e.g. LAMDA)		Progress tracking
Behavioural support & Ed Psych (targeted-specific)		Other activities (e.g. Saturday school)
Pastoral/ pupil support		
Other activities (unspecified – whole school)		

In a number of interviews across the three case study schools, possibly attributable to the way in which spending was articulated, the distribution of pupil premium was described as leaving ‘room for improvement’ in the way it is allocated within the school. Most notably these concerns arose where pupil premium was being spent using strategies where funds were allocated using a ‘whole school’ or ‘whole year group’ strategy and not exclusively for the individual attracting the premium payment. Using the pupil premium for individual or as a compromise, small group intervention, was the preferred method for a number of teachers interviewed, exemplified by the following exchange:

*Q: How is pupil premium being spent in your school?*

*A: There is one to one intervention for pupils in English and maths. There is also discussion of introducing Saturday and/ or summer holiday classes.*

*Q: Do you think that’s the best way to use the money?*

*A: On balance, yes. We also have one to one interventions in a few other subjects, or small group working with teachers for a short time where they are taken out of their normal classes during the school day and supported with Teaching Assistants.*

(Teacher, professional interview 15)

It remains the case, however, that under DfE guidelines on Pupil Premium spending, school leaders are permitted to allocate funds entirely at their own discretion and in whatever way they think is appropriate in their school setting.

The grant may be spent by maintained schools for the purposes of the school; that is to say for the educational benefit of pupils registered at that school, or for the benefit of pupils registered at other maintained schools; and on community facilities, for example services whose provision furthers any charitable purpose for the benefit of pupils at the school or their families, or people who live or work in the locality in which the school is situated.

(Department for Education, 2013b; 6)

This is entirely in keeping with the findings of the 2013 Ofsted report which identified, very early in the report, that schools which were successfully spending Pupil Premium funding to increase achievement “... carefully ring fenced the funding so that they always spent it on the target *group* of pupils ...” (Ofsted, 2013c: 3. Emphasis added). Nevertheless, it appears at odds with the government’s own policy paper of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 which was clear in stating that pupil premium should only be used for the benefit of disadvantaged pupils (Department for Education, 2015.)

Whether this is a positive approach for those pupils who do not reach KS2 benchmarks is questionable. *Prima facie* using Pupil Premium to target groups rather than individuals would seem to disadvantage the individual as their funding is significantly diluted. Significantly more analysis would be needed than it has been possible to achieve in this thesis to prove, or disprove this supposition. It is theoretically possible, using the National Pupil Database, to track pupils through the KS2 to KS4 transition by name and therefore those whom attract Pupil Premium. A number of other factors would need to be built in to the methodology however not the least because not all Pupil Premium students will ‘fail’ and not all of those who will ‘fail’ attract Pupil Premium.

### **8.2b: Progress measures – changes to assessment criteria.**

Proposed changes to the system by which schools and individual pupils are measured at KS4 will mean that the current ‘gold standard’ of five A\*-C passes will be replaced by a more equitable assessment which includes the best eight results at GCSE. Whilst this broadening of assessment criteria was largely welcomed by

respondents to the survey and interviewees, caveats were introduced by several of the education professionals during interview, who highlighted that the government was being overly prescriptive in the subjects that could be included in the new measure; for example:

*If BTEC and other such courses are limited in the Best 8 then these students will be further disadvantaged as the content at GCSE will be above them.*

(Teacher; Professional Interview 10, p6)

Consequently, it was felt that pupils identified as low attainers would derive no benefit from the change. To a large degree BTECs and other vocational qualifications will not be accepted in the Progress 8 curriculum and, as has been articulated elsewhere in this chapter, these are often the qualifications that low attaining pupils most rely upon as indicators of their performance. Knowledge of the proposed shift in focus from 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE to the Progress 8/ Attainment 8 measure was scant in each of the schools. There was a clear disconnection between what Head Teachers and their Senior Managers knew and what had been shared with the corpus of teaching staff and most particularly with Teaching Assistants.

*Q: Are you aware of any proposals or imminent changes to the way in which pupils' progress is measured at KS4, for example Best 8?*

*A: I know about the change to Progress 8, or Best 8 as you have described it but you would be hard pressed to find anyone amongst the teaching staff generally who could explain what it means.*

*Q: Why is that?*

*A: The Head has decided not to share the information yet as he thinks it would just be too confusing. It's a real problem for the TAs [Teaching Assistants] as they are the people who tend to work most closely with the children involved.*

(Deputy Head Teacher; Professional Interview 14, p.3)

This viewpoint was tested by asking a similar question of a Teaching Assistant who was not from the same school. She responded by stating that she had an awareness of proposals to reform some elements of the process but was candid in her admission that she had no real idea what was really happening.

*Q: What do you know about the Best 8 proposal?*

*A: Nothing. What is it? I have heard something about a change in the way kids are measured at their GCSEs but I'm not sure what it is that's happening.*

*Q: It's a proposal to replace the GCSE measure with a different measure which includes results from a pupil's best 8 subjects at GCSE. You haven't heard about it?*

*A: I know something is coming but we have our own common room and our immediate boss is the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) and a Deputy Head Teacher. We rely on her to pass down any information that will affect how we do our job.*

(Teacher/ SEN Officer; Professional Interview 8, p.1)

In general terms, a series of concerns existed that information was not being disseminated in a timely fashion, from Senior Managers down to front-line practitioners. Throughout the interviews there was genuine belief that a change in the way in which both school and pupil were measured at GCSE level was needed and inevitable. There was some disillusionment at an inappropriate lack of co-ordination of the information held by Senior Management.

### **8.2c: Free Schools and Academies.**

Evidence from within the literature base throughout chapters 5 and 6 above indicates that education professionals have a very mixed opinion of the Free Schools and Academies programme. Higham (2014) squarely locates free schools and academy

structures in pathways towards privatisation and autonomy, a trajectory which Kitchener (2013) described as ‘insidious’. Whereas, the Wolf report of 2011 and the insistence within it that the free school ‘project’ would increase standards, is opposed by the National Union of Teachers 2015 announcements that there had been no determinable evidence to suggest that this was the case (Wolf, 2011; National Union of Teachers, 2015). Similarly, Wormald (2014) argues that the concept is grounded in a desire to increase standards, whilst Connelly et al, (2014) argue there is no clear evidence that standards increase in those schools which have already converted. This disparity was also highlighted particularly by survey respondents and interviewees, for example from the Head Teacher of a secondary school with full managerial responsibilities and a teacher with no real managerial responsibilities:

*Q: Why do schools opt to become Academies?*

*A: Schools tend to apply for and adopt Academy status for purely financial reasons as the protection of existing budgets is paramount.*

*Q: Is that the case for your school too?*

*A: Yes. We need to protect what we already have. In applying for Academy status we know, deep down, that further along the line detrimental effects will almost certainly be felt by those schools remaining in local authority control in the quality and nature of the staff they can attract and the type of pupil they will have to accept. It's like a race to the bottom for them but a means of staying afloat for us.*

(Head Teacher; Professional interview 17, p.6)

Perhaps a more balanced but not for entirely altruistic reasons it seems:

*Q: Why do schools opt to become Academies?*

*A: I'm for anything that improves outcomes for our students. I read some research the other day that suggests that schools that convert to Academies benefit from a better intake of students and so experience better results in pupil performance...*

(Teacher; Professional interview 10, p.4)

As expected, the Free Schools issue was extremely divisive amongst teaching professionals, again, as evidenced by the body of opinion throughout the literature from academia and more generally.

*Q: What do you think of the Free School Agenda?*

*A: I am retiring shortly and am getting involved in setting up a Free School, an affiliate of six mainstream schools, on the basis that it will take in the majority of disadvantaged children in the area, absorbing them from those six schools so that we can give them a different offer.*

*Q: How do you think that will help at risk pupils?*

*A: As we are not bound by the National Curriculum, we can tailor-make our offer almost on an individual by individual foundation.*

*Q: How will your new school be funded?*

*A: We will be taking funding from the other schools but it is money that they will no longer have to spend on their most needy children. We are convinced that this will work and that it will benefit the children.*

*Q: What effect will this have on the other schools?*

*A: They will be able to concentrate on their most able pupils and deliver a better education experience for them.*

*Q: So, you will in effect be a pupil referral unit?*

*A: That's not the intention but I suppose that's one way you could look at it. I would prefer it to be recognised as an establishment of alternative provision, tailored completely towards the needs of individual pupils. By having the time and resources necessary to engage them in the process. Mainstream schools just don't have that capability.*

(Head Teacher; Professional interview 16, p8).

Very much in accord with supporters of the Free Schools agenda, this response maintains that setting a new pedagogy allows for students, within reason, to become involved in setting their own agenda and so become immediately engaged through co-ownership of their school processes.

Specifically, in terms of what Free Schools and Academies can offer to low attaining pupils, a number of the professionals who expressed views through survey responses and the interviews argued that these schools do not universally offer anything that maintained schools could not, given the same freedoms. However, there was a real recognition that the funding status and ability to vary their curriculum put Free Schools and Academies in a ‘much better place’ than schools which remain under LA governance. Other freedoms for Free Schools and Academies such as term times, longer days and the opportunity to engage staff on better terms and conditions than maintained schools, were also seen as advantageous.

### **8.3: Policy Implementation.**

This thesis addresses the apparent disparity between students who enter secondary school with excellent prospects and those who enter with little opportunity to reach floor standards. When asked during the survey and subsequent interviews, for their own opinions on strategies to improve outcomes for those pupils, many respondents also identified these themes as issues of policy which would drive the changes needed. There were however some notable departures from the predominant policy discourse with some respondents specifically describing approaches which had not previously featured in the literature. Examples included additional training for mainstream practitioners, thus equipping them with the same detailed skill set as their colleagues in Special Needs Departments to deal with low-achieving pupils; one-to-one tuition or small group classes and as argued by one senior teacher:

*For them to be removed from the school statistics so schools don't feel they need to force them into the standard schedule.*

(Deputy Head Teacher; Professional Interview 14, p.6)

Each of these may have merit although, certainly in the case argued by the Deputy Head Teacher, removal of the disconnected minority from school statistics could lead to the complete isolation of that cohort which is possibly not his intent but may be an unintended consequence.

This is important as whether effective use of Pupil Premium, the changes to introduce a new attainment benchmark or the founding of a Free School is the focus of change, it places school staff central to changes required by the policy implementation process. Consequent risks are involved where staff are resistant to change, as evidenced by the opinions of a member of teaching staff at school 2:

*Q: How would you describe your organisation's attitudes to the policy changes which would be needed to reduce disparity in attainment?*

*A: There are some people at the top who are a bit resistant to any changes at present.*

*Q: Why do you think that is?*

*A: Any number of reasons. Too many changes keep being pushed through without being thought out first.*

*Q: What about other teachers; those who aren't 'at the top'?*

*A: Many of them resist because it will usually increase the workload and is too challenging. Others have been in education a long time and have seen initiatives come and go without much success. Some just think that the changes won't provide the best education for the students.*

(Teacher; Professional interview 7, pp5-6)

Further into the interview, the same teacher offered several additional views on the way in which the disconnected minority may be viewed within an element of the teaching profession.

*Q: So, what can be done to help the cohort of pupils who don't seem to have a decent chance from the outset of getting any qualifications; those that I am calling the disconnected minority?*

*A: We continue to do our best by these pupils within the existing structures. Parental engagement and support [...ing their] development is key as is an overhaul of the current care system for young carers (this should not be allowed) and a look critically at educational outcomes for those in children's homes – **without beating up schools** which are powerless to deal with these issues effectively.*

(ibid. p8, emphasis added).

I have added emphasis to the latter part of this response as it articulates in the words of one teacher a feeling which was evident throughout the interviews, that many teachers feel threatened by the regulatory framework. The sense of the teaching profession being 'beaten up' by government is entirely consistent with the discourse of a power-elite and a conflict perspective from which this thesis is argued.

