

An Exploration into the Educational Experiences of High Achieving Young People Entitled to Free School Meals.

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Abstract

Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of academic success, as measured by gaining five GCSEs at grades nine-four (formally known as A*-C), on positive life outcomes and access to higher education (Hayward et al., 2014; Jerrim, 2022). However, research has consistently highlighted that children and young people accessing free school meals (FSM) are less likely to academically achieve compared to their non-FSM peers (Hutchinson et al., 2020). As a response to this gap, the Pupil Premium funding was developed to support school professionals to raise the attainment of pupils including those accessing FSM. To date, limited research has been conducted to explore young people accessing FSM who are considered to be high achievers' educational experiences.

This research aimed to explore the facilitating and hindering factors of academic achievement in young people accessing FSM. Participants were five pupils in year 10 or 11 and semi-structured interviews were used to gain the views of participants. Data was analysed inductively and deductively. Inductive analysis used reflexive thematic analysis to develop key themes from the participants' views. These themes were then deductively analysed and applied to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to attempt to understand the systemic factors influencing academic achievement for children accessing FSM.

The results indicated that a range of multi-systemic factors influence academic achievement in young people accessing FSM whilst considered to be high achievers. Facilitating factors influencing academic achievement included positive relationships with staff, parents and peers, having access to home and school resources, young people's positive attitudes towards education and learning, effective teaching practices and young people spending time away from learning. Conversely, hindering factors influencing academic achievement included lack of positive relationships with school staff, a lack of adequate home resources and environment, the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions, academic pressures, lack of interest in a subject and ineffective teaching practices and school policies. The implications arising from the findings are also discussed in relation to the school professionals and the role of the educational psychologist.

Dedication

To my parents, MSJ and KKJ.

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Abbreviations

FSM – free school meals

PP – Pupil Premium

EP – Educational Psychologist

SES – Socio-economic status

GCSE - General Certificate of Education

DfE - Department for Education

SMCPC - Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

Ofqual - Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

EEF - Education Endowment Foundation

EPPSE - Effective Provision of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education

UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

RTA – Reflexive thematic analysis

TA – Thematic analysis

IPA - Interpretative Phenological Analysis

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

BPS - British Psychology Society

BERA - British Educational Research Association (BERA)

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the process by which the research topic was identified. This is followed by the rationale for the research. I then discuss the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on this research. Finally, an overview of the research is summarised.

1.1 Personal and Professional Journey and Rationale

This research explores the educational experiences of young people accessing free school meals (FSM) whilst considered to be higher achievers. The decision to conduct such research was motivated by aspects of my personal and professional experiences.

I was first exposed to the Pupil Premium (PP) funding as a teaching assistant in a large and urban primary school. As of October 2021, 54.5% of children at this primary school were accessing PP (Ryke Primary School, 2022). I witnessed discussions about how the spending should be used to support the eligible children in the class during staff meetings. Furthermore, I supported the enactment of the funding through, namely, delivering academic interventions. This was the starting point of my interest in learning more about the PP funding which led me to explore the inequalities within the education system in England. Through this journey, I learned about the attainment gap between children accessing FSM and their non-FSM peers.

I have continually reflected upon the role of the educational psychologist (EP) throughout my training journey. Personally, the role includes attempting to break down barriers of educational inequalities and ensuring the child and young person are at the centre of my practice.

I was interested in children and young people's own views and perspectives and noted these were not represented much in the qualitative literature on the attainment gap for children and young people accessing FSM.

Therefore, my personal and professional journey led me to want to explore the views of young people who are accessing FSM and are considered to be high achievers. This led me to the following research questions:

1. What, if any, are the facilitating factors of academic achievement for young people accessing FSM?
2. What, if any, are the hindering factors of academic achievement for young people accessing FSM?

1.2 Covid-19 Impact Statement

The covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the recruitment process of this research. Initially, members of senior staff representing two local secondary schools expressed an interest in participating and signed the preliminary consent forms (see Appendix 1). However, after further discussions, both staff members withdrew their respective schools from participation due to the lack of staff capacity because of the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent guidance causing staff absences.

Additionally, the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent guidance disrupted the data collection process. Many of the pupils who were approached to participate in the research were absent, due to having covid-19, on the days of interviewing. This impacted the intended number of six to eight participants not being achieved. Overall, there were five participants in this research.

1.3 An Overview of the Research

Chapter two of this research reviews the relevant literature pertaining to young people's academic success, the influential factors of academic achievement and pupils' participation in research, in order to give an overview of the research area.

Chapter three details the methodology and research design used in this research.

Chapter four outlines the findings of this research and discusses them in relation to the wider literature as reviewed in Chapter two.

Chapter five explores the potential implications for professional practice and policies. This is followed by the strengths and limitations of the current research and possible future directions for subsequent research. This chapter finishes with concluding comments.

1.4 Key Terms

This research explores experiences of academic achievement for young people accessing FSM and therefore PP. It does not aim to make any claims or focus on socio-economic status (SES) but acknowledges the significance of this on children and young people's development including academic achievement (Morris et al., 2016). This is because, as a researcher, I did not feel comfortable assuming these claims about the participants and believed it was unethical to assume this or to ask the young people to identify their perception of their SES. Therefore, the participants involved in this research are referred to as accessing FSM rather than low SES.

FSM is a well-known indicator of SES used in research (Ilie et al., 2017). Therefore, the wider research drawn upon in the literature review often uses FSM as well as other indicators as a measure of SES. However, this research does not intend to make claims about SES but only to seek

the views of young people accessing FSM and PP. I will be using the authors' descriptors and terms when referring to the wider literature. When referring to significant research, I will briefly outline how the authors have defined the terms they are using, if stated.

The terms academic achievement and academic attainment are often used interchangeably within the literature (for an example of this see Jerrim, 2022). When referring to the wider literature, the term the authors use will be referred to.

In this research, the terms academic achievement and academic attainment are defined as follows:

- Collins dictionary states that achievement is defined as “...*something which someone has succeeded in doing...*” as well as “*achievement is the process of achieving something.*” (Collins, 2022a). Therefore, academic achievement can then be described as educational accomplishments reached by an individual, such as a teacher's predicted grades and a grade on a test.
- Collins dictionary says that attainment refers to “...*a skill you have learned or something that you have achieved.*” (Collins, 2022b). Therefore, academic attainment can also be described as educational accomplishments reached by an individual, such as a teacher's predicted grades and a grade on a test.

The definitions outlined above suggest that academic achievement and academic attainment may have the same meaning and perhaps provides an understanding of why the terms are used interchangeably in the literature. Within this research, the term academic achievement will be used when I am not referencing the wider literature.

In this research, the term academic success is defined as gaining five GCSEs at grades nine-four (previously known as A*-C) including maths and English (Crawford et al., 2014). This is described further in section 2.2: Academic Success.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by exploring the central concept of academic success in English secondary education. This is followed by an overview of the disparities in academic achievement between young people accessing free school meals (FSM) and their non-FSM peers.

Next, the impact of the covid-19 restrictions on education are considered including how GCSE grades were calculated and the effects of remote learning. This is followed by an overview of the Pupil Premium (PP) funding and FSM eligibility.

Then, research exploring the individual, family and school influences on academic achievement are discussed and reference is made to Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) research which is influential to this study. This leads to an overview of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) results are then discussed in relation to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This is followed by a discussion of the importance of pupil participation in research. Then, research that has explored young people accessing FSMs' perceptions of education are summarised.

This chapter concludes by outlining the rationale and research questions that this study aims to address.

2.2 Academic Success

In England, General Certificate of Education (GCSE) examinations are taken from age 16 and used to determine educational progression and measure academic achievement (Machin et al., 2020). A new secondary school accountability system was introduced in 2016 (Department for Education [DfE], 2020b; Ofqual, 2019). This included a change in the grading system for all GCSEs including maths, English and science. Rather than A*-G, it is now graded on a 9-1 scale, 9 being the equivalent of an A* and 1 the equivalent of G. In all subjects, a grade 4 or above is recognised as a standard pass (DfE, 2020b). It is expected that pupils sit GCSE exams in maths, English and science in the English education system in mainstream secondary schools. There is particular emphasis on achieving a pass grade for English and maths. Pupils who do not achieve this standard pass in GCSE English and maths exams must re-sit the exams until they pass or turn 18 (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2022a).

Achieving five GCSEs at grade A*-C, now 9-4, including English and Maths, was the institutionalised success criteria of achievement (Anderson, 2022; Crawford et al., 2014) before the GCSE reforms. This criteria is widely accepted including within research. For example, Mulcare (2020) uses this criteria as a measure of academic success in their research and Crawford et al. (2014) apply this

criteria to indicate high achievement. The government now use Progress 8 and Attainment 8 as a measure of a school's performance (DfE, 2020b). Progress 8 and Attainment 8 are calculated to determine the whole school's progress and attainment (DfE, 2020b) suggesting that these approaches measure a school's performance rather than individual pupils' academic achievement. For this reason, Attainment 8 and Progress 8 were not used as measures of high academic achievement in this research.

Academic success is important as it has strong links to an array of positive societal and economical outcomes in adult life including employment (Greenwood et al., 2007) and earnings (Hodge et al., 2021). Furthermore, five GCSEs at grades 9-4 is often the minimum entry requirement for access to future opportunities such as further education¹ and employment. This may suggest that this benchmark is regarded as pupils academically succeeding. Additionally, research has shown that this benchmark is commonly used to predict later outcomes including key stage five provision type and attainment, higher education provision type and employment earnings (Chowdry et al., 2010; Hayward et al., 2014; Mangan et al., 2010).

Performance in GCSEs can have an impact on young people's immediate outcomes such as their access and eligibility to higher education such as sixth form, colleges and universities and can influence entry to courses or subjects that they can study. Jerrim (2022) found that achieving a C grade in GCSE English, maths and double science was strongly associated with an increase in the probability of studying A-levels at age 17 and applying to and receiving an offer for university at age 18. These results indicate how achieving what is considered a standard pass in core GCSE subjects, grants substantial advantages for educational progression and long-term educational attainment.

Similarly, Machin et al. (2020) highlight the impact that GCSE grades can have on children and young people's next steps after secondary education by exploring the consequences of pupils failing GCSE English taken at age 16. They found that pupils who had marginally missed out on meeting the pass criteria had varying educational trajectories compared to similar ability peers. Achieving a pass in GCSE English significantly influenced access to opportunities available for pupils including access to particular courses, institutions as well as the quality of educational institutions. Furthermore, pupils who marginally missed out on a pass did not recover from this, even if they passed in the following years, they had a higher probability of exiting education without being in some form of employment. A strength of this quantitative research is the large sample size used (49,231 pupils), increasing the

¹ Achieving a minimum of five 9-4 graded GCSEs including English and maths is the entry requirement for most courses at Pine school sixth form (Pine School website, 2022a) and the local college (Hutshire College website, 2022).

strength of Machin et al's. (2020) results. Along with this, the research is novel as it highlighted the significance of meeting institutional educational thresholds.

Jerrim's (2022) and Machin et al's. (2020) findings highlight the significance of GCSE grades in core subjects acting as a gateway to further and higher education and improved employment prospects. This has vital implications as many pupils in England leave school without these grades (DfE, 2020a). Therefore, research must continue to explore the educational experiences of young people in secondary schools to develop understanding as well as to attempt to reduce pupils not achieving the key benchmark indicators of academic success that are needed for future prospects.

Research has also documented the relationship between GCSEs and longitudinal outcomes. Greenwood et al. (2007) predicted an approximate 25% difference in wages between individuals who gained five or more GCSEs at a pass or above in English and maths than those with no qualifications. Furthermore, Hayward et al. (2014) found that individuals who had achieved five or more GCSEs including a pass or above in English and maths, on average, earned £283,000 and £237,000 (male and female respectively) more through their lifetime, compared to individuals who achieved no qualifications. However, it is important to consider that the educational data was collected via interviews which means data collection may have been susceptible to bias. For example, individuals may have overrepresented their attainment and the retrospective nature may have led to an inaccurate recall of details such as GCSE grades. Similarly, Hodge et al. (2021) found that a one-grade increase in GCSE maths is associated with a £14,500 discounted labour market return, compared to £7,300 for GCSE English. This research, therefore, highlights the significant positive impact academic achievement at GCSE level can have on young people's life outcomes.

2.2.1 The Attainment Gap

The attainment gap refers to children and young people who are eligible for FSM achieving less than their non-FSM peers (Andrews et al., 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2020). It is a longstanding trend within educational data and is evidenced across all school ages (Hutchinson et al., 2020; Sammons et al., 2014). Sammons et al. (2014) conducted longitudinal research using mixed methods and found that pupils eligible for or receiving FSM were less likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C and, on average, achieved one grade lower in GCSE English and maths, compared to non-FSM pupils. Furthermore, Hutchinson et al. (2020) found that in 2019, the attainment gap between children and young people accessing FSM and their non-FSM peers had started to widen for primary aged pupils for the first time since 2007. In 2018 the attainment gap was 9.2 months between children accessing FSM and their non-FSM peers and in 2019 this gap increased to 9.3 months. Further analysis showed that in secondary education, the attainment gap

widened in 2018 and remained in 2019 (Hutchinson et al., 2020). These results, therefore, indicate that educational inequalities have stagnated or are possibly increasing.

Crawford et al. (2017) found that pupils from poor backgrounds, as measured by an index including FSM eligibility and local area characteristics, who are high achievers in primary school fall behind their more affluent but lower-achieving peers during secondary school. Similarly, Montacute (2018) found that pupils accessing FSM who performed well in primary school appeared to academically fall behind in comparison to other high attaining pupils during secondary school. These findings suggest that secondary school may be a critical period for young people accessing FSMs' academic achievement. Therefore, it may be important for professionals including educational psychologists (EPs) and school staff to further understand the educational experiences of young people accessing FSM and attempt to prevent these pupils from academically falling behind their non-FSM peers.

Further exploration into the attainment gap shows that pupils eligible for FSM made between 0.26-0.35 of a GCSE grade less progress whilst their non-FSM counterparts made between 0.06-0.09 of a GCSE grade more progress, despite having similar prior attainment in key stage two (Shaw et al., 2017). Shaw et al. (2017) highlight that 88% of this progress disparity is due to within-school differences, compared to 12% attributed to variation between schools. This, therefore, emphasises the significant influence of the school and home context on academic performance. This implies that there may be a difference between the experiences and treatment of pupils eligible for FSM and those not within the same secondary schools. Therefore, this highlights the importance of exploring the views and experiences of academic achievement of secondary pupils accessing FSM within the same school.

The literature describes how academic success, as measured by achieving five GCSEs at grades 9-4 including in English and maths, can facilitate access to further education (Jerrim, 2022) and positive life outcomes (Greenwood et al., 2007). This, therefore, highlights the importance of academic achievement in education, particularly GCSEs. The attainment gap between children and young people accessing FSM and their non-FSM counterparts appears to have stopped reducing for primary and secondary aged pupils (Hutchinson et al., 2020). Research indicates that secondary school is a critical period for young people accessing FSMs' academic achievement (Crawford et al., 2017; Montacute, 2018) and that school-related factors may influence their academic achievement (Shaw et al., 2017).

2.3 The Covid-19 Pandemic and Education

The covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions meant that current pupils in years 10 and 11 would have experienced significant disruptions to their education in years eight, nine and 10. The

national lockdown resulted in significant changes to pedagogical practices as face-to-face teaching was restricted and, in the summers of 2020 and 2021, exams were cancelled including GCSEs. The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation² (Ofqual) had to decide how results and grading would be managed during the pandemic. Initially, Ofqual proceeded with an algorithm that placed significant weighting on the school's and college's past performance (Ofqual, 2020a). This was concerning as it overlooked an individual pupil's ability, something which Ofqual themselves recognised (Timmins, 2021) but still decided to proceed with the algorithm method. Additionally, this approach would disadvantage many pupils who were considered high academic achievers and were likely to perform well in exams and were in schools that were improving year on year. Furthermore, previous research has shown that secondary schools with a higher percentage of pupils eligible for or accessing FSM predicted lower grades for pupils in GCSE English and maths and a lower probability of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A*-C (Sammons et al., 2014). This, therefore, highlights how young people who were accessing FSM whilst considered high achievers may have been unfairly penalised under the algorithm method.

The government declared the approach to exam results would be changed from the algorithm method despite initially being adamant that this would be the only approach taken (Weale & Stewart, 2020). Pupils would now be able to choose between the higher grade of teacher predictions or those grades predicted by the algorithm (Ofqual, 2020b). For a detailed timeline of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic restrictions and decisions made by the government in regard to education, refer to Figure 1.

² Ofqual regulate GCSE exams and marking as well as ensuring that standards are maintained across different exam boards (Ofqual, n.d).

March 2020

- 18th – Government announces school closures starting 23rd March. Schools remain open for children of key workers and vulnerable children. Gavin Williamson (Education Secretary at the time) also declares exams would be cancelled.

April 2020

- 1st - National FSM voucher scheme entered allowing children to continue accessing FSM at home.
- 3rd – Ofqual issues guidance about grade calculations being based on a mixture of an algorithm and teacher assessment (teachers ranked children within their class).
- 19th – Government announces a scheme to provide some children with laptops to access online learning.

May 2020

- 11th – Proportion of the government scheme laptops delivered at schools (50,000 out of an initial 200,000 order).
- 22nd – Ofqual announce the algorithm will be weighted more toward past school performance than teacher assessments.
- 24th – Government announces that schools will reopen for select year groups on 1st June with social distancing measures.

June 2020

- 1st – Primary schools reopen for years 1 and 6. Some schools decide not to reopen.
- 9th – Government announces that their plan to get most pupils back before the end of the summer term is not possible and claims 2021 exams will take place.
- 15th - Government rejects the proposal for FSM vouchers extension throughout the summer holidays. This decision is retracted the day after. Secondary schools reopen for years 10 and 12.

August 2020

- 13th - A-level grades published despite concerns about grading calculation method. The government claims there would be no change in the grading method.
- 17th – Government announces retraction on the grading calculation method, going to the higher of either the calculated score by the algorithm or teacher predicted grades.
- 20th – GCSE results published using the higher of either the teacher predicted grades and algorithm calculated results.

September 2020

- 2nd – All schools reopen with social distancing rules and bubbles.

October 2020

- 14th – Government announces 3-tiered system. Schools remain open but different tiers had different sets of guidelines for schools. Tier 3 secondary schools limited attendance to just vulnerable children, children of key workers and selected year groups.
- 30th - National lockdown announced to begin from 31st. Schools remain open.

January 2021

- 4th – Many primary schools reopen. That evening, the government announces the closure of all schools until at least 22nd February. Exceptions are made for children of key workers and vulnerable children. Exams are cancelled. Government declares a national lockdown.
- Date not specified – many schools still have not received laptops from the government scheme.

February 2021


- 25th – Government announces that GCSE and A-Level grades were to be awarded and determined by teachers. Guidance about how teachers should assign grades referred to using a range of information such as mock exams, coursework, essays, work completed by pupils and tests given by the exam boards.

March 2021

- 8th – Primary schools reopen and there is a phased reopening of secondary schools.

July 2021

- 19th - Most lockdown restrictions are lifted in England



<p>August 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10th and 12th - A-level (10th) and GCSE (12th) grades are awarded based on teacher estimates (no algorithm).
<p>September 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30th – Government announces intention for GCSE and A-level exams to occur in summer 2022.
<p>February 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24th - All lockdown measures are lifted.

Figure 1. Timeline from March 2020 to February 2022 summarising significant covid-19 events and subsequent key government decisions regarding education.

The covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions have further highlighted educational and societal inequalities. For example, there are growing concerns that the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the attainment and educational progression of pupils eligible for FSM compared to non-FSM pupils (Blundell et al., 2021; DfE, 2021b; Rose et al., 2021). Furthermore, Major et al. (2020) found that through the Spring 2020 lockdown period, 74% of private school pupils accessed full school days whereas only 39% of state-funded school pupils did.

The covid-19 pandemic restrictions resulted in children and young people having to access and engage in learning from their homes. Therefore, this relied on them having appropriate technology and an adequate home working space. Andrew et al. (2020) found that one in seven secondary school pupils relied on a phone or had no device to access schoolwork. This would have had a significant impact on those children and young people's access to and the effectiveness of online learning. An adequate home learning environment would have been essential during online learning. Andrew et al. (2020) found that 10% of children and young people did not have access to a suitable study space during the national lockdown period between April 2020 to June 2020.

The lack of access to a suitable home learning space and resources would likely have impacted the concentration and engagement of pupils accessing online learning. This is confirmed by Walters et al. (2022) who explored secondary school pupils' experiences of online teaching via a retrospective online survey. They found that pupils' concentration, engagement, and ability to learn were significantly lower during online learning compared to classroom-based learning and pupils reported a higher percentage of distractions with online learning. Distractions included devices, family, pets and intrusive thoughts impacting their concentration (Walters et al., 2022). Results of which emphasise the importance of the influence of the home environment on learning but particularly during online classes.

Overall, the research exploring the impact of the covid-19 pandemic restrictions on learning highlights the difference between children and young people from lower and higher income families in the frequency of online lessons offered by their schools, access to resources such as their own

study space at home and time spent on home learning (Andrew et al., 2020; Major et al., 2020). These results not only demonstrate the substantial learning loss for pupils but also the significant influence of the home learning environment and inequalities of the education received according to the type of school children and young people attended. This is concerning as research has demonstrated the salience of achieving standard passes in GCSEs at age 16 for positive life outcomes, including access to higher education (Machin et al., 2020).

The literature and reports discussed highlight how the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions have influenced pupils' education due to the significant absence of face-to-face teaching as well as the educational and social inequalities such as the management of the grading approach and access to resources.

2.4 Pupil Premium

The Pupil Premium (PP) funding was introduced in April 2011 in recognition of the attainment gap between pupils from 'disadvantaged'³ backgrounds, whether by income or being in care, and their non-disadvantaged peers (Roberts et al., 2021). The scheme aims to provide schools with additional funding so that they can support the education and enhance the attainment of pupils eligible for the PP funding (DfE, 2022b).

The PP funding consists of two policies (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2022b). One policy is for 'disadvantaged' children and young people and refers to children and young people who are and have been in the last six years accessing FSM or are considered a looked after child currently or in the last six years, the latter is referred to as the PP Plus. The terms used to describe the PP funding stream for children accessing FSM are used interchangeably by government documents and researchers. It is most commonly either termed the disadvantage PP, deprivation PP or PP (DfE, 2021a; Roberts et al., 2021). The amount of funding received for pupils differs depending on which funding the child is eligible for and whether they are in primary or secondary school.

The other policy, named the Service PP, supports children who have parents in the armed forces. The Service PP aims to provide support for children and young people eligible, whereas the disadvantage PP aims to accelerate progression and raise the attainment of eligible pupils. Therefore, the government guidance states that schools should not merge Service PP with disadvantage PP funding and the spending of each should be accounted for separately (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

³ This is the term used by the Government in their documents in reference to the Pupil Premium (DfE, 2022b) and therefore, for consistency, it is referenced here too.

This research is interested in the deprivation PP, therefore in subsequent chapters when the PP funding is discussed this is with regard to children and young people accessing FSM and not the Service PP nor the PP Plus (for children and young people who are looked after). For a detailed overview of these different streams of PP funding, refer to Figure 2.

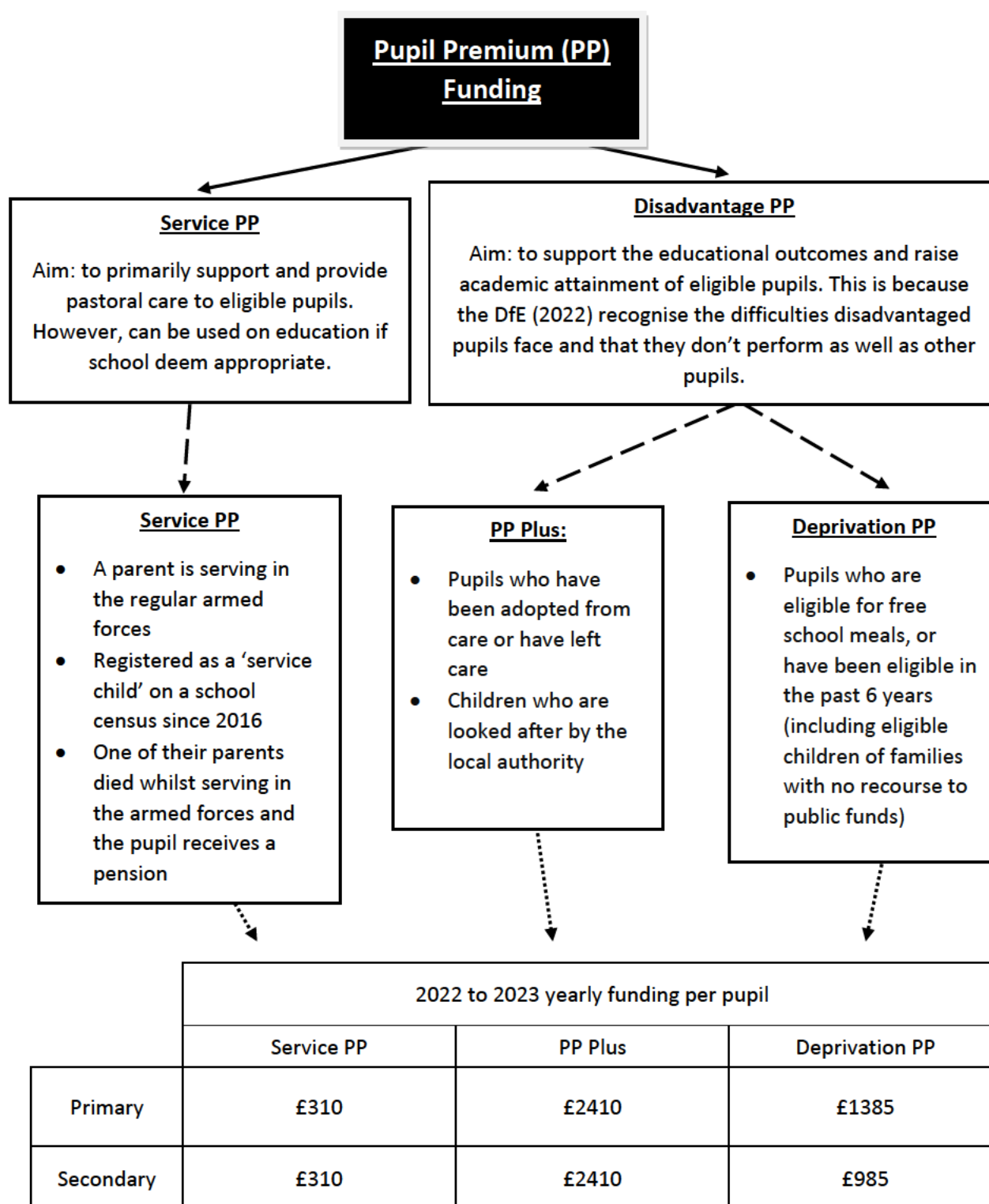


Figure 2. An overview of the 2022 to 2023 PP funding streams.