As seen in chapter 6 a sense of context-dependency may be argued in assessing pupils' success at the end of Key Stage 4. Explicit in that context dependency is the recognition of the part that parents play in the education of their children, the environment within which the child is located and the support that the current system is able to give in a practical sense. A large body of academic work exists which supports this concept of cultural capital and its effect on educational outcomes (cf. Dumais, 2002; Perry and Francis, 2010; Lenton, 2013; Milburn, 2014). In recognising this context dependency, three of the criteria are identified. Each of these needs to be considered when policy, to help address the disparity in attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils, is being developed. The three criteria are analysed and conceptualised here to be: -

(i) To ensure that schools in disadvantaged areas are better resourced than those in other areas.

(ii) That specific programmes and interventions are funded.

(iii) That the funding they attract makes pupils identified as 'Ever6' (pupils who have received free school meals at any point in the previous 6 years) attractive to schools, rather than seen as individuals who should not be included in school statistics.

I argue that it is implicit within point (ii) that funding should be made available for alternative provision, interventions and programmes which are delivered in the main by informal or third-party organisations such as those identified through chapter 6.3 and termed 'classrooms without walls'. A number of these are viewed through the lens of education professionals in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 9:** **ARTICULATIONS OF THE POTENTIAL FOR AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**

Broadly, this chapter contrasts with chapter 8, which was largely orientated around policy and policy implementation, by exploring educators' views which relate to alternative constructions of successful transitions from KS2 through to KS4 but which have an indiscernible relationship with government policy. These are important in the context of the overarching research question as they may provide signposts towards an alternative mechanism of measuring those transitions. The chapter also discusses contextual barriers which might prevent a pupil from 'succeeding' at school, such as recognised indicators of disadvantage.

The chapter continues with two short sections the first of which reveals how professionals view a polarised debate around qualifications versus skills, where the argument locates in what should be taught at school and what preferred outcomes should be. The concluding section discusses mechanisms of alternative provision, how some of these fit within and outwith the school curriculum and how they offer the potential to improve outcomes holistically through enrichment activities.

Each of these themes seem fundamental to understanding how educational outcomes, which are not solely grounded in academic competence, can be improved for pupils identified as low performers before they enter the system of secondary schooling.

### 9.1: Constructs of “success”.

Freely available evidence shows that progress is being made in results-based outcomes. Nevertheless, school performance data indicate that year-on-year a sizeable proportion of school leavers in the State sector exit the secondary education system without reaching the government benchmark of 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE (including English and Maths).

2010 – 44.9%

2011 – 41.8%

2012 – 41.2%

2013 – 39.4%

(Department for Education, 2014b).

The survey, however, highlighted that the perception of achievement was as a multi-faceted concept; one which as a consequence defies discrete definition and which should, it seems, measure outcomes which recognise the diverse starting points of individual pupils. This was clearly articulated by the following survey response:

*I think the definition of ‘achievement’ varies from pupil to pupil. For some it is an achievement to keep them in the mainstream until the age of 16. Some of my friends have done perfectly well without any GCSEs because they are hardworking and have good social skills. GCSEs do have a place and are still a good way of measuring some level of success, as they do tend to sort the ‘wheat from the chaff’ although they HAVE definitely got easier and no longer represent sufficient subject knowledge in a lot of areas of the curriculum.*

(Male, Acting Deputy Head teacher, 45-54)

Over time, a number of government policies have been implemented and ‘initiatives’ suggested, in an attempt to address this concern. Other policies *prima facie* employed to raise standards generally, have effectively only realised an increase in

outcomes for the ablest pupils and in so doing re-enforced the disparity between the most and the least able.

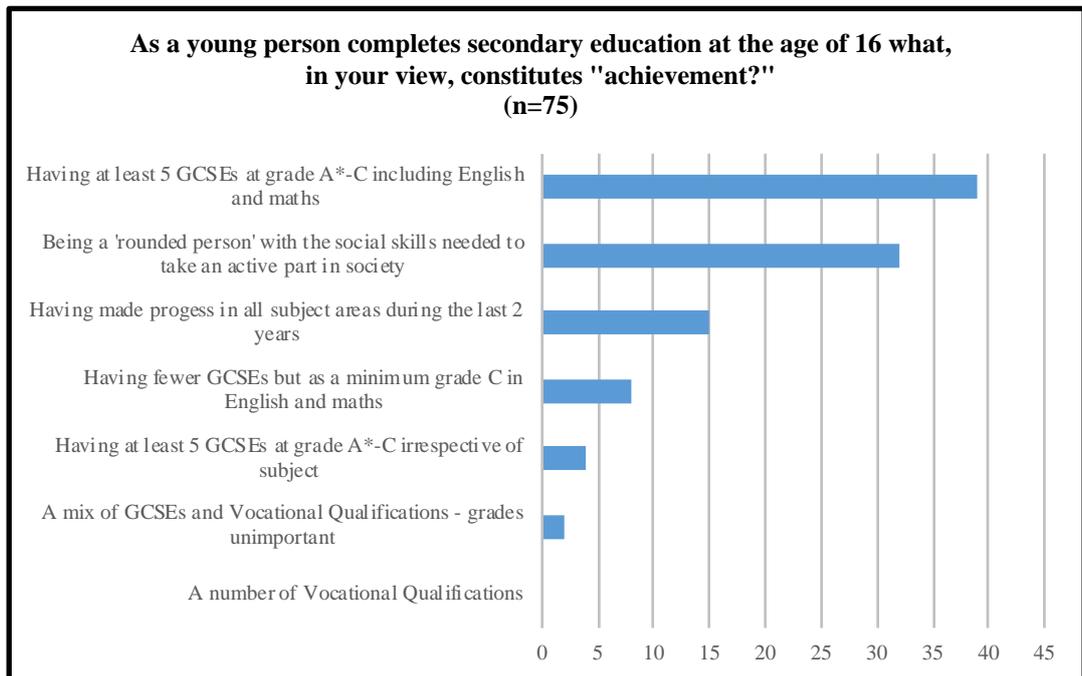
What then, represents a positive transition through the secondary school process and can therefore be considered to be “success” at the end of KS4 given that year-on-year, by the government’s own published figures, approximately 60% of pupils do not reach the benchmarked level? During his interview, one respondent described the following scenario:

*That’s the real problem with education, what do you value? Many educators will tell you that there is a real need to make sure that their pupils have a well-rounded education which includes getting them to understand a sense of right and wrong, the importance of caring and ideas of charity, together with the rationale for healthy eating and keeping fit. Having said all that, education is now, pretty much without exception, measured by results in exams and where a school ends up in the league tables. So what do we value?*

(Male, Assistant Head Teacher, 55-65)

His view strongly supported the results from a survey question on this topic which asked: “*As a young person completes secondary education at the age of 16 what, in your view, constitutes "achievement?"*” Which are represented in figure 9.1 on the following page.

**Figure 9.1: Survey respondents constructs of “achievement”.**



It is evident from the literature that the predominant justification for the emphasis on ‘results’ is the optimism that high levels of qualifications result in positive employment opportunities (Marples, 2010; Winch, 2013). This rationalisation consequently provides the foundation for the preferred government criteria of five A\*-C grades at GCSE, including English and maths which, although other articulations were made, was the predominant view of achievement throughout survey responses. Amongst those who completed the survey, 38% were in accord with the concept that five A\*-C GCSEs should be construed as ‘achievement’. Nevertheless, it is a corollary that over 60% of respondents disagreed that the government’s preferred measure should be the arbiter of success with, for example, more than 30% of respondents believing in the importance of being a ‘rounded individual’.

A 'rounded person' however was interpreted in a number of ways by survey respondents, each aligning the concept with notions of academic success including: -

*"...My definition of being a 'rounded person' would include **basic abilities** in English and maths..."*

(Male, teacher, 55-65, emphasis added)

*"...Being a 'rounded person' in reality means achieving 5 GCSEs..."*

(Female, Learning Support Manager, 45-54).

It could therefore be argued that being a 'rounded person' of necessity, needs to include some level of academic prowess. Specifically, the ability to read, write and count should be considered essential. In the school environment, attempts to achieve this balance often appear in terms of "enrichment" activities. For example, the ethos of Wellington Academy referred to in an earlier chapter is based on eight 'aptitudes' of which only two relate directly to academic performance:

- Linguistic and Logical
- Social and Personal
- Cultural and Physical
- Moral and Spiritual

The school describes these in the following manner:

The eight aptitudes model, as developed at Wellington College, is based on the multiple intelligence theory of Howard Gardner, Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA. It can be summed up in the quote: "Don't ask how intelligent your child is: ask in what way are they intelligent?"

(Wellington Academy, 2014)

It could be argued that the Wellington School ethos does not however strictly follow a concept of ‘asking in which way they are intelligent’. By including elements of academic prowess, those of linguistic and logical aptitude (assumed here to relate to English and maths skills), those pupils entering the secondary school system at KS2 for whom predictions are that GCSE floor levels are not achievable, remain significantly disadvantaged as their KS 2 tests are predominantly based in those subject areas.

### **9.2: Contextual barriers to success.**

Studies by Higham (2014) and Milburn (2014) are amongst a corpus of literature which provides evidence that that a number of contextual barriers exist for a marginalised cohort of pupils. Results from the online survey conducted for this thesis resonate with this evidence and argue that these contextual barriers need to be regarded when educational performance is measured. Some professionals reason that for some of this marginalised cohort, merely navigating the secondary education process should be considered as a representation of success

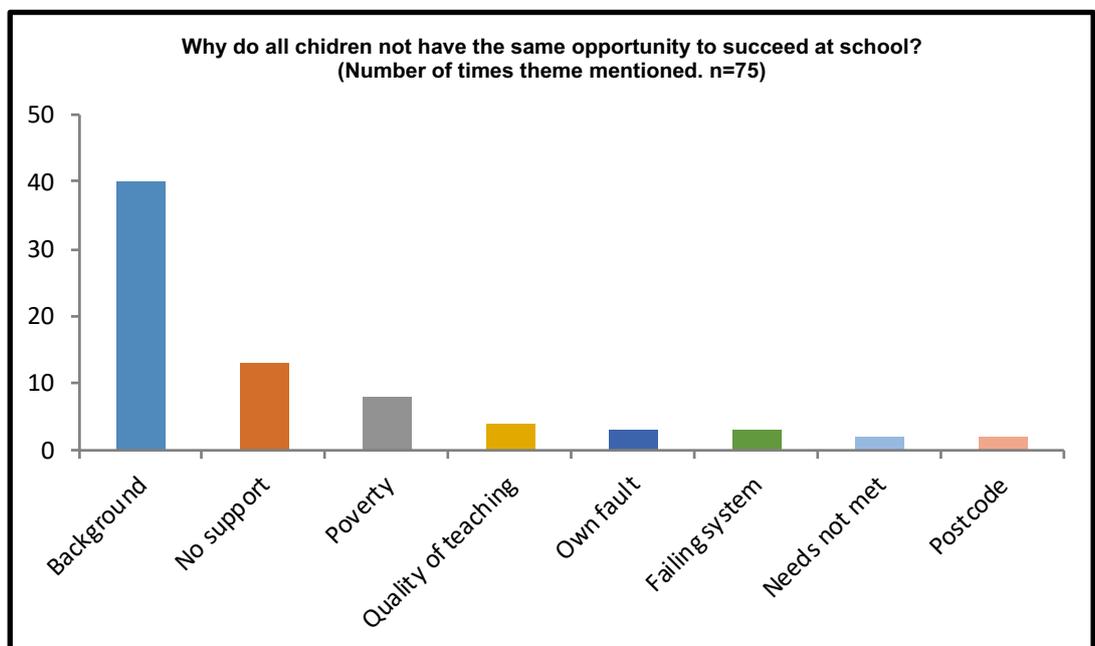
*“... For some it is an achievement to keep them in mainstream education until the age of 16 ...”*

(Male, Acting Deputy Head teacher, 45-54).

Also evident through the literature are a number of problems which can be held to be obstacles to learning and achievement of a pupil’s proper potential. Many of these are axiomatic such as family background and material inequalities as

identified by measures of deprivation and for which a large body of analysis exists in government and academia. Results from the survey confirmed that themes from the literature were relevant to pupils’ individual environment. In response to the survey question “Do all children have the same opportunity to succeed at school?” over 80% of respondents believed that they did not. When asked to expand on their answer, their rationale for making such a statement were varied, as represented in the figure 9.2 below.

**Figure 9.2: Opportunity for all pupils to succeed at school.**



Examples of respondents’ rationale included:

“...Family **background**, economic **circumstances**, **poverty**, locality...”

(Teacher, Male, 45-54, emphasis added).

“...**Lack of support** from home...”

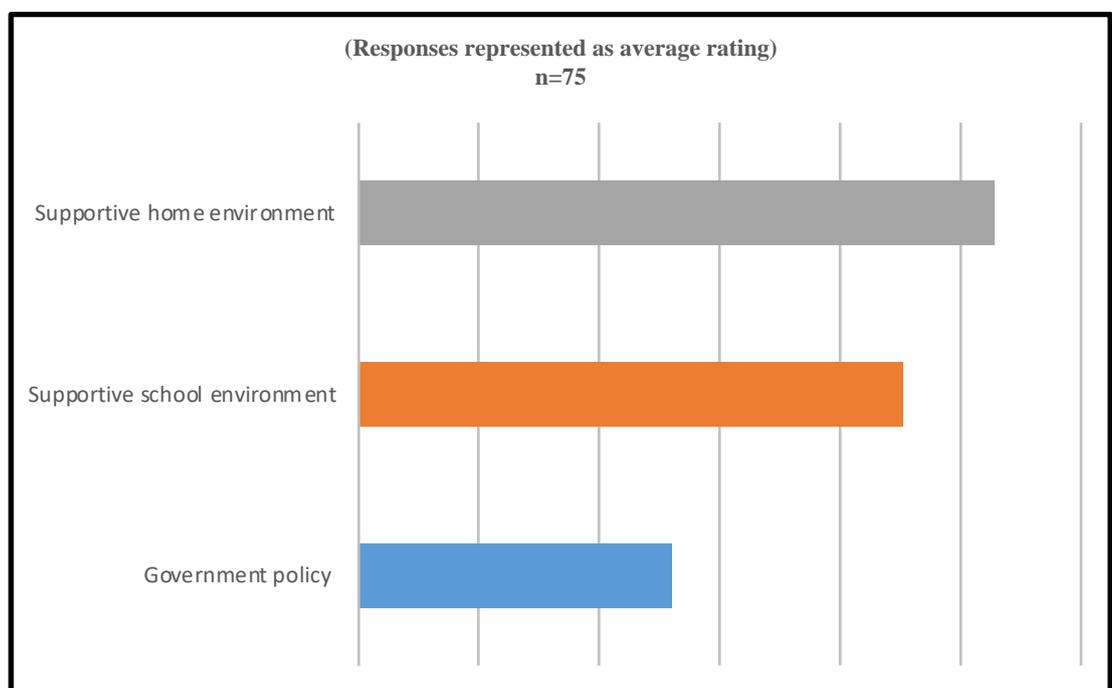
(Deputy Head teacher, Female, 25-34).

*“...Low expectation, lack of support and lack of personalised approach to learning and young person’s learning style...”*

(Special Needs Co-ordinator, Female, 45-54).

A lack of support from home was a principal theme in responses which related to a child’s background and it is clear from opinion throughout the literature, that however a determination of success is made, any young person needs a supportive home environment in order to flourish. Equally however by using a rating scale developed from responses to a question concerning what most affects the ability to succeed’, it was possible to determine that school environment was also of particular importance. The ‘top 3’ issues arising from the rating scale based on survey responses were:

**Figure 9.3: Influences on pupils’ ability to ‘succeed’ – Top 3 issues.**



Amongst a small number of noteworthy themes which had not previously been articulated in responses to previous questions, was the notion of ‘peer pressure’. This principle was so strong that although it did not register as a discrete issue in overall responses of ‘supportive school environment’, it nonetheless appeared in a substantial majority, over 80%, of the supplementary responses in that category and was largely recognisable as having a detrimental influence on a pupil’s behaviour.

*“...Trying to fit in and make friends, which sometimes can cause individuals to make wrong social choices...”*

(Higher Level Teaching Assistant, Female, 45-54)

*“...The influence of other children...”*

(Teacher, Female, 35-44).

*I believe that when children enter Secondary School they can be affected by the behaviours and values of others, and in an attempt to ‘fit in’ they may adopt different standards to those they were brought up to value.*

(Teacher, Head of Department, Female, 45-54)

The notion of peer pressure on levels of academic attainment is a well-researched area in academia, where a consensus appears to have been reached that negative effects arise from poor peer behaviour, especially at the lower end of the ability scale (c.f. van Ewijk and Slegers, 2010; Lavy et al, 2012). As was argued in chapter 4 the social interactions which determine the attitude of pupils to the system in which they are located, the behaviours they exhibit and the relationships between themselves and their teachers (that is, the labels they attach to themselves and which are attached to them by others) is therefore an important consideration. In many schools, self-

evaluation tools such as Pupils' Attitudes to School and Self (PASS) are used to determine how these relationships affect pupil wellbeing.

For an indicative evaluation, one of the schools granted access to PASS results from a previous year for the purposes of this survey. In PASS, pupils are required to self-assess against a variety of headings such as: -

- 'Working hard in school will help me in the future';
- 'My teachers expect me to work hard';
- 'When I'm given new work to do I feel confident that I can achieve it'.
- 'I am lonely at school'
- 'I behave well in class'

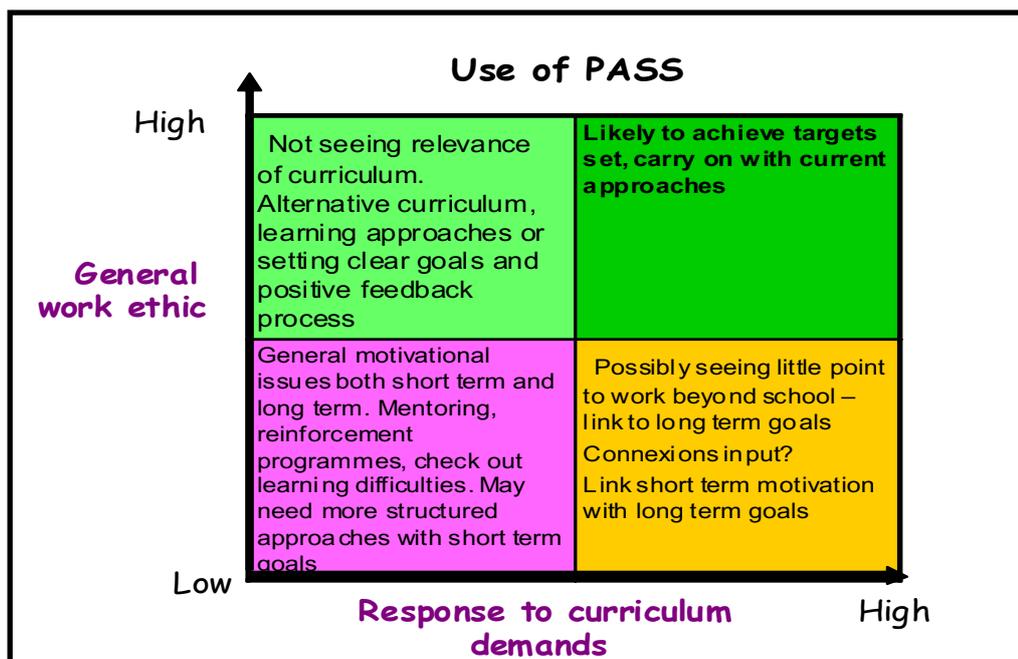
PASS results for the school in question indicate that overall, pupils in Key Stage 4 at this school, approaching GCSE examinations or final BTEC assessments, responded well to the school curriculum and have a good work ethic. This replicated over a five-year period and is considered 'significantly positive' by the external assessment company which delivers and analyses the report (W3 Insights, 2010). The work of this commercial company is founded on a body of academic research which sets out a framework for asking for pupils' attitudes towards school and the relationships, between pupils and teachers and although less positive about the results of such assessments, there exists a broad consensus of a positive trend in educational outcomes (cf. Humphrey et al, 2010; Ireson and Hallam, 2011; Banerjee et al, 2013). This consensus appears to be supported by one teacher who, in a free-field choice during the survey responded:

*I think the ethos of a school has a huge role to play in a child's experience of education. I have come across many pupils who live in challenging circumstances but, with much help from school, go on to achieve and become rounded individuals.*

(Teacher, Male, 45-54)

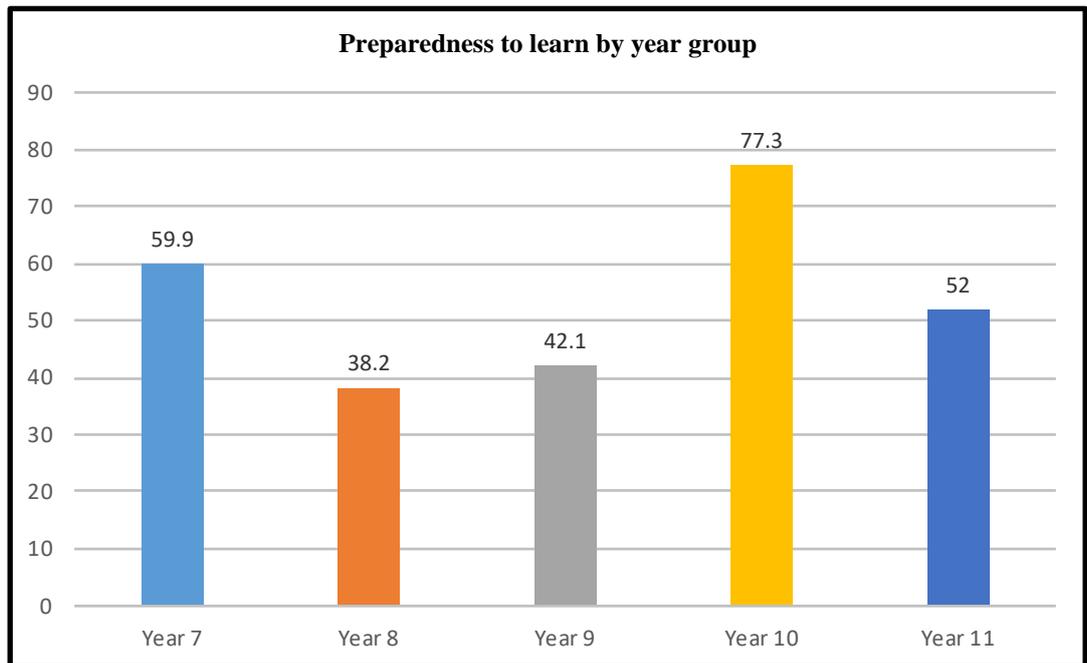
Although there is no *direct* correlation to these questions and the perception of achievement, it can be argued that these pupils are expressing some judgement on the way they feel and interact with the school process and each other. Similarly, by using PASS, or similar systems, it can be determined that pupils have a low work ethic combined with poor response to the demands of the curriculum. In these instances, they are individually identified and flagged on an ‘at risk’ register where interventions, individual programmes of work, motivational techniques and other tools for improvement can be developed. For example, as represented by W3 insights in the matrix, figure 9.4, below: -

**Figure 9.4: W3 Insights model – Pupils’ Attitude to School and Self (PASS).**



Amongst the most expressive of the results arising from the indicative PASS emanates from the “Preparedness for Learning” section which is designed to indicate pupils’ feelings about their own ability to learn.