2.4.1 Free School Meals

The FSM initiative in schools began in 1906, the Education Act permitted local authorities to provide meals to pupils (Keith, 2020). Following this, the Education Act of 1944 stated local authorities had a statutory duty to provide school meals and milk for all school pupils (Education Act, 1944). However, this entitlement was restricted by the revised Education Act (1980) which stated that free school meals were only to be given to children of families receiving supplementary benefits and family income support (Taylor, 2018). Families and children who were entitled to FSM were further restricted with the introduction of the Social Security Act (1986) (Keith, 2020).

The Education Act (1996) enforces that maintained schools and academies provide FSM to children and young people of families receiving any of the support outlined in Box 1 (DfE, 2018). For a pupil to be registered as eligible for FSM, the family must meet the criteria, outlined in Box 1, and a request must have been made by them (DfE, 2018). Although, research has highlighted that approximately 10% of eligible families do not apply (Roberts et al., 2021) for various reasons including concerns around stigmatisation of the funding (Carpenter et al., 2013; Sahota et al., 2014; Woodward et al., 2015) and meals not aligning with religious beliefs (Carpenter et al., 2013). Therefore, eligible children and young people are not only missing out on FSM but subsequently, schools are not in receipt of PP for those children.

The government announced that from September 2014, all children in reception and years one and two attending state-funded schools were able to receive FSM (DfE & Clegg, 2013). Although families who meet the FSM criteria outlined in Box 1 are still encouraged to apply for FSM (Hutshire County Council [pseudonym], n.d.). This universal approach may mean that fewer families have applied for FSM, therefore also impacting schools receiving PP for eligible children in reception and years one and two.

Free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for
- Working Tax Credit

Box 1. FSM eligibility criteria as quoted the from DfE (2018, p. 5).

As discussed in section 2.3: The Covid-19 Pandemic and Education, the covid-19 pandemic highlighted and enforced societal and educational inequalities. Despite FSM eligibility increasing before the pandemic, there was an acceleration in the eligibility of primary and secondary pupils eligible for FSM between 2020 and 2021 (DfE, 2021a). For primary pupils, there was a 20.6% increase and for secondary pupils a 21.6% increase between 2020 and 2021 compared to an increase of 12.1% for primary pupils and 14.0% for secondary pupils between 2019 and 2020, this is visible in Table 1.

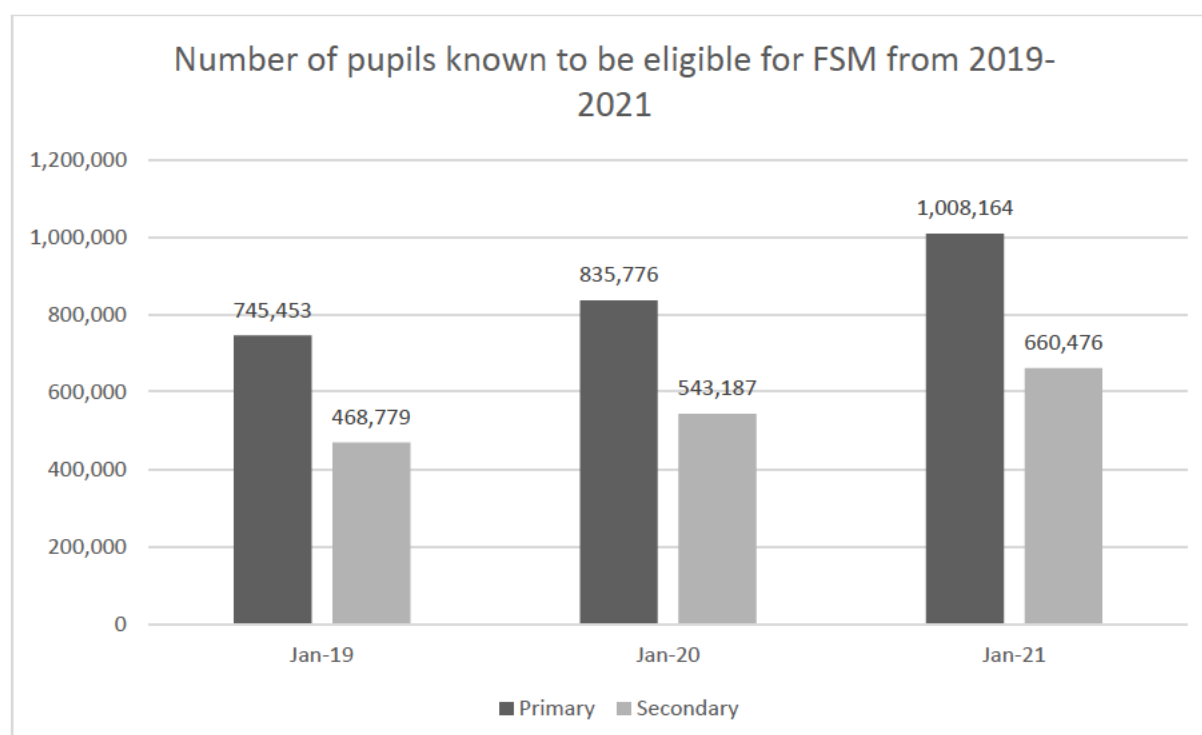


Table 1. The number of children and young people eligible for FSM between 2019 and 2021 (DfE, 2021a).

2.4.2 Pupil Premium Funding Rate Per Pupil

The amount of funding per pupil and the eligibility criteria has changed over time. For an overview of this, refer to Table 2. For children in receipt of FSM, the funding schools receive per pupil significantly increased from 2011, when the funding began, at £430 for both primary and secondary pupils, to 2014 when differing amounts were introduced for primary and secondary pupils, £1,320 and £935 respectively. The difference between the primary and secondary allocation was justified for reasons including early intervention being more effective in improving achievement and to help support pupils to prepare for secondary school (Sibieta, 2015).

Between 2015-2020, the PP funding rate per pupil stagnated. The funding increased to £1,345 for primary pupils and £955 for secondary pupils in 2020 and increased further by £40 for primary and

£30 for secondary pupils in 2022. Despite these increases, researchers have found that the PP funding increases have failed to match inflation rates since 2015 (Farquharson et al., 2021). Consequently, this may impact the amount and quality of support and intervention that school staff can spend on raising academic achievement for disadvantaged pupils. This is concerning as it questions the efficacy and effectiveness of the PP funding.

Deprivation PP	Year	Eligibility criteria	Funding rate (per pupil)
	2011-12	Currently receiving FSM	£430
	2012-13	Currently receiving FSM and/or have been at any point in the last six years	£600
	2013-14	Same as 2012-13	£900
	2014-15	Same as 2012-13	Primary £1,300
			Secondary £935
	2015-16	Same as 2012-13	Primary £1,320
			Secondary £935
	2016-17	Same as 2012-13	Same
	2017-18	Same as 2012-13	Same
	2018-19	Same as 2012-13	Same
	2019-20	Same as 2012-13	Same
	2020-21	Same as 2012-13	Primary £1,345
			Secondary £955
	2021-22	Same as 2012-13	Same as 2021-22
	2022-23	Same as 2012-13	Primary £1,385
			Secondary £985

Table 2 The PP eligibility criteria and funding rate between 2011 and 2023, as adapted from Roberts and Long (2017, p. 5).

2.4.3 Pupil Premium Allocations

The method by which PP funding is calculated has changed since April 2021 (Adams & Vinter, 2021). Previously, school census data completed in January informed the PP allocations. This has now changed to the October census. A reason for this change is to align the PP with the rest of the core funding system for schools which operates in October (Education Committee, 2021). However, this resulted in schools missing out on funding in the year of the change as it did not account for pupils who enrolled in schools between October 2020 and January 2021 (Adams & Vinter, 2021).

Furthermore, there was a substantial increase in claims for FSM between October 2020 and January 2021 (Farquharson et al., 2021) which is likely to be an effect of the covid-19 pandemic (Julius & Ghosh, 2022). Schools were delayed from benefitting from this increase in PP claims for 2020-21 due to the change in school staff having to determine and declare PP eligibility from January to October.

The total annual funding for the PP has increased each year since it started in 2011 (Roberts et al., 2021). In 2021-22, overall, approximately £2.5 billion in total PP funding was provided to schools in

England, £2.2 billion of which was allocated to pupils qualifying for the PP due to their access to FSM (DfE, 2021a). Hutshire (pseudonym) is the local authority that this research is conducted in. Altogether, £17.3 million of the PP funding was allocated to primary and secondary schools in Hutshire. The number of pupils accessing PP due to receiving FSM in the last six years as well as the PP allocation in England and Hutshire for 2021-22 are outlined in Table 3.

	Number of pupils eligible for Deprivation PP		Deprivation Pupil Premium Allocation	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Hutshire	8,273	6,484	£11,127,185	£6,191,743
England	1,050,477	838,303	£1,412,809,743	£800,535,674

Table 3. The number of children and young people eligible for Deprivation PP and PP Allocations in Hutshire compared to England in 2021-2022.

Allocation of the PP funding for children and young people eligible for FSM changes depending on the type of school. Both maintained schools and academies receive quarterly instalments of the funding (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2022b; Roberts et al., 2021). However, maintained schools receive the funding from the local authority which obtains it from the government. Local authorities must declare they have sent the correct amount to schools (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2022b). Whereas, academies receive the funding directly from the government (Roberts et al., 2021).

2.4.4 Pupil Premium Spending in Schools

School staff are responsible for how they spend the PP funding in their schools as the government argued that they are best placed to determine how to effectively use the funding to support their pupils (Morris & Dobson, 2021). However, alongside this autonomy, there are accountability measures that schools must adhere to. School staff have to annually publish their strategies for using the PP on their websites (DfE, 2021c). Additionally, Ofsted inspections report on the attainment and progress of PP pupils (Ofsted, 2022). These are all measures which ensure school staff spend the PP appropriately and sensibly (Morris & Dobson, 2021).

Despite schools being responsible for spending the PP, the government recommends practitioners consult with guidance produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (EEF, 2019). The EEF generates guidance detailing evidence-based suggestions and approaches aiming to enhance the

educational attainment of pupils (Morris & Dobson, 2021). The organisation has produced a range of materials to support educational practitioners with the spending of the PP including a specific guide to spending the PP (EEF, 2019) and the Sutton Trust and EEF Toolkit (Higgins et al., 2014). The PP guidance recommends five principles underpinning spending of the funding in schools which are: schools can make a difference, evidence-informed approaches, quality teaching helps all pupils, implementation matters, and support middle and high attainers too (EEF, 2019). Figure 3 summarises these principles.