**Figure 9.5: School 1 PASS results 2013 – Pupils’ Preparedness to Learn.**



This indicates that, for whatever reason, large numbers of pupils across the spectrum of the school cohort do not have the self-assurance to learn and as indicated by the graph above, there was a marked decrease in the percentage of pupils from year 10 into year 11 which, in some of the school data, was attributed to anxiety at impending examinations and a sudden realisation that they are nearing the end of their secondary school experience. This concept of ‘preparedness to learn’, was further explored during the interview stage of this research. It became apparent that anxiety and the end of schooling were not the only factors which affected pupils, as evidenced in the following interview exchange:

*Q: The school PASS results suggest that pupils think they are not 'ready' to learn. Why do you think that is?*

*A: Students are not taught by their parents to listen to and respect their elders. They have short attention spans and so time in lessons has to be spent entertaining them, not teaching them.*

*Q: So you're suggesting that all the time pupils spend in class lessons used is not used wholly for effective subject teaching?*

*A: Some days individual pupils are more or less receptive to learning. Schools have to aim to maximise teaching and learning to ensure they are doing all that is humanly possible.*

*Q: What do you mean by that, have you any examples?*

*A: Yes, here's an example. For some children diet – whether they have eaten this morning, or even last night - can be a problem to their receptiveness and ability to concentrate on learning. Some schools have made long strides on improving meals at lunchtime and probably more importantly offer a free breakfast club to ensure all pupils begin the day "prepared".*

*Q: Anything else?*

*A: There are loads of other examples. Another problem for some is how long they stayed awake last night playing on their X Box. We can't do anything about that but it certainly affects whether a child is properly prepared to learn on a day-to-day basis.*

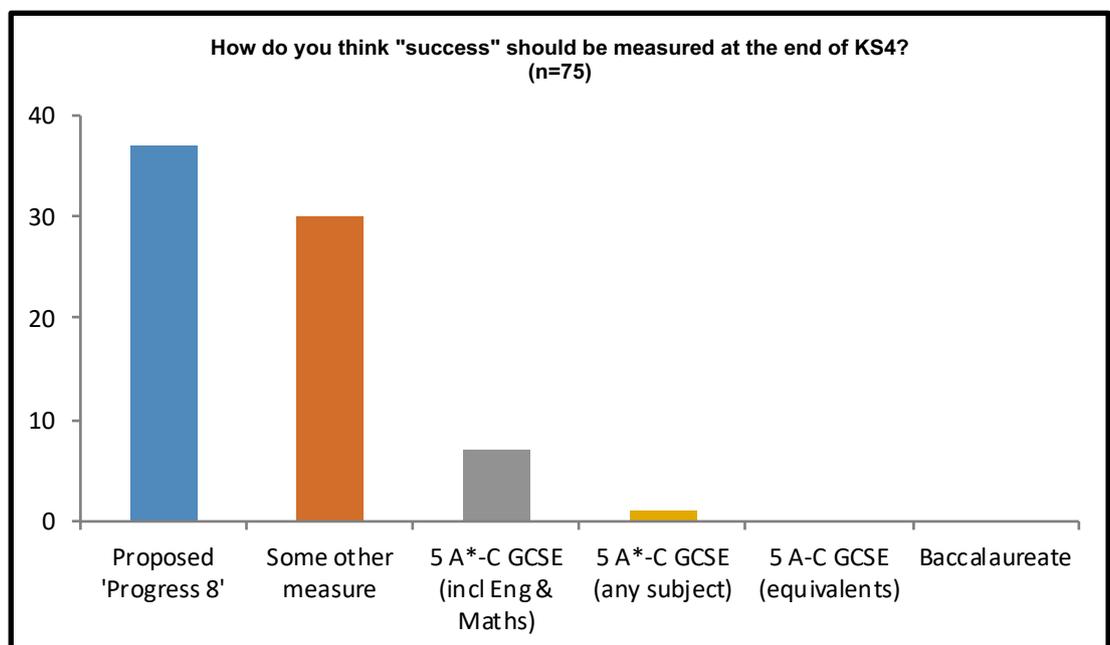
(Teaching Assistant; Professional Interview 1, p6-7)

For students in other age groups however whether this results from a fault or a series of separate faults within the system, the ability and inclination of the pupil to engage, or other factors which are outside the control of either cannot be fully established. Indicators exist, however, from within the literature and comments from the questionnaire. Both suggest that considerable misperceptions exist over the interpretation of achievement. It is entirely possible that the assorted messages being delivered to pupils at this school constitute a conundrum that needs to be fully overcome before they can have confidence in their own ability to be recognised as “successful”. One of the survey questions was ‘How do you think ‘success should be

measured at the end of KS4'. Responses, as shown in figure 9.6 below suggests that the profession has divergent views which gives rise to a series of questions not the least of which are:

- Are multiple interpretations of achievement part of the problem?
- What can be done to address any identified barriers to achievement?
- Whatever measure of success is used what, subsequently, happens to those who are unable to negotiate the processes employed to facilitate an understanding of accomplishment?

**Figure 9.6: Educators' articulations of successful transition – KS2 – KS4.**



No real alternatives to measures proposed by government were offered amongst the themes mentioned in 'some other measure', other than broad ideas of a general recognition of progress using 'some sort of target', employability and personal skills. That said, it was recognised by the majority of respondents in this category that whatever the measure, it should be personalised towards the individual rather than generic and all-encompassing.

Arguing that the two are inexorably linked, in the ‘toolkit’ for measuring success used by government, a variety of statistical methods are employed in an attempt to capture pupils’ successes and school performance. One such measure is referred to as ‘Expected Levels of Progress’. Broadly, this allows for the recognition of a pupil’s educational outcome comparative to their start point (Ofsted, 2014a). The measurement scale for secondary school pupils begins at KS2 when most pupils<sup>3</sup> undertake a series of Standardised Assessments (SATs<sup>4</sup>) and ends at KS4 when examination results (or permissible equivalents) are known. The expectation of progress is to improve by three levels, as depicted in chart 6.1, chapter 6.

Stewart (2015) writing for educational lobbyists the Local Schools Network argues that even allowing for a pupil’s start point, the three levels measure is too simplistic, asserting that:

This is a dangerous measure. If the message from the DfE is that “expected progress” for all students is 3 levels then a level 5 student is only expected to get a B at GCSE. When I’ve pointed this out, the response from otherwise sensible education professionals has been “Ah, but we are increasingly setting 4 levels of progress as the target for all students”. This response misses the point that progress differs with the starting point. In reality a 5a student should have a target of 5 levels of progress (to an A\*), while 3 levels is a real stretch for a student starting with 3c.

(Stewart, 2015)

Stewart’s assertion is based on a principle that, from the outset, pupils are classified into ranks of ability based on their KS2 SAT scores. High attainers (> level 4), Middle attainers (= level 4) and Low attainers (< level 4). Start points which, in themselves, have a marked effect on a pupil’s ability to reach the required levels of

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<sup>3</sup> Some are excluded for example absentees and recorded as ‘W’

<sup>4</sup> SATs are categorised from W – 6 where W indicates lowest score (no score) and 6 indicates highest scores. Each band has three sub-scores ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’. There are, therefore 18 possible outcomes where a SAT score is awarded.

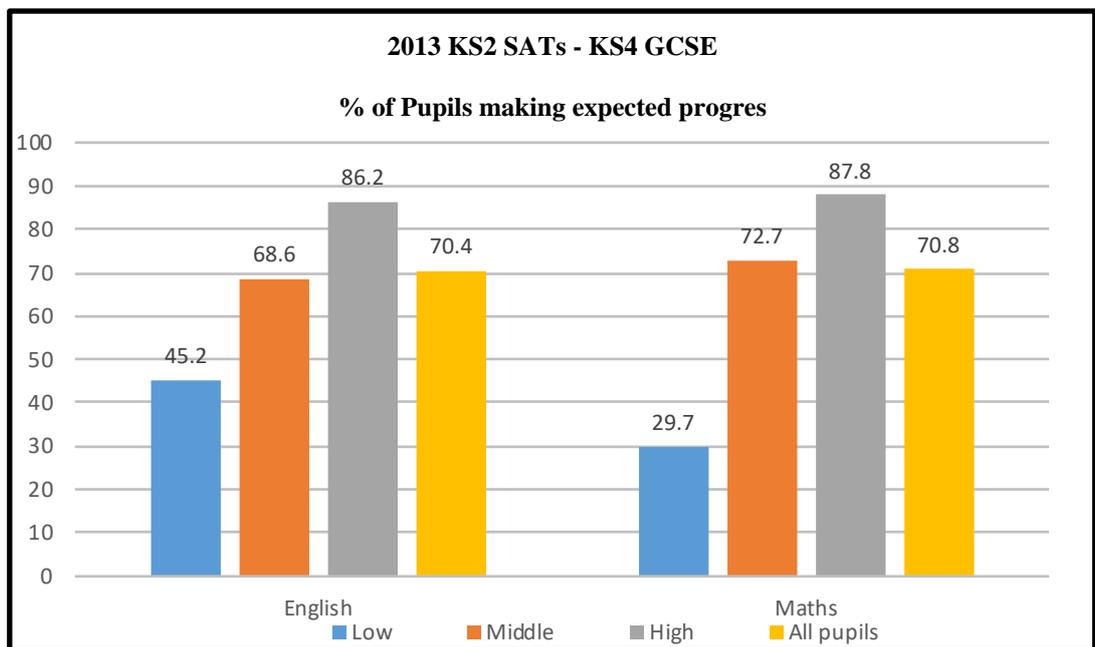
progress as evidenced by the ‘expected levels of progress’ graph below. Stewart’s largely unsubstantiated assertions can, in part, be supported through an academic study conducted for the Institute of Education at the University of London, where it was argued that those identified as potentially low attainers were, quite often, assigned additional help from Teaching Assistants (TAs) “... supplementing teacher input in class and providing more opportunities for one-to-one and small group work both in and out of the classroom ...” (Webster et al, 2011: 4). However, whilst having a positive influence on teacher workload and pupils’ classroom behaviour, rather than increasing the opportunity for improving levels of progress, Webster et al argued that the use of TAs had a negative effect asserting that:

In general, pupils are expected to progress by three National Curriculum sub-levels every two years. Using this conversion, pupils who received the most TA support were behind their peers by up two sub-levels, as a result of TA support.

(ibid: pp 7-8)

Stewart’s judgement of pupils making expected progress, applied to national GCSE results from the school year 2013 reveals the results represented in figure 9.7 on the page overleaf:

**Figure 9.7: Pupils making expected levels of progress KS2 to KS4 – 2013 by KS2 score.**



(Source data, Department for Education, 2014b)

Whilst almost 30% of pupils fail to achieve their expected levels of progress, the underlying trend for those previously ranked as ‘Low attainers’ (that is, those entering the secondary school system with a KS2 score of less than 4) fare considerably worse. Almost 55% in English and 70% in maths fail to reach their progress targets. Even for those that do reach targets, it is often the case, as articulated by Stewart, that the capacity to reach a grade D at GCSE is extremely difficult to acquire. This is made even more difficult, it seems, when the effect of TA interventions is taken into account (Webster et al, 2011).

In the online survey, respondents were asked if they agreed with the following statement:

*“Statistics suggest that a number of children entering secondary education with KS2 scores of L3 or lower have little or no chance of reaching the current KS4 attainment benchmarks (nominally 5 A\*-C passes at GCSE).”*

53 respondents agreed, 23 did not - a majority of over 2:1 - that year-on-year a cohort of pupils enters the secondary education system with little or no chance of reaching the government benchmark of 5 A\*-C GCSE passes. As statistics further show, a number of those pupils are destined to leave school without any qualifications of any kind. Of those who disagreed with the statement, predominant themes emerging were that pupils should not, from the outset, be 'written off' as statistical failures and that effective teaching can make a difference. For example:

*"...No child should be written off because of statistics. Children will exceed expectations with belief in them and good learning opportunities..."*

(Male, Assistant Head Teacher, 45-54).

*"...Too easy to use as an excuse for under-achievement. GOOD TEACHING CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE..."*

(Female, Teacher, 35-44, emphasis in original text).

It could be argued however, that these responses do not answer the question posed but simply seek to justify the statistical evidence and a thinly disguised appeal for a much more focussed acknowledgement of pupils' individual needs in both the educational and emotional sense, as they enter secondary schooling. A degree of cynicism might also suggest that certain teachers might even be attempting to justify, or even enhance the effect of, their own role.

To 'write off' a pupil simply on the grounds of prior statistics by not identifying and providing for their particular requirements can very quickly lead to disengagement and alienation. Professionals in the school setting were generally very aware of the individual capabilities of pupils in their school, particularly those from challenging backgrounds.

*For some kids, you know, success means getting through the five years of secondary school unscathed. They have no real chance of getting any decent GCSEs or BTECs – they are just not wired up that way. These kids have very little support from their parents and often have a very poor home life as well. What chance have they got?*

(SENCo; Professional Interview 2, p4)

This rather downbeat and worrying opinion, considering the role of a SENCo was however balanced by one of the teaching assistants at the same school and a junior teacher of English.

*If you start with the view that by the age of eleven all children are finished and have little or no chance of catching up, or even getting better, we are letting them down badly. Our school motto is 'Believe it can be done'. Not everyone thinks it can but there are enough of us around that try very hard to live up to it.*

(Cover Supervisor; Professional interview 4, p4).

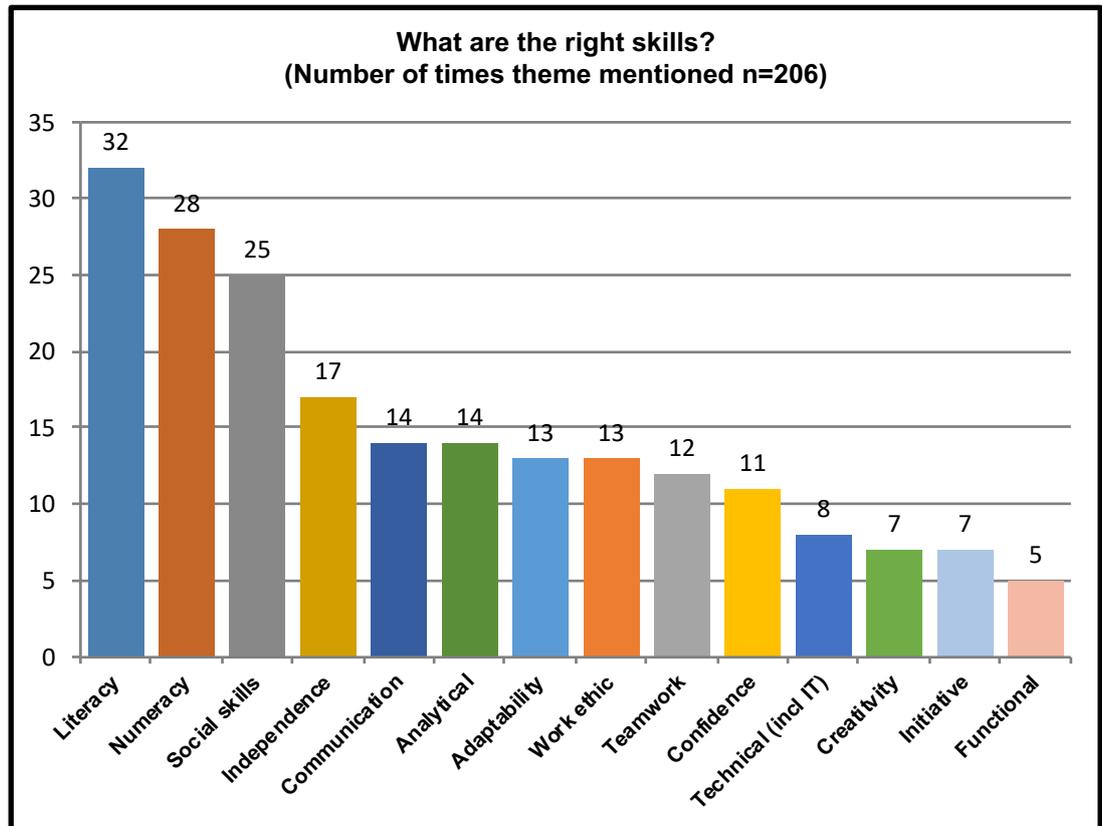
It is of some concern that an individual in a relatively senior position was prepared to write off pupils' chances of success at a very early stage, whilst more junior members of the same staff cohort had much more ambition for the same pupils. The opportunity to follow up on the views of the senior staff member subsequent to those of the junior staff was not possible due to the chronology of the interview process and is considered to be a missed opportunity. One inference to be drawn is that the many years' experience of the SENCo gave rise to her views. Equally that a relative lack of experience on the part of the junior staff members gave rise to theirs. Other, more cynical interpretations could be applied however. No such assumptions have been made here and consequently the views expressed have to be taken at face value.

### **9.3: Jobs and Skills.**

As seen in chapters 5 and 6, it was evident that the building of social and cultural capital in young people is considered an important element of their development (JRF, 2007; Portes, 2011; OECD, 2102) Many of the child development models referred to in the earlier chapter (chapter 4.2.) also highlight the need to consider the young person holistically rather than in the relatively simple terms of how well they might do in examinations or how many academic qualifications they collect. Indeed, the underlying premise of Assets-based approaches, upon which a number of studies have been undertaken, is that there are a considerable number of component parts by which a young person can be assessed. As cited earlier, studies conducted by Rotheron et al (2102) and Ramey and Rose-Krasnor (2012) are examples of a large corpus of research which identify the benefits of young people engaging with their community and community activities. In so doing, it is argued, academic performance will increase. The recognition of these skills by potential employers is a critical factor if school leavers are able to succeed in later life simply through working hard and having the ability to positively interact in the social context.

It is therefore relevant to understand the skills that are needed at the point in which pupils leave the schooling process and whether educationalists felt that students were exiting education at KS4 with the 'right skills'. Respondents to the survey indicated by a majority of nearly 2:1 that they thought this was not the case. When asked what the 'right skills' were by way of a free text field where more than one skill could be articulated, respondents expressed their answers as represented in a graph, 9.8.

**Figure 9.8: Essential skills required by pupils exiting KS4 as identified by survey respondents.**



Several themes were identifiable from those articulations which tend to support earlier replies; literacy and numeracy were, for example, again principal themes which align to purely academic success and the indicator of performance measures. Interestingly however, many of the social attributes (such as those identified in the literature relating to 40 Assets) became recognisable. A themed analysis was conducted on these replies which showed that the emergent themes also correspond appropriately with much of the evidence in the literature (cf. Elliott et al, 2011; Benson, 2011).

Examples of verbatim from the amongst the responses highlight the themes expressed include: (Emphasis added in all cases).

*“...maybe we should be focussing a little more on the **basics or foundations** of everything else we learn in life [...] working out the best way forward for ourselves is the realism...”*

(Male, teacher, 35-44)

*“...The right skills are **a mixture of educational qualifications** and an ability to engage with others...”*

(Female, Assistant Head Teacher, 45-54)

*“...The right skills are an advanced level of **literacy and communication skills** as well as the ability to think **analytically and independently**...”*

(Male, teacher, 25-34)

Many of these social skills are learned in “non-academic” subjects such as music, drama, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and through vocational tuition such as ‘BTEC’ and ‘ASDAN’. These belong to a group frequently referred to as the ‘soft’ subjects in secondary education. Proponents of the drive for excellence in education argue that these subjects should be disregarded. As identified through the literature, examples can be found in pronouncements from successive Secretaries of State, who are widely reported as being averse to including ‘soft’ subjects and vocational qualifications in a school’s league table results. The incumbent Secretary of State in the period 2010-2014, was particularly vociferous in advocating that the inclusion of such subjects tended to inflate actual performance and thus detracted from the principles of ‘excellence’ that were being promoted by his government (Gove, 2009; 2011; 2013).

It may be argued that, through the acquisition of these ‘softer’ skills, many low attainers could provide varying degrees of “evidence” of their capabilities and

therefore access the workplace market. As a counterpoint, following the Dearing Review (1996) it became almost *de rigueur* for schools to adopt the proposal for National Record of Achievement (NRA), which detailed a pupil's progress through the secondary school process, including issues of attendance, academic performance and non-academic activities – for example participation in DofE award (Dearing, 1996). NRA was not particularly successful as it did not seem sufficient to allow pupils' access to the workplace either directly, through apprenticeships or even, for some, into Further Education. Then as now it is argued, in the view of the majority of employers, qualifications were the economic and academic 'currency' which bought admission to jobs; and whilst many employers continue to argue that school leavers have very poor maths and English skills (Confederation of British Industry (CBI), 2012), arguments for the exclusion of softer subjects from benchmarks of academic performance will, most likely endure. It is on this basis, it seems, that the government continues to redefine what are acceptable qualifications, making the whole notion of 'right skills' a moveable feast but one which steadfastly fails to include anything other than academic prowess. Contrasting themes emerge from within the semi-structured interviews. A number of time-served educationalists, who remember the NRA as a positive tool, called for its reintroduction, or for that of the vocational Diploma system much favoured by the previous Labour government. Both, in the view of these respondents, afforded individuals the chance to set out their skills, experience and achievements in a nationally recognised format which garnered recognition amongst employers who would need to engage with the record in a way that had not previously been achieved. Under these systems young people were able to provide evidence of everything they have done at school, including qualifications, as well as everything else they get involved in along the way,

including out-of-school activities. A number of questions arise from this which resonate with the ambitions of this thesis. These include:

- Are there any material advantages for young people to become involved in community efforts to improve the life of the disadvantaged in society?
- What might young people learn by caring for their sick relatives?
- What are the health, wellbeing and self-perception benefits of young people taking up sport and proving by hard work they can become proficient?

One interviewee had a particularly interesting view of this situation, choosing to locate her responses firmly in a perspective which she termed Marxist but which shows many of the traits demonstrated in the works of Bourdieu which were highlighted throughout chapter 4:

*It means they are often branded as 'pragmatic' or 'hands on' and made to feel necessarily subservient to those who are considered 'higher attainers'. It also creates a false consciousness among the population that high-achieving academics can effect change and nobody else has the ability to. In a Marxist sense, it reinforces divide.*

(Educational Psychologist, Professional Interview 3, p5)

This also resonates with arguments surrounding social class and the theme of 'education for all' which were advanced in earlier chapters. Particularly germane are those theories which arise in the literature; in 4.1a, where Rawls' concept of fair equality of opportunity was an emergent theme and then later in 4.3, where it was similarly argued that disadvantaged children might not be able to effectively engage with education structures.

#### **9.4: Alternative provision.**

It readily became apparent at the interview stage that the generic term ‘alternative provision’ was interpreted in a number of ways by individuals working within the education sector and that the term covered a multitude of programmes of activity. Some of these programmes, for example DofE and Prince’s Trust were studied throughout the earlier examination of appropriate literature in the later sections of chapter 6 under the subheading ‘classrooms without walls’. A number of teachers identified that in the past, and with some success, schools had used a ‘Gifted and Talented’ fund to help children from poorer backgrounds access these schemes. A further number of activities, which were not explicit within the literature, were identified and largely classified by those interviewed as being delivered within an ‘enrichment’ ethos, rather than as alternative provision; each seems to align well, for the most part, with concepts of character education contained within chapter 4.2b, relating as they do to issues of work related learning, active engagement within the community and individual development.

Intrinsically, ‘classrooms without walls’ and ‘enrichment activities’ are descriptions of the same entity and as a consequence will be treated as one and the same in this section. Part of the rationale for this is a response contained within the following exchange:

*Q. Are there initiatives, that your school takes part in, that are aimed at improving outcomes for low achievers?*

*A. A few that I know of. SMT - senior management team – like to call them enrichment activities.*

*Q. Any examples?*

*A. Well, for a start we send kids out on the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, take them on trips and study visits. In the past we have used money from the **gifted and talented** scheme to pay for things for them but that has stopped now.*

*Q. Why has it stopped?*

*A. I think the government withdrew the money.*

*Q. What sort of things were paid for?*

*A. I know of pupils who had money given to them to pay for sports club subscriptions and equipment, musical instruments, stuff like that.*

*Q. And these were all in the low attaining group?*

*A. Not all of them, no. Some were pretty able kids but from backgrounds where money was tight.*

(Teaching Assistant, Professional interview 1, p5: emphasis added)

An interesting concept which emerged from this response was that of gifted and talented pupils. This had not emerged through the initial literature review. This may be because the search parameters were not set to include phrases such as ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ as they were more attuned to themes of ‘failures’ - lack of achievement and attainment rather than accomplishments. Later investigation however revealed a large body of research on the topic, which it may be remiss to ignore. At the very least, it would be useful to understand how gifted and talented are identified and by whom.