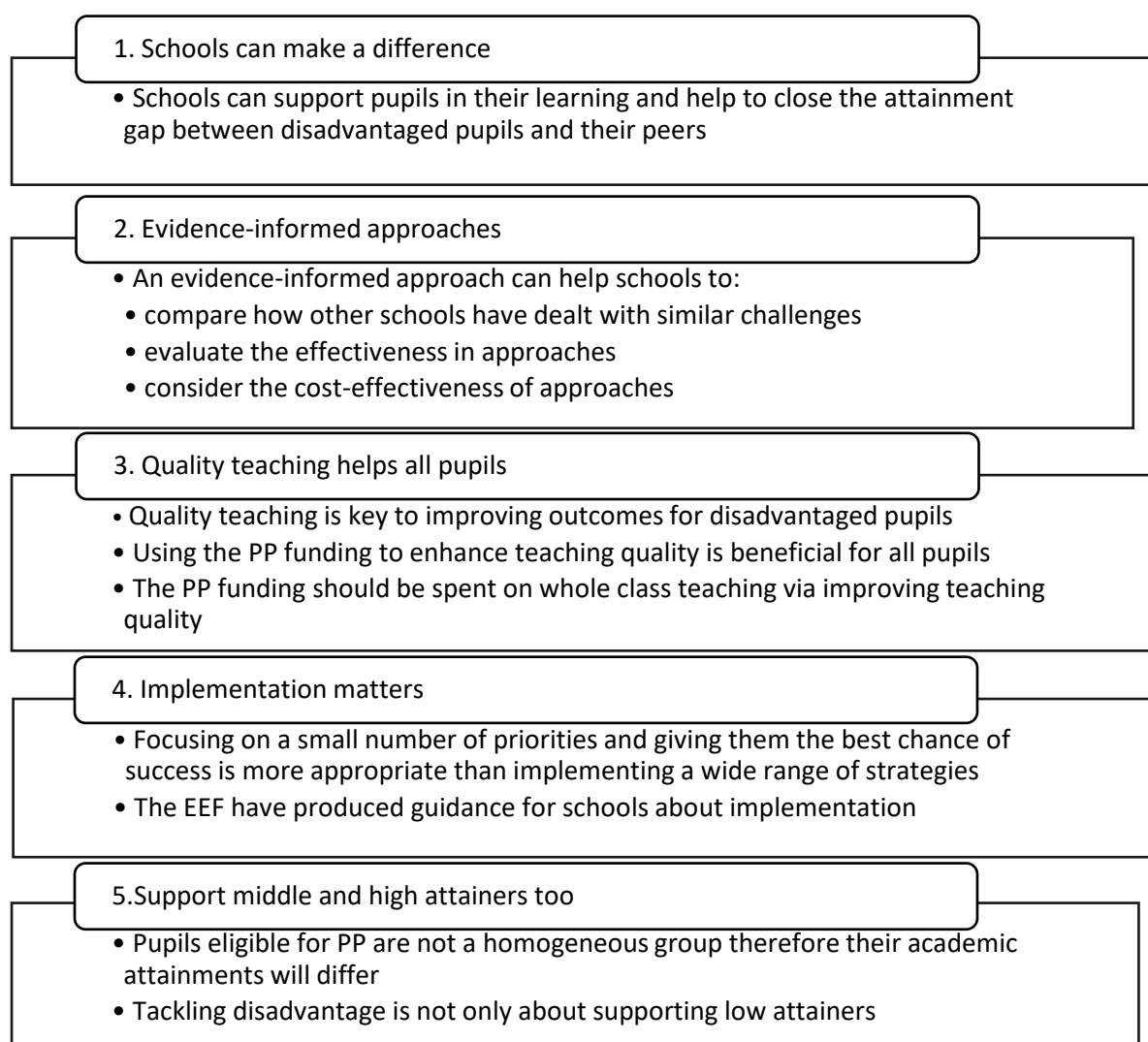


Figure 3. An overview of the five principles underpinning the EEF's guidance to the PP (EEF, 2019)

A tiered approach to PP spending is recommended by the EEF's PP guidance (EEF, 2019). The guidance proposes the PP funding should focus on teaching, targeted academic support and wider strategies (EEF, 2019) (see Figure 4 for an overview). Using the guidance as a framework, schools should evaluate each aspect of the approach and focus on a few strategies within each area that will positively support the achievement of pupils. Teaching should be the main focus when school staff

are considering spending the PP funding, according to the EEF (EEF, 2019). They recommend that school professionals improve the quality of teaching within their schools. Research has illustrated the significant influence of teaching practices and approaches on pupils' academic achievement and progress (Muijs et al., 2014; Reynolds et al., 2014). Targeted academic support spending can be informed by using the Sutton Trust and EEF ToolKit (Higgins et al., 2014) which allows school staff to review the effectiveness of interventions. The EEF guidance about spending the PP recommends the funding should be spent on wider strategies. The guidance refers to wider strategies as non-academic barriers to school.

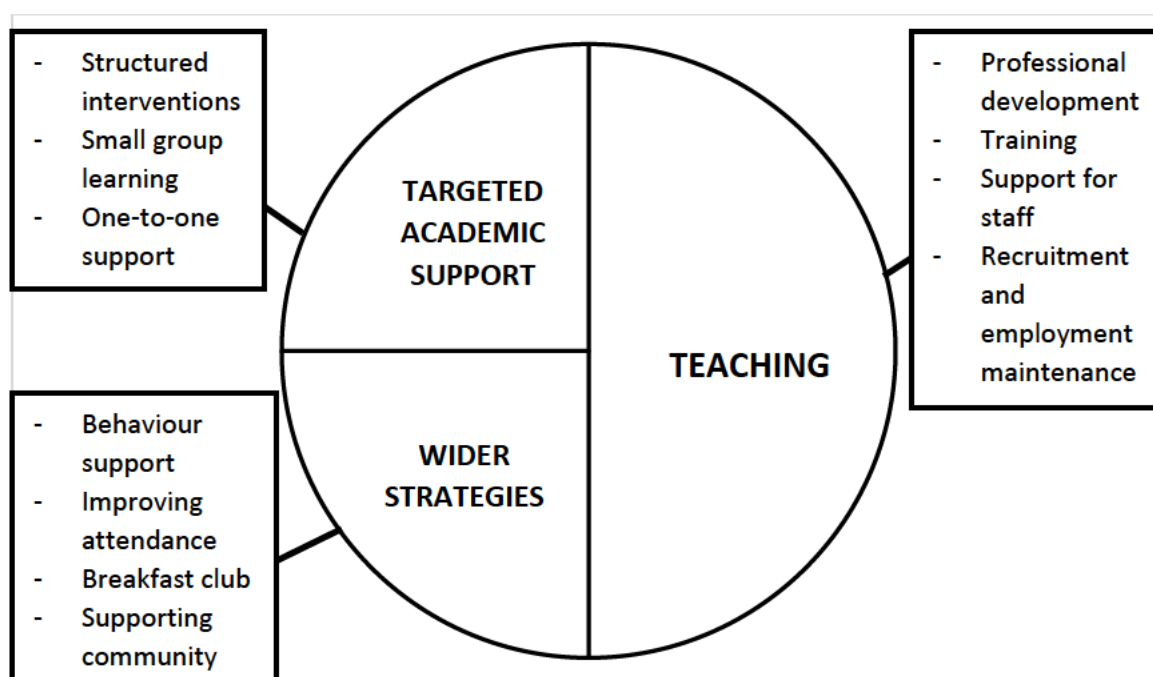


Figure 4. An overview of the tiered approach detailed in the EEF's guide to the PP (EEF, 2019).

Researchers have found an increase, from 63% the previous year to 70%, in school practitioners considering research evidence to inform their decisions regarding which approaches to adopt to improve attainment (Sutton Trust, 2019). In 2020 this increased to 79% and in 2021 decreased to 78% (National Foundation For Educational Research, 2021; Sutton Trust, 2022). Despite this decrease, the survey results appear to indicate school staff are considering spending the PP on evidence-based approaches. However, it is important to consider that this research was conducted by the Sutton Trust who co-produced some of the guidance that is recommended to schools. Therefore, these results may be susceptible to bias in highlighting the usefulness and positive impact of their guidance. Additionally, research has found little indication that the dissemination of research and evidence-based approaches to schools will have a positive influence on teaching practices and pupils' outcomes (Lord et al., 2019).

Schools do not need to necessarily spend the funding exclusively on eligible pupils, however, they must spend the PP funding on raising the attainment of 'disadvantaged' pupils (DfE, 2022b).

Research has indicated that many schools adopt a universal approach to PP spending meaning all pupils regardless of their PP status were beneficiaries of the funding (Barrett, 2018; Carpenter et al., 2013; Morris & Dobson, 2020). Furthermore, Carpenter et al (2013) found that schools that adopted a universal approach to the spending often spent it on children they believed to be 'disadvantaged' according to their definitions. This is concerning as it indicates that the PP funding may be inadequately targeted on the needs of children accessing the funding. This, therefore, questions the effectiveness of the PP funding as schools are allowed to spend the money on all children.

Research indicates that the PP funding is spent on a range of aspects within schools (Barrett, 2018; Carpenter et al., 2013; Morris & Dobson, 2020) and that most of it is spent on academic interventions to raise attainment (Fellows & Barton, 2018). In line with the EEF guidance (EEF, 2019), funding is spent on raising achievement through:

- a range of targeted interventions, resources and provisions (Abbott et al., 2015; Barrett, 2018; Carpenter et al., 2013; Craske, 2018; DfE, 2021c; Morris & Dobson, 2020).
- Recruitment of school staff (Abbott et al., 2015; Barrett, 2018; Morris & Dobson, 2020) as well as external professionals including EPs and speech and language therapists (Barrett, 2018; Morris & Dobson, 2020; Webber, 2017).
- Enrichment experiences such as school trips (Abbott et al., 2015; Barrett, 2018; Morris & Dobson, 2020).
- Supporting families with the costs of school including school uniforms, textbooks and equipment (Abbott et al., 2015; Craske, 2018; Morris & Dobson, 2020).

The research demonstrates how the PP is spent flexibly in schools and despite the aim of the funding being to raise achievement, schools spend the funding on various factors that may, directly and indirectly, influence achievement.

Previous research outlined discussed how the PP allocation has failed to keep up with the rate of inflation which may therefore influence the effectiveness of the PP (Farquharson et al., 2021). Additionally, Farquharson et al. (2021) found that 33% of 453 senior leaders from schools across England reported spending the PP funding to offset budget cuts within the school (Sutton Trust, 2022). This raises further concerns about whether the PP funding is serving its intended purposes of providing additional educational support and enhancing the achievement of 'disadvantaged' pupils.

There has been a small amount of research exploring the effectiveness of the PP funding, since it was introduced, on improving pupil achievement (e.g., Gorard et al, 2021). This is because it can be difficult to construct a robust research design that measures the influence of the PP funding on achievement and other variables. The PP funding is a national policy implemented in all schools in England. Therefore, research designs tend to evaluate the effectiveness of the funding by comparing pupil achievement pre- and post- PP funding (Gorard, 2022). However, this can be influenced by various confounding factors such as changes to the economy, policies, how 'disadvantage' is defined and assessment processes in schools (Gorard, Siddiqui & See, 2021).

Gorard (2022) conducted a time series analysis of secondary-aged pupils in England from 2006 to 2019 and compared KS4 achievement of pupils who were known to be eligible for FSM for their entire secondary schooling to all other pupils. Gorard also used regression analysis to account for confounding variables such as economic influence. The results indicated that the PP funding had positively influenced the integration within secondary school intakes between pupils considered poor and others. The results found that the PP funding led to a small improvement in the attainment gap in KS4. However, KS4 assessment policy changes appeared to have counteracted this small improvement. This suggests that policy makers should consider the influence of new policies on pupils accessing PP and whether the new policies align with the PP funding objectives.

2.5 Influences on Academic Achievement

This section explores influences on children and young people's academic achievement. It begins with introducing Siraj- Blatchford et al's. (2011) research which was instrumental in developing my research topic and approach. Results found aspects of the individual, home and school system to significantly influence academic achievement. Therefore, Siraj-Blatchford's research is discussed in these three areas in relation to the wider literature encompassing children and young people beyond those accessing FSM and considered low socioeconomic status (SES). Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is discussed.

This research uses Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) as a key paper for the literature review. This may have led to a restriction of the scope of the research used and discussed within the literature review of this research. Therefore, a limitation of this research may be that other relevant research may have been overlooked.

2.5.1 Key Previous Research on Influences of Academic Achievement: Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011)

Academic achievement is influenced by a range of factors including:

- Cognitive ability (Deary et al., 2007).

- Social class (Perry & Francis, 2010).
- Parental interest in their child's schooling (See & Gorard, 2015).
- Engagement in academically enriching activities (Sylva et al., 2014).
- Teacher's ability (Chetty et al., 2014; Slater et al., 2012).
- School culture (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).
- Pupil school enjoyment (Morris et al., 2021).