Freeman (2002: 1) in a report for the Department of Education and Skills initially took a very narrow view which aligned the concept only with academic prowess. “... Gifts are taken here to mean the more easily measurable intellectual aspects of development, such as high-level school achievement and IQ ...” Following this train of thought would not have resulted in the pupils identified in the interview above to have funds allocated for sports and music equipment. Other criteria must therefore have been considerations when judging if pupils should receive awards, which might be explained by a later, more expansive characterisation:

The way a very able child is defined depends largely on what is being looked for, whether it is academic excellence for formal education, innovation for business, solving paper-and-pencil puzzles for an IQ club – **or gaining entry to an out-of-school programme** for the gifted and talented.

(Freeman, 2002: 3, emphasis added)

The extent to which the concept of gifted and talented relates to those students who are the focus of this thesis is however questionable. In a continuation of the interview the following exchange took place:

*Q. How were the children selected for help?*

*A. We tended to rely on teachers' assessments. Most of the money went to pupils who were in the higher ability streams. We were being measured on how the money was spent so there needed to be some visible results.*

*Q. Such as?*

*A. Well, for example, when we helped with music equipment, the pupil went on to pass a grade exam. She probably wouldn't have done that if the school hadn't helped.*

*Other pupils who had shown some potential as young sportsmen were supported to join a club with a proven track record of winning trophies.*

*Q. So none of these were in the low achiever bracket or from disadvantaged families?*

*A. Occasionally but not very many.*

*Q. Why was that?*

*A. As I said, we were being measured on how the money was spent so we **needed to demonstrate some success to keep the funding.***

(Head Teacher, Professional interview 17, p5: emphasis added)

This viewpoint is supported by an academic study from the United States which found that students from underrepresented populations tended to be underrepresented in gifted and talented (GATE) schemes. Although the US study was conducted along the lines of race and ethnicity to identify the underrepresented groups, certain

comparisons can be drawn with the group identified throughout this thesis. The study identifies that:

In short, prior achievement is the best predictor of future achievement that we have. IQ is the second best predictor, and gifted assessments typically use IQ scores and achievement tests in determining whether a child should be classified as gifted or not. However, minority students obtain lower scores on both of these measures.

(Erwin and Worrall, 2012: 77)

Translating this supposition into the context of the marginalised group which is the focus of this thesis, tends to suggest that those pupils would, once again, ‘miss out’ on an educational opportunity from which they might entirely benefit.

## **9.5: Summary.**

Whilst certain evidence points towards progress being made in results-based outcomes, a major theme of this thesis identifies that a number of school leavers at KS4 do not have the benchmarked qualifications which would identify them as being ‘successful’. This chapter has analysed educators’ perceptions of a series of separate articulations of what could potentially constitute successful transitions from key stage 2 through to key stage 4, if alternate representations of ‘success’ were used.

A number of contextual ‘barriers’ to success, as this is framed by current targets, have been identified in section 9.2. These relate to the marginalised pupils whom, I argue, form the cohort which in earlier chapters I have termed a disconnected minority. These pupils, already marginalised, are further belittled by comments such as those of the deputy head teacher in section 9.2, who believes simply negotiating the secondary school process is an ‘achievement’ in itself. Despite those views being

unrepresentative of a profession which, I argue, is the antithesis of recent government representations, a minority view is sometimes the loudest. It is little wonder that PASS surveys often record that pupils are not 'prepared to learn' as they enter the classroom.

The chapter has also briefly discussed issues of 'jobs and skills'. A relevant consideration given this sub-title but one which is outside the remit for this thesis and could be argued, is a thesis in its own right, is the availability of adequate work opportunities for the low performing cohort represented. Instead the section has focussed around what the 'right skills' might represent in a workplace suitable for young people who are not academically gifted. Many of the responses to the online survey and in interviews tend to rely on the acquisition of academic qualifications but at least temper their views with an acceptance that other qualities should be recognised. Examples given include an ability to interact with colleagues in teams, to negotiate other personal relationships and to have a good 'work ethic'.

The chapter concluded by examining educators' articulations of alternative provision such as DofE and Prince's Trust. It was very clear in this examination that alternative provision has a number of interpretations, which include descriptors such as classrooms without walls and enrichment activities such as gifted and talented, which might not be available to the disconnected minority. As identified by Erwin and Worrall (2012), students in minority groups are equally marginalised by these elements of alternative provision, as they in the arrangements which govern formal education systems.

## **Chapter 10: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS**

As an exploratory study within a postmodern framework and in part using the theoretical perspective of conflict, this thesis has been concerned with educational disadvantage. Specifically, for a group of pupils who enter the secondary school process with low key stage 2 scores. Low scores are those as defined by government statistics as 3 or lower on the Standard Assessment Testing (SATs) framework. For the group of pupils to whom this relates, I have argued that a system which measures their transition from KS2 through to KS4 using their GCSE results alone, is unsatisfactory. Furthermore, that alternative constructions of successful transitions, which account for individual rates of development and (where applicable) issues of disadvantage, would offer a better reflection of the progress they have made.

To help understand this, a number of research questions were created by collecting and analysing a number of data, using methods outlined in chapter 3. This final chapter responds to those research questions, relating them by way of a discussion to the earlier appraisal of literature and an analysis of the findings in chapters 7 – 9.

### **10.1: Responding to the research questions.**

Evidence provided from the literature in chapter 4, supported by analysis of the empirical evidence from the survey and interviews, confirms that the concept of a compulsory, universal education system is deeply flawed; one in which young

people, categorised in early stages as low performers are unlikely and in many cases unable, to fully engage. Evidently, a number of faults lie in a system which is not appropriate for all young people and which is therefore not truly 'universal'. Not the least of these is a failure to recognise ideas of the rates by which young people develop as argued by psychologists such as Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky identified in chapter 4. Equally a suite of socio-ecological theories emphasises the importance of relationships between young people and their peer group and with adults. These are recognisable threads through several of the child development theories offered in chapter 4, albeit they are framed using differing titles.

This thesis therefore illuminates those pupils as a group or cohort of young people with low key stage 2 scores in a way that, outside of an individual school setting, is unrecognisable. In particular, in many regards, the literature on underachievement 'misses a trick' by focussing on that concept in terms of measuring pupils who can reach GCSE floor targets, based on their key stage 2 scores, rather than those who have little prospect of doing so. Using data from one school in chapter 7, this thesis identifies and begins to quantify this group in isolation, as a cohort which appears to have no prospect of a successful educational outcome, when measured by the current system. I cannot see where this has been done previously, although amongst my arguments I suggest that it is easily recognisable if the will exists to look. As mentioned in chapter 7, the data are available within individual schools but, perhaps more pertinent for a wider study, the data ought to be available via the National Pupil Database (NPD). Unfortunately, despite requests to the Department for Education, the Local Education Authority for Birmingham and via the UoB itself, I was unable to access the NPD. Whether fuller access would have revealed any substantial results

is, of course, conjecture but I contend that the concept of a disconnected minority would be as evident nationally, as it is within case study school 1. A recommendation for a longitudinal study using the data from the NPD, which may help to establish or disprove this concept, is amongst the recommendations contained in section 10.3 below. This is not to say that a proper identification of this cohort and a recognition that they are being failed by the system would lead to any major policy shift. As I argued later in this discussion, in some regards, it may suit the education system for these pupils to be indistinguishable outside of individual schools' internal statistics.

Against this background, as identified in survey responses and through interviews, educators argue for the provision of an alternative methodology of recognising successful transitions for these pupils. In section 8.1.2, for example where during the interview a teacher argues for an individual curriculum for all pupils and an Educational Welfare Officer identifies that low performers have difficulty in engaging with the national curriculum. The view of the EWO is supported by views from separate interviews; for example, when a question was posed regarding alternative systems a head teacher responded by saying that pupils who cannot cope with the school process, either academically or behaviourally are largely ambivalent to schooling and as a result, choose to disengage.

These comments are indicative of a recognition that within an individual school low performers are discretely recognised as being in need of additional help.

Where possible, it seems that school leaders would like to fulfil their obligations to those pupils but are frequently hamstrung by government policy and regulators.

This can be evidenced as articulated by a deputy head teacher who, I argue,

highlights a conflict perspective rationale, by maintaining that Ofsted would penalise the school if they admitted using alternatives to the prescribed curriculum.

This is also identified through many of the responses to the online survey and in interviews which, despite accepting that other qualities should be recognised, tend to rely on the acquisition of academic qualifications as indicators of a successful transition. Conflict within the system, between government and the teaching profession, can also be witnessed by the resistance to systems of testing and reluctance to implement changes such as the move from a floor target of 5 passes A\*-C GCSE towards 'Progress 8' which has resulted in a number of industrial relations disputes for example, the boycott of KS2 SATs tests in 2010 and a number of teachers taking strike action in the period 2010-2015.

Using a debate on 'standards' and a discourse of 'failing schools' as a further indicator of conflict, the government has located these squarely in the domain of the teaching profession and the profession has been 'demonised' as a result. Where the conflict is reported in mainstream media, the focus is often on how much schooling pupils will lose and how irresponsible it is of teachers to take industrial action rather than concentrating on the claims of teachers that policy decisions are affecting their ability to teach effectively. As highlighted by a teacher during interview, changes are also resisted because they 'increase the workload' and are 'challenging' but also that they are not in the best interests of pupils. In certain instances, the focus on standards at school level accounts for a marginalisation of pupils and may help to identify why many low performers at KS2 are also low performing at KS4. Simply, it seems, some of them are not entered for examinations. These pupils therefore have, at best, a passive relationship with the education system and are compartmentalised. A system which is seen by both

government and the teaching profession but for starkly different reasons, to be universal is failing on that ambition.

Despite the government discourse that all pupils have an equal chance of success, as indicated by the data from school 1, in chapter 7, universality, framed as an 'Equality of Opportunity', is a misnomer. Clearly, there is insufficient data to be able to make any robust claims. Nevertheless, for the reasons previously indicated these data are suggestive that structural and systemic issues deny the disconnected minority any real opportunity of a successful educational outcome. Why, then, are these young people compelled to acquiesce to a system which does not suit them? Part of the answer may lie in the solution inferred in section 9.3 and which relates to the provision of appropriate jobs and which was evidenced by Atkins and Flint (2015: 45) who maintained that inequality in education leads to inequality in the labour market. The arguments proposed throughout this thesis suggest that the group which these authors identify as marginalised includes (but in keeping with a significant body of academic literature on this topic, does not specifically classify) the cohort which I call the disconnected minority.

Another part of the answer, arguing from a position of conflict as governed by Foucauldian analysis of power-elites and as articulated by Wilson (2011) may be found within the 19<sup>th</sup> Century quotations from Brougham and Mill which are presented in chapter 4, which discussed the rationale for education. The quote from Mill particularly, from his respected book 'On Liberty', offers a blunt rationale for the purpose of education as being to regulate and socially control young people. These themes were discussed in chapter 4.1, which also - in section 4.3 – discussed the amount of 'control' pupils have over their own school experience.

Resulting from the constant drive to ‘increase standards’ and the attack on the teaching profession, government are controlling the debate and it is evident that pupils are submissive recipients of an education system which is focussed on the attainment of academic qualifications. As a consequence, alternative articulations of what might be a successful transition are not argued out by government, as they are in this thesis. This derives from ideological and philosophical groundings which is democratic if located in evidence-based policy. Based on evidence that a number of pupils cannot attain the floor target of 5 A\*-C passes at GCSE, there seems to be a consensus that some change is needed in the measurement of attainment for ‘middle’ attainers and ‘high’ attainers which, it is argued will simultaneously boost school performance. The concept of a ‘Progress 8’ measure is laudable in the intent to capture pupil progress across a broader range of subjects than a floor target of 5 passes at grades A\*-C. GCSEs. Nevertheless, a revised system of measurement which continues to segregate low performers is not welcomed by the teaching profession. In chapter 8, for example, in an interview response from a teacher who affirms that the content in GCSE courses will ‘be above them’. This highlights disagreement over why the new measure continues to be based in academic performance to the exclusion of alternative qualifications such as BTEC.

Amongst other alternatives, as highlighted throughout much of chapter 5 and highlighted by educators in chapter 8.2.1 are interventions using pupil premium funding for so-called ‘enrichment’ activities. As a ‘young’ policy there seemed to be a fairly limited evidence base of robust academic study during the time that this thesis was being written. Nevertheless, those studies which had taken place were arguing that when used effectively, and some argument existed over how

‘effective’ was being framed, pupil premium could have a positive effect on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. Bona-fide evidence of this was visible in the case study schools who all reported that the intervention strategies they were using were yielding positive results. Amongst the interventions used were group mentoring sessions but according to at least one teacher this was not the intent of pupil premium originally and more focus should be directed towards 1:1 intervention for them to be completely successful. This offers an opportunity for further study and a recommendation for such an investigation is reasoned in section 10.3 below.

Similarly, as is argued by Connelly et al (2014), there is little evidence base to suggest that the free school and academy project, much favoured by government, will show any real increase in standards as suggested. A number of teachers agree with this analysis including one head teacher who acknowledged that, in his opinion which supported a 2013 study by Kitchener, that the introduction of free schools and conversions of existing schools to academies represents a ‘race to the bottom’ for those schools which remained in local authority control. These, in combination, arguing from a conflict perspective, allow for an alternative conversation to be proposed. Policy-making, underpinned by the narration of a crisis, as argued in chapter 5.1, is reinforced by the political elites through the regime of truth’ or ‘general politics of truth’, according to analysis of the Foucauldian outlook and is redefined and reinforced through the education system, the media and political and economic ideologies (Rainbow, 1991; Foucault, 1998).

As passive recipients of these policies, pupils evidently have no control of how they are implemented. Education is ‘done’ to them rather than them being engaged with the processes of policy-making. As was argued in chapter 4.3, however,

despite being constrained by the structures of the education system, pupils can exercise some element of agency in the ways in which they behave. Unfortunately, these behaviours as they relate to the disconnected minority, do not have positive connotations. In chapter 2, following Merton (1948) the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy was proposed which advocates that individuals ‘live up’ to the way in which they are perceived by teachers and by their peers. Evidence shows that one of the ways in which disengaged pupils react is by exhibiting poor behaviour patterns. As one interviewee responded, as they enter secondary education, the views of pupils towards education are predominantly fixed; notionally based on their KS2 scores, those low scores can hide a number of behavioural issues such as poor attendance at school which, as is widely accepted, is an indicator of poor outcomes. Another interviewee responded by stating that pupils’ behaviour can be affected by the behaviours and values of others. I interpret this to have negative connotations rather than positive, as this was articulated during a discussion which concerned the ability of pupils to ‘succeed’.

An established link is evident between poor behaviours and poor educational outcomes. This argument does not advocate that these are ‘bad people’. Simply, it is suggested by the evidence that poor behaviours and a failure to conform to the school regime are exemplars of a disaffected pupil exercising agency, in the only way possible within an education system which is firmly set against them.

As suggested throughout this thesis and within chapter 9 particularly, it might be possible to advance alternative models of performance based on the fulfilment of targets related to individual assets and capabilities. Chapter 9 begins with a quote from an acting deputy head teacher which articulates that ‘achievement’ varies from pupil to pupil. For this respondent however, GCSE exams are a mechanism

of sorting the ablest from the weakest academic performers. Coincidentally, this is the same respondent who believes it is an achievement simply for some pupils to negotiate the secondary school process for five years. It would have been useful to explore these thoughts at interview but unfortunately, this teacher was one of the initial respondents who agreed to interview but subsequently withdrew from the second phase of the study. Despite his acceptance that he has friends who have done well without GCSEs, this is tempered by phrases such as 'hard working' and 'good social skills'. The use of pejorative terminology such as this suggests the respondent is more a fan of the current system of measurements, than being accepting of any alternative. Other articulations of success were less normative and, on the whole throughout this study there seems an absolute commitment, from the majority of teachers, to fulfil their obligations to all of their students to 'educate' them insofar as is possible.

For example, the assistant head teacher who, in interview stated that the requirement was for a 'well-rounded education' which includes an understanding of what is right and what is wrong. This view which was supported by a number of other respondents (see figure 9.1 for analysis) which, amongst the classifications of responses included notions of being a 'rounded' person and having made progress in all subject areas over the previous 2 years. No-one, however, seemed able to fully articulate what constituted a 'well-rounded' pupil outside of these fairly vague descriptions.

Nevertheless, using concepts such 'well-rounded' as new indicators for a base line from which to start a process of change, I argue that successful transitions could be measured by 'awards' generated through mechanisms of alternative provision such as DofE, Prince's Trust and ASDAN, as discussed throughout this thesis.

Although recognised and used currently I argue that their use is insufficient and particularly are not wholly recognised where it matters most, in the labour market. This may result from an apparent shortage in the academic literature base of robust studies into real outcomes, which results in a lack of respect for the qualifications these schemes provide.

Similarly, effective and robust evaluations and the subsequent employment of models of child development, using as the exemplars the 40 assets model as discussed in chapter 4.2a and Character Education as discussed in 4.2b, may form the basis of awards which can be tailored towards the pace and scale of individuals' development, rather than the common targets in which measurement systems continue to be grounded.

A shift in discourse would be required, away from academic performance towards a more liberal model of education such as that promoted by Lord Brougham and J.S. Mill in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and much later by, for example, Peters (1966) and any number of other philosophers and psychologists. Furthermore, a realisation by the forces which control the labour market that a more liberal view of education, with metrics based on what is considered 'worthwhile', is of equal value to raw academic performance.

## **Summation:**

*Why does the UK education system fail a number of pupils who enter the secondary education process with low key stage 2 test scores?*

I conclude in response to the overarching research question therefore, that for reasons articulated above, it eminently suits the power-elites for a number of pupils to be disadvantaged within the education system. Arguing from a conflict perspective, within a postmodern framework, exposes a 'truth' in the Foucauldian sense outlined in chapter 2 that there is no real incentive for change within the prevailing philosophical and ideological outlooks which drive those elites. The need for stasis in the perspective of the 'establishment' is driven by self-interest and although it is possible for 'outsiders' to break into the elite, it is necessary that they have a high educational capital. Very often, those that do break in are virtual replicas of those who already inhabit the arena. To protect their own positions, it is clearly in the interests of the elite to restrict entry to others of their own archetype.

Furthermore, that the group which I have identified as the disconnected minority is not, to date, recognisable as a discrete entity outside of any individual school setting. As a consequence, this group is at best overlooked and at worst intrinsically invisible within an education system which is predicated on academic performance. The failure of the education system to publish specific data on this group can promote a conversation and may begin to explain why they are failed by the system. Arguing from the conflict perspective, it is not the teachers who failing the disconnected minority but the processes by which they are compelled to operate. Very clear conflict lines are drawn here between government and the teaching profession. Teachers who are prepared to take industrial action in protest

at what they see as unworkable, unreasonable and largely unnecessary changes, are branded as irresponsible by government representatives. This is reflective of an ideology and philosophy which construct teachers and schools as ‘the problem’ which, as some of the evidence suggests, is predicated on driving all schools towards the marketisation of education under the academies and free schools project. (As an aside, similar themes such as the imposition of doctors’ contracts in the National Health Service and contested reforms in the welfare system use disparaging rhetoric to describe the individuals towards whom the reforms are directed. Using the term ‘Junior’ doctors, for example to describe anyone below the level of consultant is especially pejorative as are terms such as ‘cheats’ and ‘scroungers’ when describing benefit claimants.)

Many in the teaching profession see marketisation as a real threat to the underlying principles of state education and a race to the bottom will result if schools are compelled to transfer away from LEA control. This has clear effects on the ambition to improve social mobility for disadvantaged people. As a result of Milburn (2014) local authorities are responsible for having a strategy for dealing with social mobility. They will be unable to comply fully with that responsibility when one of the measures of social mobility, the effect of educational disadvantage, is outside of their purview. Simply, when a significant proportion of education takes place outside of their direct control, how can local democratically elected authorities account for results (or lack of results) from non-state schools? If education really is ‘for all’ then all who are eligible should be included. As such educational programmes should be tailored to the individual. A full recognition of what constitutes the differences between pupils needs to become accepted as the new norm, rather than a concentration on how they are similar (in age profiling

year groups, for example). A new ‘conversation’ on education is therefore needed and an alternative articulation of a successful transition from key stage 2 through to key stage 4 is required. Potentially a separate crisis needs to be narrated; perhaps this is what teachers are attempting to achieve in their resistance to the changes government are making. Their voice is only partly being heard however, as the power-elites seem able to control education discourse through their influences with the media.

Pupil premium policy is not perfect and currently, as far as I can distinguish, its effects are currently under-researched by academic study. Nevertheless, evidence from the case study schools suggests that the pupil premium policy when used effectively can positively improve outcomes if less emphasis is placed on academic performance. Within a reframed discourse, initiatives and interventions that accepted a new articulation and aimed directly at the disconnected minority could yield positive results. Where the pupil attracts pupil premium funding, those funds should be ring-fenced for exclusive use rather than consolidated into a generic pot of money for wider use.

In many regards, the acquisition of a set of examination passes does not equate to intelligence and the ability to perform well in the labour market. Equally, the lack of any academic qualifications does not indicate a lack of aptitude and an inability to perform appropriate roles based entirely on an assessment of capabilities and not the number of GCSE passes an individual possesses. A separate measure, rather than a collection of exam passes, would in many cases help the disconnected minority to reconnect with the education process and exit with a meaningful outcome. Even throughout the rather judgemental outlook of the teacher referred to earlier with regards to low performing students, was a realisation that a number

of his acquaintances had managed to do well in the workplace through hard work and the ability to socially interact. There is nothing available in the evidence to suggest that the disconnected minority would not be capable of exhibiting those traits in the workplace. Where a lack of these is identified in the school setting as potentially problematic, might it be feasible to individually adapt their curriculum or school syllabus to include mentoring in those areas and in the sphere of alternative provision?

Both of these conclusions would require a fairly seismic shift in discourse and the approaches to policy-making which recognise performance; away from the rigidity of academic qualifications and towards a wider recognition of “success”. It would almost certainly require a new ‘crisis’ to be narrated. From the evidence presented in this thesis, neither of these seem likely to occur at any perceptible point in the future.

## **10.2: Recommendations for future studies and reflections on the research process.**

The research has highlighted a number of opportunities for further study.

- For a longitudinal study to be conducted using the National Pupil Database of the cohort of low performers at KS2, which could be done retrospectively. There is no evidence of a system in place currently where schools and government appear able to constructively talk to each other about the cohort I have identified as the disconnected minority. The study would be based on the type of data used in chapter 7 to identify the cohort in one school.

Amongst the characteristics the study would aim to correlate with a disconnected minority are the accepted demographic indicators of disadvantage and deprivation such as gender, ethnicity and family background and the more specific educational indicator of free school meals.

- A study which explores the themes of this thesis from the perspective of the pupil, so giving them a ‘voice’ and a stake in the process.
  
- If as it seems floor targets, however these are framed, continue to be the primary indicator of academic attainment, to study whether a proportionate measure could be implemented for the disconnected minority. This could be based on a concept, for example, that the government publishes statistics of how many low performers at key stage 2 do not reach, or exceed their expected levels of progress. A pre-requisite would be for a more robust regulation of the scoring system at key stage 2.
  
- Therefore, a vigorous investigation into allegations of ‘gaming’ in primary schools, of over inflation of key stage 2 scores and deliberately excluding from testing a proportion of pupils who would ‘fail’ SATs.
  
- A study of the nature and type of interventions which are delivered within and outside of schools, especially where the use of pupil premium is involved and to whom they are delivered.
  - Is pupil premium the correct vehicle for these strategies?

- Why are interventions apparently working for some pupils but not for others?
- Does the rationale to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils consider issues such as:
  - How do disadvantaged pupils align with the disconnected minority?
  - Are all low performers disadvantaged?
  - Are all pupils classed as disadvantaged low performers?
- As indicated above, an issue which is largely outside the remit of this thesis but one which is briefly covered in the literature review and evidenced in the empirical study; an area of interest for a future research project could be the relationship of the disconnected minority with the employment market. In an environment where graduates are struggling to find jobs, what type of jobs will these young people be able to fulfil and where do they exist in an employment market which is apparently constrained?