This therefore highlights the complexity of academic achievement of children and young people. This current research explores significant factors related to individual, school and home because research has demonstrated the significant influence of these three key systems on academic achievement (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Willott, 2013).

The Effective Provision of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project has followed the progress of over 3,000 children and young people since 1997 from three to sixteen years of age. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) conducted one phase of this project by exploring the barriers and facilitators of academic achievement of low SES children and young people. Academic achievement was measured by children and young people's performance being above predictions based on their SES. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) define SES in relation to the highest job level in the home at the start of the EPPSE project when children were between ages three and four. Low family SES was defined as the highest job level in the family being manual, semi-skilled or unskilled, or the parents had never worked. High SES families were defined as parents working in professional jobs. A concern of defining SES this way is that a family's SES could have changed between the child aged three or four to 14-16 when the research was conducted.

Another criticism of Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) definition of family SES being based on family jobs is the reductive and presumptuous nature of this. For example, manual professionals may earn the equivalent or more than individuals considered to be in professional jobs. Therefore, only using the highest job level in the family as a measure of SES may not be accurate or representative.

A strength of Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) research is the magnitude of data collected and analysed. They conducted multiple case studies consisting of 50 pupils from the EPPSE project who were either in key stage three or preparing for upcoming GCSEs. For each pupil, at least one parent was interviewed, and a secondary school teacher was approached although not all teachers responded. Interviews explored the role of the young person, family, peers and community in the pupil's learning. Each participant was asked about their perceptions of the causes of the pupil's particular learning trajectory. Results identified included factors that related to the individual, home and school.

2.5.2 Individual Factors

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that a range of individual characteristics influence academic achievement for children considered to be low SES. This included children and young people's perceptions of their academic and personal competencies as well as a positive attitude towards school. They suggest that these factors supported children and young people's successful adaptation to the school environment and learning which in turn supported their academic achievement. Furthermore, wider literature has discussed the significance of intrinsic motivation for academic achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2020) which is also briefly discussed in this section.

Pupils' perceptions of their personal and academic capabilities were found to influence academic achievement (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that participants, including the children and young people themselves, referred to how they were 'bright' and insinuated that learning came naturally to them. Pupils' positive self-belief appeared to be reinforced by others which in turn supported the development of these pupils' confidence in their learning abilities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011).

Research appears to illustrate the influence of pupil self-belief and confidence on academic achievement (Chowdry et al., 2011; Dinsmore & Parkinson, 2013) and decisions regarding future outcomes such as accessing further education (Horton & Hilton, 2020; Sheldrake et al., 2014). Chowdry et al. (2011) explored factors associated with GCSE achievement using a large-scale sample of 13,343 pupils. They found that a range of factors related to the young person's attitudes and behaviours influenced GCSE achievement. In particular, young people's self-belief in their own ability strongly correlated with their attainment at age 16. Similarly, Hansen and Henderson (2019) explore the relationship between young people's beliefs in their own academic ability, which the authors refer to as self-concept, and academic outcomes. Hansen and Henderson (2019) found a positive and significant association between young people's academic self-belief and GCSE attainment, including the likelihood of achieving five GCSE grades at A*-C. Furthermore, Hansen and Henderson (2019) found that young people's academic self-belief reduced the attainment differences by social backgrounds and household income. These findings from both Chowdry et al., (2011) and Hansen and Henderson (2019) may suggest that young people are more likely to do well in their GCSEs if they have a greater belief in their own abilities at school.

Children and young people's positive attitudes towards school, including homework and learning, appear to be supporting factors of academic achievement in children and young people considered to be low SES (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Research has shown a positive correlation between children and young people viewing school as useful and GCSE achievement (Chowdry et al., 2011).

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found children and young people's aspirations to support academic achievement in pupils considered to be low SES. The researchers suggest that aspirations, such as access to further education and careers, were a source of motivation for academic achievement and that pupils viewed these aspirations as mechanisms to achieve economic independence and employment opportunities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). However, Carter-Wall and Whitfield (2012) contradict the finding that children and young people's attitudes and aspirations influence their achievement as they were unable to find evidence that achievement was mediated by a change in attitudes and aspirations. This, therefore, may indicate that there are various and broader systems that influence academic achievement than just individual characteristics and factors.

Intrinsic motivation refers to actions that are performed in the absence of external benefits such as actions being performed due to enjoyment or interest (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2017). An aspect of self-determination theory proposes that in order for intrinsic motivation to be achieved, three basic psychological needs must be met within education which are:

- Autonomy – this refers to a sense of ownership over one's behaviours and actions and is supported by interest and value (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
- Competence – this is concerned with confidence and belief in one's capabilities (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
- Relatedness – this refers to a sense of connection and positive relationships with others (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Ryan and Deci (2020) state the necessity for these three psychological needs to be satisfied and met within the school and learning context to support intrinsic motivation which in turn contributes to higher academic achievement. Impeding any of these psychological needs is seen as damaging to motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A strength of self-determination theory is the recognition and understanding of the influence of various systems and contexts on motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Therefore, it acknowledges that external benefits can also influence motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Intrinsic motivation has been seen to positively influence academic achievement. Taylor et al. (2014) completed a meta-analysis of 18 studies that were conducted in a variety of school contexts. The results from the meta-analysis indicated a significant role of intrinsic motivation in predicting academic achievement. Taylor et al. (2014) conducted two additional studies to further explore the role of intrinsic motivation on academic achievement. They found intrinsic motivation to be a predictor of academic achievement in young people aged 12-17. This, therefore, suggests that intrinsic motivation may be an important influential factor of academic achievement in young

people. A strength of Taylor et al's. (2014) study is the extensive nature and multiple stages of the research conducted.

Intrinsic motivation has been found to decline as children and young people progress through school (Gillet et al., 2012). Whilst this is international research, this is supported by Gnambs and Hanfstingl (2016) who showed that pupils, aged between 11 and 16, experienced a marked decrease in intrinsic motivation as they got older across all ages. According to self-determination theory, this may suggest that educational settings are not meeting the basic psychological needs of pupils as they get older. This may link to Shaw et al's (2017) findings that suggest the school environment plays a significant role in young people's academic achievement. Shaw et al (2017) also indicated that young people accessing FSM's experiences may be different to their non-FSM peers in the same school.

The decrease in a pupil's intrinsic motivation (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016) and the influence that school environments have on academic achievement (Shaw et al., 2017) may be associated with pupils accessing FSM and performing well in primary school falling behind in comparison to other high attainment pupils during secondary school (Crawford et al., 2014; Montacute, 2018). Therefore, this may suggest that the difference in school experience may include pupils accessing FSM's basic psychological needs not being adequately met compared to their non-FSM peers in school.

2.5.3 Home Factors

Much literature has illustrated the influence of the home environment on academic achievement and development (Lehrl et al., 2020; Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Hunt, 2008; Sylva et al., 2008). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that home environment components and activities that influenced academic achievement differed at different educational stages (e.g., pre-school, primary and secondary schools). For example, activities related to the home learning environment that supported academic achievement in secondary school included support from family and access to resources needed for learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011).

Parents can support children and young people's learning by providing an effective home learning environment (Lehrl et al., 2020). This is done by parents minimising distractions within the home and providing necessary resources, such as books and computers, that facilitate the pupil completing school-related activities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). The significance of an adequate home learning environment and resources was highlighted by the covid-19 pandemic. As previously discussed in section 2.3, The Covid-19 Pandemic and Education, pupils from low-income backgrounds were less likely to have access to appropriate technology to access online lessons and have a dedicated study space (Andrew et al., 2020; Major et al., 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). This is likely to have influenced the quality of learning received during lockdown.

Family support has been found to positively support academic achievement (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). In particular, parental relationships and involvement has been associated with high academic achievement (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that parents provided practical and emotional support and facilitated engagement in activities such as religious and sports groups. Practical and academic support included help with homework, even when parents did not have the knowledge or skills, and checking in with children and young people's learning (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). However, parental support with homework decreased when young people were in secondary school as parents viewed the young person as academically competent (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Emotional support included talking about school frequently, encouraging children and young people and emphasising the value of education (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). This support also came in the form of providing children and young people with autonomy regarding their choices in education such as GCSE subjects studied (Mayo & Siraj, 2015).

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that children and young people succeeded when they did not allow home situations to interfere with their education. The researchers show that children and young people who were academically successful did not allow negative home situations to interfere with aspects of their learning such as their focus and grades. In comparison, children and young people who were considered to not be academically succeeding appeared to feel overwhelmed by negative home events. This subsequently hindered their academic achievement (Siraj-Blatchford 2011). A criticism of this finding is that it makes a sweeping generalisation about what constitutes as home situations. Children and young people who were considered low SES and underachieving may have experienced more severe and more frequent negative home situations than those who were academically succeeding. Additionally, this result appears to imply blame on the child or young person for not being able to cope with the situation rather than the situation itself.

2.5.4 School Factors

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that a wide range of school factors influence the academic achievement of children including teaching pedagogy, aspects of the school environment and additional academic support in the form of booster and revision sessions (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of teaching (Sharples, 2019). It encompasses the thinking and enactment of teaching practices, approaches and behaviours (Beetham & Sharpe, 2019).

Academic stress is a common concern reported by secondary school pupils (Owen-Yeates, 2005; Roome & Soan, 2019). Owen-Yeates (2005) found academic stress, caused by homework, revision

and exams, to be the main source of stress for year 11 pupils. Furthermore, participants reported that a decrease in homework demands would help reduce their stress, suggesting that homework appeared to be a significant source of academic stress for secondary aged pupils (Owen-Yeates, 2005). Similarly, Roome and Soan (2019) also found pupils reported feelings of stress concerning exams which appeared to negatively influence their wellbeing. Academic stress has also been found to cause worry and jeopardise pupils' health and wellbeing (Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2007). The research discussed appears to demonstrate how aspects of the school environment may be stressful to pupils which in turn may hinder their academic achievement.

Research has consistently highlighted the significance of the pupil-teacher relationship as a factor influencing children and young people's outcomes, such as promoting learning and achievement (Sammons et al., 2014; Sylva et al., 2014) as well as emotional outcomes including lower levels of stress in school (Banks & Smyth, 2015). In support of the finding that pupil-teacher relationships influence children's learning outcomes, research by Holzberger et al. (2019) in Germany and Mainhard et al. (2018) in the Netherlands and Pianta et al. (2012) in America, also found this. Therefore, this appears to indicate that the influence of the pupil-teacher relationship on learning and academic achievement is widely accepted.

The nature of the pupil-teacher relationship appears to influence children and young people's learning outcomes. Pupils who reported a positive relationship with their teachers obtained higher total GCSE scores, better results in GCSE English and GCSE maths and were more likely to achieve five GCSEs at grades A*-C including in English and maths (Sammons et al., 2014). Conversely, a negative pupil-teacher relationship appears to have a detrimental influence on a pupil's attitude towards school, school attendance, academic engagement and achievement (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Teachers' behaviour towards and interactions with pupils can impact the pupil-teacher relationship. Whilst this is international research, Hamre and Pianta (2005) identified two important aspects of positive pupil-teacher interactions: teaching-related support and emotional support. Research has indicated that the need for emotional support from teachers is a strong predictor of children's learning motivation and achievement (Mainhard et al., 2018; Wentzel et al., 2010). Similarly, Carmona-Halty et al. (2019) support the need for emotional aspects in pupil-teacher relationships as research showed the stronger role of emotional aspects compared to professional and teaching components for fostering learning and knowledge. This, therefore, highlights the importance of teachers' behaviours and their role in creating a supportive relational context for children in order to support their learning and academic achievement (Wentzel, 2012; Wentzel et al., 2010).

The link between the pupil-teacher relationship and academic achievement may be explained by the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2017). When children perceive themselves to have a negative pupil-teacher relationship and believe teachers do not respect or value them, this can negatively influence pupils' trust in teachers, their behaviour and academic outcomes (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Therefore, in line with the self-determination theory, a lack of relatedness and emotional support from teachers appears to suppress pupil's intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000b) which in turn may influence pupil's motivation to engage in learning and their subsequent performance in academic tasks (Hughes & Cavell, 1999; Liew et al., 2010).

A behaviourist approach to behaviour management in school appears to influence the pupil-teacher relationship. Payne (2015) viewed year seven and 11 pupils' perceptions of behaviour management strategies in school. Results indicated that sanctions such as negative messages sent to parents, detentions and public reprimands had the potential to damage the relationship between pupils and teachers and failed to increase pupils' work ethic. This, therefore, questions the benefits of using punishments and sanctions in schools. Additionally, further research found that secondary school pupils felt their school heavily focused on punishments of behaviour and did not use rewards, but wanted them to, to encourage positive behaviour (McCluskey et al., 2013). According to the research discussed, pupils appear to dislike their schools focussing on managing behaviour through sanctions, which also appears to be detrimental to aspects of their education. This suggests a lack of consideration of pupils' views and desires in the decisions made by adults in school.