Their options seem few:

- Find sustainable employment with a benevolent employer, which seems increasingly unlikely in the prevailing employment market.
- Find work in an industry where there is a significant skills shortage and a robust training strategy.
- With particular reference to models of child development, re-enter education in later life when better suited to what is required (I can, however, offer no strategy for what happens in the intervening period).

- A robust examination of the discourse on underachievement and whether this needs to be articulated differently in academia and the wider educational environment. Is the discourse ‘missing a trick’ by concentrating on underachievement in terms of pupils who could succeed but do not, to the exclusion of those who enter the education system with little chance of success? Conversely, is it deliberate in not reporting the wider cohort within which the disconnected minority is located?

### **Reflections on the research process**

Using a postmodern framework to underpin the theoretical perspective from which this thesis is argued, has allowed for a subjective examination and analysis of what might be true rather than what is acknowledged as fact. My background in scientific enquiry in industry, was predicated on a true/false – works/ does not work basis, one which I found is somewhat restrictive. The opportunity to explore and examine the ‘why’? questions behind a perceived problem in the education system, which I had recognised whilst working within it, using my own values as a point of enquiry was a stimulating prospect. Not only to examine the problem in a field of research that interested me greatly but also to find discoveries about myself, challenge my own orthodoxies and explore any of my own misconceptions. I accept that using one theoretical perspective, conflict, to the exclusion of others results in a set of conclusions that would be different if, for example, a functional theory approach had been adopted. What is known about the shortcomings of the education system, which would have been accepted within a functional paradigm, latent inequality, an acceptance of social placement and an

imposition of social norms, for example, rail against my own values and the way in which I view the world. This thesis is, therefore, very much a personal journey and I find that my personal values are reinforced, enhanced even, by that journey rather than diluted by it.

It has not, however, been an easy journey and in many respects extremely frustrating. A number of entries in the research diary I kept begin with the phrase ‘had enough of this’ or something similar, largely fuelled by the fact that although, largely, this resembles the thesis I wanted to write, it is not the thesis that I set out to write, resulting in some vexing times and needing several ‘U’ turns along the way.

Following guidance from the department which awarded the ESRC funding, the original research proposal firmly located the research in the realm of Public Policy; a conflation of educational disadvantage (the area I truly wanted to explore) and notions of ‘Big Society’ (which I did not) which were prevalent at that time. I got some way down the path of that investigation before realising that ‘Big Society’, relative to my own required outcomes, was a blind alley. Similarly, the second iteration of the thesis, which took it down a route of educational sociology, was not yielding the type of inquiry I wanted to produce. The third iteration, this thesis, is as close to my original concept as it was possible to achieve having gone through a number of differing methodologies and having to identify an entirely different research sample on three occasions.

There were positive elements to these changes however as the ability to reflect on those ‘false starts’ helped to shape the final thesis and revise the methodology to accommodate the mixed methods approach where, originally only a qualitative

methodology was proposed. This had clear impact on the sort of study I was able to conduct and, as a direct consequence, the type of findings that study produced.

As inferred in the conclusions to this thesis, I was impressed by the way in which teachers approach their day to day tasks and their general commitment to their work. Although interviews were relatively few in number, I was also both grateful and impressed by the way in which those that agreed to participate fully engaged with the research process and were honest and explicit with their views. This extends to a number of respondents to the survey. Although interviews with the majority of those was not possible, their answers and insight helped shape the research findings chapters to a significant extent.

As a result of this research, certain of my previously held assumptions, perceptions, biases and opinions have begun to change, others have not.

Firstly, as a committed non-theorist I was compelled to face my own particular demon and accept that the use of a theoretical framework would considerably help shape the overall strategy. Adopting those strategies gave much-needed meaning to me and my approach to the work.

Second, having worked within the schools which form the case study, I knew a number of the teachers who agreed to be interviewed at first hand through classroom and common room interactions. Despite having worked in the system, in many respects, I was prepared to accept the rhetoric pronounced by much of the media which represented the teaching profession as irresponsible and uncaring. I confess that I had little regard for some of the people who had agreed to be interviewed and believed that view was reciprocated; I was not particularly

looking forward to exchanges that I perceived would be extremely difficult and negative. I could not have been more wrong and found these to be the most helpful and productive people I could wish to interview. They completely engaged with me and the process and were very forthcoming with views which, at times, were very personal. I am indebted to their patience and tolerance of the interview process. In particular, those few who agreed to suffer the tribulations of the pilot process and offer wholly worthwhile suggestions for improvement which were happily incorporated into the final interview schedule.

Overall, I find the teaching profession caring, diligent and prepared to do a good job for their pupils. Some of their senior managers may have questions to answer in the way they interpret policy and use or misuse valuable resources such as teaching assistants; perhaps another study awaits an interested party to take up that particular cause.

What has not changed is my view that there has to be 'another way' of representing capability. What young people who are not academically gifted can do, rather than simply judging them on academic performance. Previously within industry and for more than 20 years in the environment of sport, which I inhabit as a hobby, I have witnessed at first hand the ability of young people, who do not have a clutch of qualifications, to overcome the disadvantage of a lack of qualifications and lead positive and productive lives. What has not changed is my frustration that we have no real way of recognising this as a society.

Despite the frustrations, 'U' turns and countless other problems along the way, this has been a fascinating journey and one which I will never regret. I was afforded a remarkable opportunity by UoB and ESRC, which by far the majority of the

general population will never have. As such I was determined to do the best with the opportunity that I possibly could, to illuminate an issue which I saw as being unnoticed. Whether that ambition will be realised will be judged by others but I hope that the cohort which I chose to represent through the production of this thesis will now have some sort of visibility within the academic community.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Survey questions.

### About you and your organisation.

1. Do you work in?  
(a) A school                      (b) Wider education
  
2. Where is your organisation located?
  
3. Type of organisation (e.g. Free School, Academy, State School, FE, HE)
  
4. Please state your current role
  
5. How many years' experience (if teacher)?  
0-5      6-10      11-15      16-20      Over 20
  
6. Do you have any responsibility for?  
Strategic planning  
Managerial decision-making  
Supervising staff  
None of these

### Transitions from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4

How should successful transitions be judged?

7. Accepting that this will vary from pupil to pupil what, in your opinion, constitutes a successful transition KS2-KS4?

Comments
----------

8. How do you think “success” should be measured at the end of KS4?

5 A\*-C passes at GCSE (incl. English and maths)

5 A\*-C passes at GCSE (subject irrelevant)

5 A\*-C passes GCSE or equivalent (incl. English and maths)

5 A\*-C passes GCSE or equivalent (subject irrelevant)

Proposed ‘Progress 8’ measure

Baccalaureate (e.g. IBacc/ EBacc)

Some other measure

9. If ‘some other measure’ what should this be?

Comments
----------

10. In your opinion will initiatives such as ‘Progress 8’ and ‘Closing the Gap’ help improve KS4 outcomes for **all** pupils?

Yes

No

11. If ‘yes’ how do you think they will improve?

Comments
----------

12. In your view is all the time pupils spend in class lessons used wholly for effective subject teaching?

Yes

No

13. If 'no' why not?

Comments

14. In your view is a child's education mostly influenced by?

The school

The home background

The wider community

Their peers

Other influences

15. Please state the reason(s) for your choice

Comments

**No child left behind?**

Statistics suggest that a number of children entering secondary school with KS2 scores of 3 or lower have little or no chance of reaching KS4 floor targets.

16. Do you agree with this statement?

Yes

No

17. Why do you agree or disagree?

Comments

18. How do you think the proposed shift to 'Progress \*' measure might alter this (if at all)?

Comments
----------

19. Are there any initiatives within your school particularly aimed at improving educational outcomes for pupils identified at KS2 as low performers?

Yes

No

20. If 'yes' please describe the initiative and method of measurement.

Comments
----------

21. And how successful has (have) the project(s) been at delivering lasting change for the pupils involved? (Please indicate on the 'Salmon Line')

Completely successful

Completely unsuccessful



22. In your view is there a cohort of pupils for whom chances of reaching Ofsted levels of attainment or achievement is unrealistic?

Yes

No

23. If 'yes' can anything be done to improve the educational outcomes for this cohort?

Comments

**Attitudes to change.**

24. What (or who) is the primary driver for change in your organisation?

Comments

25. How would you describe your organisation's attitude to change?

Always embraces

Sometimes embraces

Neutral

Sometimes resistant

Always resistant

26. In your view do groups or individuals within your organisation habitually resist change regardless of the rationale for improvement?

Yes

No

27. Why would change be resisted?

Comments



33. If 'yes' what changes are achievable?

Comments
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34. What, in your view, is the rationale for the proposal to adopt 'Progress 8' as the KS4 floor target?

Comments
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**Further research.**

35. If you are willing to participate in a short follow-up interview to further explore your responses, please indicate below by providing your email address/ contact details.

**This is in strict confidence and will not be used to identify you to any third party.**

Email address/ contact details
--------------------------------

**Thank you for giving up your valuable time to complete this survey.**

## Appendix 2: Interview participants ‘pen-pictures’

Interview no.	Role	School **	Years' experience	Same school?	Notes
1	Teaching Assistant	1	12	Y	SEN Dept
2	Special Ed Needs Coordinator (SeNCo)	2	22	N (3 others)	SeNCo for 6 years
3	Educational Psychologist	3	19	N/A	National profile
4	Cover Supervisor (teacher deputy)	2	2	Y	Part-time
5	Deputy Head teacher	1	30	Y	Head of Pastoral
6	Educational Welfare Officer	1	18	N/A	School-based
7	Teacher	2	12	Y	Head of Year
8	Teaching Assistant	2	8	N (1 other)	SEN Officer
9	Educational Welfare Officer	3	9	Y	Covers school cluster
10	Teacher	3	11	N	Joined from industry
11	Special Ed Needs Coordinator (SeNCo)	3	17	N (3 others)	Previously teaching
12	Teaching Assistant	3	6	Y	SEN Dept.
13	Teacher	1	10	Y	Asst. HoD
14	Deputy Head teacher	2	16	N (1 other)	Recently promoted
15	Teacher	2	7	Y	Deputy HoD
16	Head teacher	1	35	N (3 others)	Prev. as teacher/ DHT
17	Head teacher	3	18	N (4 others)	Started as a teacher

Notes:

\*\* Totals – School 1 = 5 School 2 = 6 School 3 = 6

**Appendix 3: Interview topic guide.**

<b>MAIN THEME</b>	<b>SUB THEME</b>	<b>STARTER QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPT</b>
<b>POLICY</b>	Changing metrics Academies Free schools Curriculum Implementation Methods of assessment	Is the scale and pace of change appropriate? What is the rationale for change? Why do schools convert to academies? Will all schools be forced to take academy status eventually? How will academies/ free schools increase standards? Could state schools do the same with equal resources?	Progress 8 Pupil premium State v market National or notional? Leadership roles SMT-Teacher relationship Ofsted
<b>TEACHING</b>	Good teachers Poor teachers	How does good (bad) teaching make a difference?	Teaching time in the classroom. Attitudes to pupils Teacher-pupil relationship Self-awareness
<b>ALTERNATIVE PROVISION</b>	Internally Externally Engagement with 3 <sup>rd</sup> party providers	No. of pupils engaged in AP and where? What intervention strategies?	Interventions DofE/ Prince's Trust
<b>JOBS and SKILLS</b>	Chances for low performers Availability of jobs Qualifications	What 'skills' are employers looking for?	Skills deficits 'Right skills' Workplace remedies What do employers want?
<b>"SUCCESS"</b>	Attainment Achievement Progress	What represents a successful transition from KS2 – KS4? What is the alternative to floor targets?	GCSEs BTEC Diploma?
<b>BARRIERS</b>	Material Disadvantage Family Access issues Latent ability	Do low performing pupils disengage from the system or vice versa? Equal chance for every pupil?	Effects of home life and peer groups.  Govt. Statistics

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