Teaching practices and qualities were found to influence children and young people's academic achievement (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). For example, teachers being enthusiastic and increasing children's interest in learning can subsequently influence children's motivation and academic engagement (Harackiewicz et al., 2008; Harackiewicz et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2000). Research into the attributes of high-quality teaching includes teachers promoting deeper understanding, a positive pupil-teacher relationship, increasing pupil engagement, being enthusiastic and friendly, and teaching that is functional (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Smimou & Dahl, 2012). The research outlined further emphasises the importance of the role of pupil-teacher relationships as well as the possible association of this with high-quality teaching.

Quality teaching in secondary schools plays a significant role in influencing the progress of pupils accessing FSM (Demie & Mclean, 2015; Macleod et al., 2015; Shain, 2016; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission [SMCPC, 2014]). This, therefore, highlights the role that schools can play in raising the achievement of pupils accessing FSM. Shaw et al. (2017) conducted case studies of eight

secondary schools with differing levels of pupil progress. Data was gathered via telephone interviews with senior leadership members. All professionals agreed that the quality of teaching was the most important factor in determining low-income pupils' progress. However, it is important to consider that assessment of quality teaching is difficult, particularly in secondary schools where there are a range of teaching practices and approaches to measure this (Shaw et al., 2017). Therefore, the concept and measurement of high-quality teaching may have differed between each school within the research.

Research demonstrates that peers can positively and negatively influence pupils' academic achievement such as by promoting their learning interests (Rambaran et al., 2017; Sylva et al., 2014; Wentzel et al., 2010). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) found that peers offered emotional support and practical support. Emotional support included reinforcing positive attitudes and enjoyment of school and support with difficulties encountered within school. Practical support included help during lessons, with homework and revision. Additionally, peer relationships provided opportunities for children and young people to re-teach learning which deepened their understanding and were a source of healthy competition which motivated pupil's desire to academically succeed.

2.6 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) employ Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) as a framework to understand children and young people's high or low academic achievement. Therefore, this section outlines Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), mentions subsequent developments of this model and then reports Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) findings in relation to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) research is highly influential in understanding human development. Development is defined as "*...a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment*" (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 3). Bronfenbrenner states that there are three important concepts in human development: the individual, the environment and the evolving interaction between the two. It is based on the understanding that events or outcomes are the product of multiple interactions between various factors in different systems, rather than isolated instances (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The ecological environment can be thought of as a set of nested structures (see Figure 5). The centre contains the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This person is active in the sense that they shape environments, evoke responses and react to interactions with others (Darling, 2007). The microsystem is the innermost level, it denotes the relations between the individual and their immediate surroundings such as their interpersonal connections, events and settings

(Bronfenbrenner, 1981). For example, for young people entitled to FSM, this may include their parents, family and home.

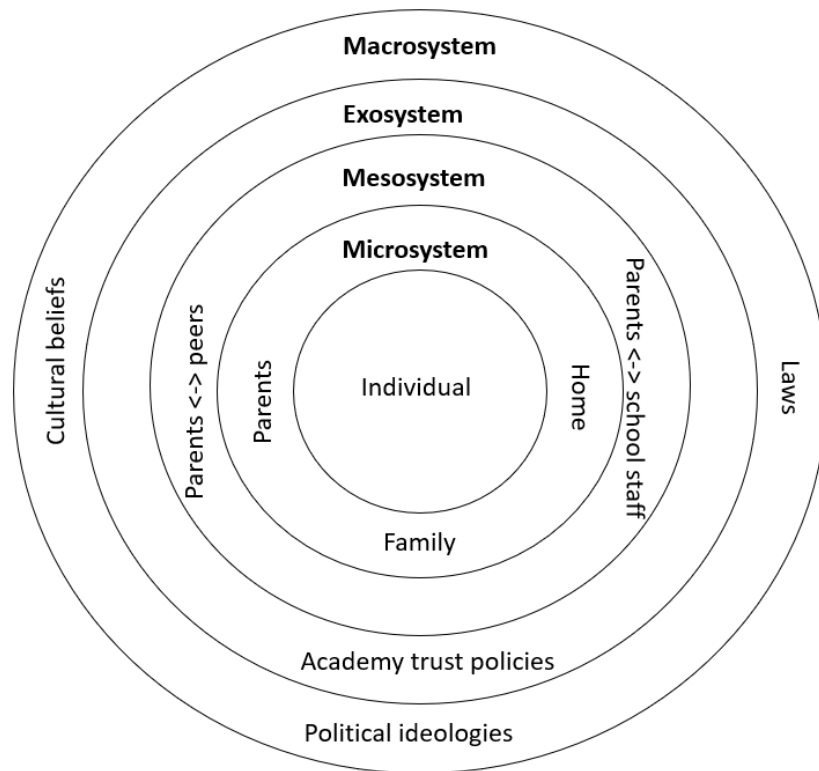


Figure 5. Diagram of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979).

The mesosystem is the next ecological nest and consists of various microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The mesosystem represents the interrelations among the microsystems such as interactions between parents at home and school staff or parents and peers.

The exosystem encompasses the systems that indirectly impact the child through interaction with other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, this may include policies and processes of academy trusts and local authorities which impact school sites.

Following the exosystem is the macrosystem, which comprises the overarching and wider socio-cultural context including political ideologies, laws and cultural beliefs as well as all the other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, this may include key legislation and societal customs such as education being viewed as important, five GCSEs at grades 9-4 as the benchmark for academic success, and the PP policy.

There have been many revisions to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) is an updated version of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

and places more of a focus on the person, process, context and development over time referred to as the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

By applying the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to their research, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) conclude that their findings demonstrate the significance of the microsystem on academic achievement for children and young people considered to be low SES. Although the researchers do acknowledge that macro and meso level factors influence academic achievement, they state that the best opportunities for support are at the micro-level. For example, targeting parental support and the child's determination. They conclude that a support system which tends to come from the child's microsystem, including parents, family, peers and teachers, is key to academic achievement by providing encouragement and belief and through interactions enhancing the child's development and therefore academic achievement.

To conclude, the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) emphasises how developmental processes do not occur in isolation which Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) results demonstrate with academic achievement. This is supported by other researchers who recognise the importance of exploring the complex interactions between various systems and the child in order to understand academic outcomes (Zaff & Smerdon, 2009). Additionally, Manstead et al. (2020) write that it is important to understand features of the socio-ecological context that shape inequalities in academic outcomes. For these reasons, the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is used as a theoretical framework to explore and infer how various factors can influence the lives and academic achievement of young people accessing FSM in this current research.

2.7 Children and Young People's Participation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Unicef, 1989) recognises and emphasises consultation and participation rights of children and young people. It informs governments to ensure that children are adequately represented in decision-making regarding themselves. Although this international convention recognises the requirement for children's voice, historical legislation has inadequately enacted this and has viewed children as incompetent compared to adults (Fundudis, 2003), therefore, leading to the voice of the child often becoming excluded. The 2002 Education Act (Education Act, 2002) emphasised children in schools being active participants in decisions that concern them and the 2005 Education Act (Education Act, 2005) enforced a statutory duty of Ofsted officers having to consult pupil's views when inspecting schools. The PP for school leaders guidance (DfE, 2022c) omits any mention of pupil views.

Lundy's model of child participation (Lundy, 2007), as illustrated in Figure 6, suggests the gathering and acknowledgement of children's views requires consideration of four connected factors which are space, voice, audience and influence:

- Space refers to children having the opportunity to express their authentic views without fear of criticism (Lundy, 2007).
- Voice involves ensuring children are supported to make their thoughts heard and can express their views in a format they feel best (Lundy, 2007).
- Audience means that children's opinions are listened to by the most appropriate audiences (Lundy, 2007).
- Influence ensures that children's voices affect decision-making and have their views acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, 2007).

A strength of Lundy's model (Lundy, 2007) is that it ensures that children and young people's views are respected and valued. Additionally, the four factors underpinning the model are flexible and can be applied to a range of contexts such as within the classroom.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Space</u></p> <p>Adults need to ensure to provide a safe and inclusive space for children and young people to express their views freely.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Voice</u></p> <p>Adults should provide relevant and appropriate information to ensure an informed view can be made. Additionally, adults should appropriately and safely facilitate the expression of children and young people's views.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Audience</u></p> <p>Adults need to ensure that children and young people understand who their views are being shared with and that the correct individuals are listening to the children and young people's views.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Influence</u></p> <p>Adults should ensure that children and young people's views are seriously considered, and that, based on their views, appropriate actions are implemented.</p>

Figure 6. Lundy's model of participation as adapted from Lundy (2007).

School staff have enacted approaches that enhance pupil participation such as school councils involving a small and selected sample that represents the views of the student body (Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003). However, secondary school pupils feel that the student councils are tokenistic and peer representatives did not accurately represent most opinions in the school (McCluskey et al., 2013). Furthermore, approaches such as school councils can create homogeneity in pupil opinions and can lead to other pupils' voices being marginalised (Fielding, 2007; Weller, 2007). This, therefore, questions whether school councils are an effective and equitable method of pupil participation in school.

Pupils report that they do not feel listened to or that their voices were partially heard by school staff (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Burke & Grosvenor, 2015). This is despite conventions and legislations recognising the significance of children's views and participation in school. This is supported by McCluskey et al. (2013) who found that pupils felt that their views were not sought, listened to or acted upon consistently but pupils have a desire to be involved in decision making within their school. Research has highlighted the negative outcomes for children and young people when they are unable to have their voices heard (Keating & Janmaat, 2015; Robinson, 2014).

This current research focuses on the views of school pupils, in acknowledgement that their views are still too rarely heard in debates and decision-making in education and research. Furthermore, research has highlighted the benefits of gaining pupil voice including its value in understanding what helps learning (McIntyre et al., 2005) which is salient to this research. More specifically, McCluskey (2017) suggests that pupil engagement and participation is a key principle in attempting to close the attainment gap. This research uses pupil views to attempt to understand the experiences of academic achievement and to inform implications about how the PP can be spent in schools.

2.8 Young People Accessing Free School Meals' Views on Academic Achievement

There is a lack of research exclusively exploring pupils who are accessing FSMs' experiences of academic achievement. This is despite the benefits of children's participation in understanding and enhancing learning (McCluskey, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2005). As highlighted by the literature review, much of the research conducted in this area has focused on the views of educational professionals (Demie & Mclean, 2015) or merging pupil views with those of parents and school staff (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011).

Research that has exclusively explored the educational experiences of young people accessing FSM has focused on underachieving pupils. Willott (2013) explored the views of six pupils in year 10 accessing FSM and underachieving according to grade predictions based on tests, using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Willott's (2013) results highlighted the significance of aspects within the microsystem, particularly the individual, home and school on educational experiences, as also found by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011). In accordance with previous research, Willott (2013) found that positive relationships with teachers supported learning, whereas the lack of a positive pupil-teacher relationship was viewed as a barrier to learning. Additionally, interesting, practical and creative teaching delivery appeared to increase pupils' engagement and motivation in learning. Conversely, participants reported feeling bored in lessons that were monotonous and repetitive which in turn appeared to decrease participants' motivation. Additional school factors that negatively influenced learning included the pressure and worry of exams.

Similarly to Willott (2013), Mulcare (2020) used IPA to explore the facilitating and hindering factors of academic success. Participants consisted of six pupils aged 16-18 who had experienced academic success as measured by achieving five GCSEs at grades A*-C. Mulcare (2020) refers to the participants as low SES as measured by FSM eligibility, parental education and type of school attended.

Mulcare (2020) found that relationships with teachers, peers and family were supportive factors of education. Participants connected with staff who offered support, were friendly and kind. Other supportive factors included pupils valuing learning and having an interest in learning. For some participants, this appeared to be linked to viewing education as meaningful to opportunities for their future. Participants also reported engaging in activities outside of education that they enjoyed.

Mulcare (2020) found hindering aspects of education included negative or lack of relationships with staff as it led to decreased effort and engagement in education. Additionally, participants' lack of confidence appeared to impede their belief regarding their competency to access higher education. A strength of Mulcare's research (Mulcare, 2020) is that it highlights the complexity of academic success and demonstrates the influence of a range of inter-relational systems. However, both Mulcare's (2020) and Willott's (2013) research was conducted before the covid-19 pandemic and therefore does not consider the influence of this on educational experiences.

2.9 Rationale for Current Research

Research has highlighted the importance of academic success for access to positive future outcomes (Hayward et al., 2014; Jerrim, 2022; Machin et al., 2020). However, inequalities within the education system negatively influence groups of pupils including those accessing FSM as demonstrated by the attainment gap (Hutchinson et al., 2020). Research highlights that secondary school is a critical period for young people accessing FSM in terms of their academic achievement (Crawford et al., 2017; Montacute, 2018). Despite the introduction of the PP initiative, the attainment gap remains. Therefore, exploring the views of pupils accessing FSM whilst academically achieving is important when attempting to understand the inequalities in outcomes for these pupils, compared to their non-FSM counterparts, and how the PP may be used to support their achievement.

Large scale research has explored influential factors of academic achievement in low SES children and young people (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). However, this research has focused on merging children and young people's views with school staff's and parents' views. This is despite research stating that there is a need to gain children and young people's views to understand what supports their learning (McIntyre et al., 2005).

Research that has explored young people accessing FSM's views in education has focused on those underachieving (Willott, 2013) and young people who are beyond the critical point and accessing higher education, therefore having to retrospectively look back on their experiences (Mulcare, 2020). Additionally, research in this area has yet to explore these young people's views after the covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this research aims to gain the views of young people accessing FSM, thus providing insights into the facilitating and hindering factors of their academic achievement which can inform ways the PP funding can be used to attempt to reduce the educational inequalities present.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology used in this research. Firstly, research questions are recapped. Secondly, my philosophical perspectives that guided the research methods and data collection are explored. Thirdly, information about participants, ethical considerations and the research procedure are presented. Lastly, data analysis methods and issues regarding quality qualitative research are outlined.

3.2 Research Questions

This research aims to explore the views of young people accessing FSM to provide insights into their educational experiences and academic achievement. With this in mind, the research explores two questions:

1. What, if any, are the facilitating factors of academic achievement for young people accessing FSM?
2. What, if any, are the hindering factors of academic achievement for young people accessing FSM?

3.3 Philosophical Assumptions

This section describes the philosophical assumptions underpinning and guiding this research.

3.3.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Research paradigms reflect the researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge (ontology and epistemology respectively). This has significant implications for the choice of methodology, methods and analysis employed in the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Ontology refers to the nature of social reality (Cohen et al., 2017) and is concerned with what we believe constitutes reality (Blaikie, 2000). The ontological stance underpinning this research is relativism. Relativism is the perspective that reality is individually constructed through interaction between human consciousness and the world (Scotland, 2012).

Epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge and questions how we know about the social world we have ontologically defined (Grix, 2018). A relativist ontology lends itself to a subjectivist epistemology which recognises that knowledge about the social world is not independent of human perspectives (Gray, 2021) and that knowledge is value-laden (Levers, 2013).

A researcher's ontological and epistemological orientation correlates with a research paradigm (Scotland, 2012). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) describe a research paradigm as the researcher's

worldview “...or a set of shared beliefs, that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data” (p. 26). As a researcher with a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, I adopt an interpretivist research paradigm which aims to understand the subjective perspectives of individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

By adopting a relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology and interpretivist paradigm, I accept that reality is individually constructed, meaning that there are multiple realities and experiences of academic achievement. Therefore, I believe that academic achievement in those accessing FSM can be understood by working with the young people living that reality. Furthermore, I recognise that each participant’s experience is their reality and, as a researcher, I will be interpreting their experiences through my own reality and value-laden lens. It is important to mention that I am using a softer relativist approach as I am exploring shared experiences across participants as well as looking at individual experiences. With this in mind, my goal is to understand the participants’ experiences by using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as the primary method which lends itself to the interpretivist research paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.4 Methodology

This research uses RTA as the primary method to explore the facilitating and hindering factors of academic achievement in young people accessing FSM whilst considered to be high academic achievers.

Thomas (2016) defines a case study as, “...analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods...” (p. 23). Furthermore, Simons (2009) defines a case study as, “...an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, institution, programme or systems in a ‘real life’ context...The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic...” (p. 21).

Both definitions highlight case studies as having multiple perspectives which provides a holistic understanding of phenomena. This research originally intended to explore academic achievement from three perspectives (the young person, a family member and a member of staff) which lends itself to a case study approach. However, multiple perspectives could not be achieved. Therefore, this research is a study that employs RTA as the primary method as only one perspective was gained to explore academic achievement of young people who are accessing FSM.

RTA is described as a robust method which involves analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets and emphasises the continual engagement of reflexivity throughout the

research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA aligns itself to qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and is discussed in further detail in section 3.11.

3.5 Recruitment

A two-step recruitment process was employed in this research. Firstly, secondary schools in Hutshire were contacted about the research via email directly from me or the link EP. The email contained a letter that outlined the research aims and a consent form for a senior member of staff to complete (Appendix 1).

A fellow trainee EP with links in a secondary school in Hutshire, Pine school, put me in contact with the link PP coordinator in Pine school. Before confirming their participation, school staff checked General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance and ethical considerations and signed a consent form for the research to be able to take place in the school. Once signed, I met with the school's PP coordinator to discuss the research in greater detail and the logistics of the research such as participation criteria, ethical considerations, data collection and interview dates. I then sent the documents to be forwarded to potential participants.

3.6 Research Context

Braun and Clarke (2021) highlight the importance of describing the immediate and wider context the research and analysis is situated within. A reflection of how I, as a researcher, may have shaped the research process and analysis is outlined in Appendix 2.

It is important to describe the research context as all participants recruited attended the same secondary school. Pine school is a relatively large secondary school for ages 11 to 18, located within a rural area in Hutshire. The school was graded as 'outstanding' in their latest Ofsted report. For the year 2020-21, 11.3% of pupils were accessing the PP funding through eligibility of FSM which is less than the national average. The national average of pupils accessing FSM and therefore PP funding for 2020-21 for state-funded secondary schools in England was 18.9% (DfE, 2022a). In 2020-21, Pine school spent the PP funding on many things including additional staffing, enrichment activities and resources such as revision guides (Pine school website, 2022b).

3.7 Participants

In purposive sampling, information-rich participants related to the phenomenon of interest are identified and selected (Palinkas et al., 2015). This study employed purposive sampling as the PP coordinator identified and approached pupils who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined in Table 4.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 10-11 • Currently and prior to the pandemic, predicted to achieve a minimum of 5 9-4 (A*-C), GCSEs (including in Maths, English Language as they are compulsory subjects) • Currently and prior to the pandemic, eligible for free school meals and aware of this • Accessing the PP funding (but are not from military families or a child in care) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil from a military family • Looked after child or previously looked after child • Pupils with special educational needs • Pupils who cannot competently communicate in English (as judged by school staff)

Table 4. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for participant selection.

High academic achievement was identified as predicted grades of a minimum of five 9-4 (A*-C) GCSEs (including in Maths and English Language as they are compulsory subjects). As discussed in section 2.2 Academic Success, teacher predicted grades were viewed as a reliable measure of academic achievement due to the inequality in other methods such as the Ofqual algorithm. Additionally, five 9-4 GCSE grades were used as this is considered a benchmark indicator for academic success (Anderson, 2022) as outlined in section 2.2: Academic Success. I recognise that using this benchmark indicator may be viewed as contrasting to my philosophical assumptions, however, this measure was used as it appears to be the institutionally accepted criteria of academic achievement (Crawford et al., 2014; Shain, 2016).

Once pupils were identified by the PP coordinator, pupil and parent information sheets and pupil and parent consent forms were shared (Appendix 3 and 4).

Participants were 3 males and 2 females. The amount of demographic information gathered about the participants was intentional. A limitation of this may be that readers lack additional information about the participants. However, this was a conscious decision as the research focus was the young people's FSM eligibility and high academic achievement. For further information about the demographics of the participants see Table 5.

Name	Year Group	Sex	Predicted GCSE grades at the time of the interview	Additional Information
Harry	10	Male	5 English 5 Maths 5 5 Double science Predicted to gain 6 GCSEs	Harry appeared to be friendly and modest. He mentioned that he has a close friendship group which he has maintained from primary to secondary school. Harry enjoys swimming and riding his bike through fields. Harry seemed to really value his family. He spoke about how he has a close and supportive family consisting of him, Mum, Uncle, Nan

				and Grandad. Harry helps his neighbours with jobs such as dog walking without taking any money because he likes helping others.
Name	Year Group	Sex	Predicted GCSE grades at the time of the interview	Additional Information
Beth	10	Female	5 English 5 Maths 6 6 Double science Predicted to gain 7 GCSEs	Beth was sociable and very engaged throughout the interview. She appeared to think in great detail about her experiences and was honest in her reflections. Beth enjoys colourful things and writing. Her aspiration is to become a specialist needs teacher for primary aged pupils. Beth is a young carer and attends a young carer support group for young people. Beth alluded to having ongoing difficulties with a previous experience of hers and her family. She values her family's support and mentioned that she wants to make her Mum happy.
Robert	11	Male	6 English 6 Maths 6 6 7 Triple science Predicted to gain 8 GCSEs	Robert presented as an individual with a strong moral compass who had learned from his past experiences. He alluded to incidences of negative experiences with the behaviour policy in school during his time in secondary school. Robert mentioned that his friendship group consisted of pupils with mixed academic achievement. He really enjoys History in school. Robert reported that he is in the school rugby club and playing rugby makes him feel good. Robert mentioned that he lives with his Mum, step-Dad and has two younger siblings.
Anna	11	Female	7 English 8 Maths 8 9 Double science Predicted to achieve 9 GCSEs	Anna thoroughly enjoys maths and going to Church. She appeared low in confidence and, initially, shy. Anna spoke about how she had a more positive experience in primary school compared to secondary school. Additionally, she mentioned how she felt more confident in primary school. Anna spoke about how she is not very good at trusting people but feels that she has improved with this. Anna lives with her Mum and visits her Dad on occasional weekends.
John	10	Male	7 English 5 Maths 6 6 Double science Precited to achieve 7 GCSEs	John appeared as a friendly and chatty young person. He was very reflective and honest about his academic experiences. John spoke about how his friendship group consisted of a mixture of pupils in the "...more smart..." and the "...need more support" groups in the year group. John mentioned that he is not a part of any clubs.

Table 5. An overview of the demographic information for each participant.

3.8 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participants' school to gain their views. Semi-structured interviews aligned with the interpretivist approach guiding this research valuing depth over breadth. Therefore, approaches such as quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were not chosen. Qualitative methods are suited to interpretative research (Hammersley, 2012). This is because qualitative approaches can allow flexible information gathering and gives more control to participants which can lead to more exploratory and richer data (Robson, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the participants' perceptions of the facilitating and hindering factors of their academic achievement. This approach allowed for a relaxed atmosphere by which participants were able to discuss their educational experiences and allowed the conversation to evolve and develop. The use of semi-structured interviews meant that the direction of each interview differed (Cohen et al., 2017). However, the interview schedule (see Appendix 5) meant that an overall framework was consistent among interviews which explored the facilitating and hindering factors of participants' educational experiences. A reflection of using semi-structured interviews in this research is outlined in Appendix 2.

Magnusson (2015) suggests that pilot interviews should be completed to assess the suitability of questions and to gain experience in interviewing. Thus, a pilot interview was conducted before the main data collection. This provided an opportunity to trial the interview schedule. The interview was conducted with a participant who partially met the criteria as they were not accessing FSM. Therefore, the data gathered in the pilot interview was not sufficient for inclusion in the research findings. The pilot interview highlighted that my interview schedule was suitable, and no adjustments were required.

3.9 Procedure

Before the recorded interview, informal rapport building occurred with all participants. This involved the participant and I answering the questions outlined in Appendix 6. The questions provided prompts and stimulated discussion between myself and the participants.

The recorded interviews took place over two days in the same room in Pine school. The room was quiet however during one interview, there was an interruption (refer to Appendix 2 for my reflections on how this may have impacted the interview). Each interview lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half.

Visual materials accompanied the interviews (Appendix 7). Participants could choose to engage with the visual materials alongside verbally engaging in conversation. One participant opted to use the visual materials, and another began to but stopped during the interview.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review committee (Appendix 8). Ethical considerations in this research were guided by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2021) and British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018).

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent must be gained from participants, typically at the start of the research (BERA, 2018). Researchers must ensure that potential participants voluntarily consent and have sufficient knowledge and understanding about the research to make an informed decision about their participation (BERA, 2018; BPS, 2021).

Informed consent was gained from each participant, their parent because they were under 18 years old, and a member of the senior leadership team. Before the interview, participants, and their parents, were provided with information sheets detailing the aims of the study, methods of data collection, confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw conditions, and contact details. My contact details were also provided on the information sheets so that potential participants and parents could contact me about the research. Additionally, when I met with the participants, the research aims were discussed, and I provided them with the opportunity to ask any questions. I also asked participants if they still wanted to participate before starting the interviews.

3.10.2 Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage

Participants and institutions have the right for information regarding them and gained from them to be private (BERA, 2018; BPS, 2021). Therefore, the information about participants and information that they provided will not be identifiable as belonging to them. All data should be kept securely.

Pseudonyms were used for participants, the school and the local authority where this research was conducted. The participants were assigned a pseudonym from the start of the transcription phase. The information documents for the school, parents and pupils detailed how participants' information would be treated as confidential.

Complete anonymity was not possible due to conducting face-to-face interviews. However, all information about and from participants was kept confidential. All data including transcripts, recordings and consent forms were securely stored. Naming and storing of data used pseudonyms and encrypted devices.

3.10.3 Right to Withdraw

Participants have the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason (BERA, 2018; BPS, 2021). Information regarding participants' right to withdraw was detailed on their information documents. Along with this, at the beginning and end of the interview participants were reminded of their right to withdraw within a given timeframe and provided with my contact details to be able to do this.

3.10.4 Disclosure

Researchers have an obligation to disclose harmful behaviours to the participant or to others, to the appropriate authorities (BERA, 2018; BPS, 2021). Safeguarding procedures were checked with school staff, such as identifying the safeguarding lead within the school, prior to the interviews being conducted. It was also recognised that if there were any disclosures that this would override confidentiality and anonymity considerations.

3.10.5 Risk

Researchers must consider the potential physical and/or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to participants throughout the research process (BERA, 2018; BPS, 2021). Careful consideration about the power dynamics and the potential impact in terms of the discomfort of participants was reflected upon prior to data collection. The purpose of the rapport building activity was to attempt to address the power relations and make participants feel more comfortable. Additionally, the rapport building and interviews occurred in the participants' school. This was a deliberate choice so that the participants felt more comfortable being in a familiar environment.

3.11 Data Analysis

RTA was used to analyse the qualitative data in this research. RTA is described, the rationale for selecting RTA is outlined and then the data analysis procedure is stated.

3.11.1 Reflective Thematic Analysis

RTA is a relatively new form of thematic analysis (TA). It stemmed from Braun and Clarke wanting to have a version of TA suited to qualitative paradigms and detached from a positivist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Like other TA methods, RTA is a systematic method involving coding and analysing qualitative data to develop patterns across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Reflexivity is a practice which involves *“critically interrogating what we do, how and why we do it, and the impacts and influences of this on our research”* (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.5). RTA is unique from other TA approaches as it places emphasis on reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This is because RTA recognises the research process (including data analysis) as a subjective process. Braun and

Clarke (2021) write that researchers must consider how their assumptions, experiences and values may impact and shape the analytical process. Therefore, researchers using RTA must actively and critically participate in reflexivity throughout the research process. I used a reflexive journal to document my reflections, thoughts and feelings during my research journey. Appendix 2 documents some of the accounts from my reflexive journal.

3.11.2 Rationale for RTA

Researchers must consider various factors such as their theoretical perspectives, logistics, and research aims when deciding upon a data analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Additionally, Willig (2013) writes that the researcher's choices should ensure that the theoretical assumptions, research questions and methods align and that the research design is coherent.

A strength of RTA is that it is a method of data analysis and is thus theoretically flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2020) and one of the reasons why RTA was selected for this research. Braun and Clarke (2021) write that RTA can operate within an interpretivist perspective. For this reason, discourse analysis was discarded as an option as it lends itself to a social constructionist paradigm (White, 2004).

An aim of this research is to explore patterns of meaning across participants' accounts which RTA achieves (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021; Spiers & Riley, 2019). Therefore, themes of facilitating and hindering factors of academic achievement can be developed. Furthermore, Sandelowski and Leeman (2012) write that statements of the themes developed about the research questions can be used to facilitate actionable outcomes which in turn can lead to clear implications for research and practice. Therefore, using RTA in this research allowed implications for staff and EPs to be created which are discussed in Chapter 5.

Another aim of this research is to relate the developed themes to Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), similarly to Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011). RTA is considered flexible in the sense that it allows for inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) orientations to analysis. Whereas other approaches including IPA are inductive in nature (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2020) suggest using RTA when "*the analytic interest is on how personal experiences are located within wider socio-cultural contexts*" (p. 42). This links to the use of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) within this research.

3.11.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The RTA process is documented in Table 6 (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It is important to note that RTA is a recursive and reiterative process, therefore, although the phases are presented linearly in Table 6, I went back and forth between the phases.

Once the inductive analysis was completed and themes developed, I then applied these themes in Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Braun and Clarke (2021) write that deductive analysis in RTA is "*not about massaging your data to fit into your preconceived notions, or telling a partial story of the data that fits with a pre-existing theory...*" (p. 210). Therefore, it is important to mention that the themes developed from the inductive analysis were not forced into the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). I carefully considered and reflected on if and how the inductively developed themes applied to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019)	Actions and reflections
1. Familiarisation This phase has three purposes: immersion, critical engagement, and note-making about the data.	I read each transcript (see Appendix 9 and 10 for an extract of a transcript) at least five times in different orders. The first time I did not make any notes. Subsequently, I made notes of my thoughts and the meaning I placed on the data. I also produced mind maps (Appendix 11 for an example) for each participant, summarising my key thoughts based on their transcript.
2. Coding This is described as a process in which the researcher explores the data for patterns of meaning, developing codes and applying code labels to sections of data. Exploration and coding can be at a semantic and latent level. Semantic coding focuses on explicitly stated data from participants. Latent coding involves deeper data engagement and the researcher conceptually analysing the data.	Coding was completed on NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2020). The below outlines the steps I took to code the data set: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I began by coding each transcript with both research questions in mind, I did this twice for each transcript. I found this to be useful as some of the initial coding for facilitating and hindering factors seemed to relate. On the other hand, it was also difficult to have two research questions in mind. Therefore, I changed my approach. I noticed that talking through codes out loud was helpful to clarify my thinking and understand my thought processes.2. I coded each script (in different orders) with one research question in mind (see Appendix 9 and 10). I did this twice for each transcript. This helped with editing and revising my initial codes.3. Step 2 was repeated with the other research question (see Appendix 9 and 10).4. I then spent time re-reading and refining my codes. I found this very useful. For example, this highlighted that some of my codes were too tight. For instance, two codes were labelled 'engagement in extracurricular activities and 'engagement in clubs or interest groups'. I

	<p>initially started with these two codes as participants described participating in extracurricular activities within school and others described participating in clubs in the community. However, after deliberation and continual reflection, I came to the understanding that ‘engagement in non-school or enjoyable activities’ is what actually facilitated academic achievement rather than the specific club. Therefore, I loosened this code to incorporate this. Appendix 12 shows the codes developed for research question one and Appendix 13 displays the codes developed for research question two.</p> <p>Braun and Clarke write that “<i>coding is never completed because meaning is never final</i>” (pg. 71). This resonated with me as I found it difficult to move on to the next phase. They suggest that researchers ask themselves the following questions to assess whether the codes have adequately captured and differentiated meaning:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do the code labels provide a summary of the diversity of meanings contained in the dataset? 2. Do they also provide some indication of your analytic take on things? <p>I believe my codes did reflect the above, therefore, I moved on to developing initial themes.</p>
Phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019)	Actions and reflections
<p>3. Generating initial themes</p> <p>This phase entails exploration at a more holistic scale as the whole dataset is the focus. It involves the researcher noticing connections that may develop into broader patterns of meanings by exploring the data codes for similarities in meaning and grouping these together.</p> <p>Braun and Clarke (2021) define a theme as having to “<i>capture a wide range of data that are united by, and evidence, a shared idea, sometimes quite obviously and sometimes far less obviously and, and sometimes in quite different ways</i>” (p. 77). They refer to this shared idea as a central organising concept.</p>	<p>I developed the initial themes by clustering similarly connected codes to form candidate themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021).</p> <p>I produced thematic maps to promote my thinking about the initial themes developed and to see how the themes may relate to one another.</p>

Phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019)	Actions and reflections
<p>4. Developing and reviewing themes</p> <p>The researcher assesses how well the initial themes capture the meaning of the data. It requires re-engagement with the coded data extracts and the whole data.</p> <p>Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise the difference between a topic summary and a theme. A topic summary portrays all the different meanings of a particular topic. The central organising concept is what distinguishes a theme from a topic summary.</p>	<p>I spent a few days away from the data and analysis so that I could assess whether the initial themes were suitable and rich in meaning.</p> <p>At this stage, I met with peers and my supervisor, on many occasions, to discuss my initial themes and talk through the story the themes told of the data in relation to the research questions. It was helpful to gain my peer's and supervisor's feedback. Feedback included a few of my initial themes being perceived as topic summaries. This was discussed, reflected upon and edited.</p> <p>Appendix 14 shows revisions of themes developed.</p>
<p>5. Refining, defining and naming themes</p> <p>This involved further development and improvement of the themes. Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that researchers should write 'theme definitions' which outline and describe the "...scope, boundaries and core concept of the theme" (p. 108).</p>	<p>Appendix 15 and 16 display the codes and final developed themes for research question one and two. Final themes were discussed with peers and my supervisor. This helped me to recall the story I was hoping to communicate with my themes.</p> <p>Once themes were decided on, theme definitions were written and can be found in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.</p>
<p>6. Writing up</p> <p>Braun and Clarke (2021) write that this is a key phase in RTA because the writing captures the analysis and story of the data.</p>	<p>The results from the data analysis in relation to the previous literature are discussed in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.</p>

Table 6. The process of data analysis used in this research as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019).

3.12 Quality Assurance

The indicators of quality depend on the philosophical paradigm of the researcher (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Yardley's (2000 and 2008) criteria of quality in qualitative research is widely used and was applied to this research. The four criteria are sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance (Yardley, 2000, 2008).

3.12.1 Sensitivity to Context

This pertains to the researcher's awareness of previous literature, the research context including the socio-cultural context, and the researcher's impact on the research process (Yardley, 2000, 2008). In addition to this, researchers need to be sensitive to the power dynamics and think about the extent of participants feeling able to express themselves (Yardley, 2000, 2008).

Chapter 2 outlines the literature review conducted that shaped the research aims and questions. This highlighted a gap with relatively little research conducted with pupils accessing FSM whilst academically achieving which helped form the rationale of this research.

Situating the research within the immediate and wider context is also a salient feature in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The awareness of the research context is demonstrated in section 3.6: Research Context.

Sensitivity to how I may have impacted the research process is reflected upon in Appendix 2. Additionally, measures taken to reduce the power imbalance included having allocated time for rapport building which is discussed in further detail in section 3.10.5: Risk.

3.12.2 Commitment and Rigour

This refers to the researcher's commitment to the research topic and process (Yardley, 2000). Rigour can be understood as in-depth consideration and completeness of the data collection, analysis and interpretation (Yardley, 2000, 2008).

These values were demonstrated by my careful consideration and in-depth engagement with the study's methodology throughout Chapter 3: Methodology, where rationales are described for research decisions and data analysis stages are clearly outlined.

3.12.3 Transparency and Coherence

Transparency includes the data processes being communicated and the researcher reflecting on how they may impact the research (Yardley, 2000). Coherence refers to how philosophical assumptions are carefully considered and clearly communicated to ensure that the research process aligns with the theoretical assumption guiding the research (Yardley, 2000, 2008).

My philosophical assumptions are outlined in section 3.3: Philosophical Assumptions. They guided the research process from the research question to data analysis to quality assurance.

The importance of reflexivity is also heavily advocated by Braun & Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021) for RTA. Therefore, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process (refer to Appendix 2 for extracts). The reflexive journal detailed my thoughts, feelings and reflections. I also had many discussions with peers and my supervisor about my research which supported my reflections.

Braun and Clarke (2021) recommend that researchers using RTA engage in a reflexive activity (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 16) so that they consider how aspects of themselves and their experiences influence the research. I engaged in this activity and, on reflection, found the activity to enhance my

level of thinking about how I influenced the research throughout the process. An extract of my reflections from this activity is outlined in Appendix 2.

3.12.4 Impact and Importance

This encompasses considering the impact, implications and usefulness of the research (Yardley, 2000, 2008). The implications for educational professionals and strengths of the research are discussed in Chapter 5: Conclusion, sections 5.3: Implications and 5.4: Strengths and Limitations of the Research.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from the participant interviews and data analysis. Each research question is presented and is followed by a thematic map showing the corresponding themes and sub-themes. Then, themes and sub-themes are discussed together with supportive quotes from participants. Relationships between themes are explored and the similarities and differences of findings are discussed in relation to previous research. For each research question, findings are then linked to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to explore the various systemic factors impacting academic achievement. To finish, an overall summary of the results is outlined highlighting the key findings.

The participants are referred to as high achievers. Whilst I recognise that they have yet to achieve five GCSEs at grades 9-4, I will be referring to them as academically high achievers as they are predicted to achieve these grades (as outlined in Chapter 3: Methodology).

4.2 What, if any, are the Facilitating Factors of Academic Achievement in Young People Accessing FSM?

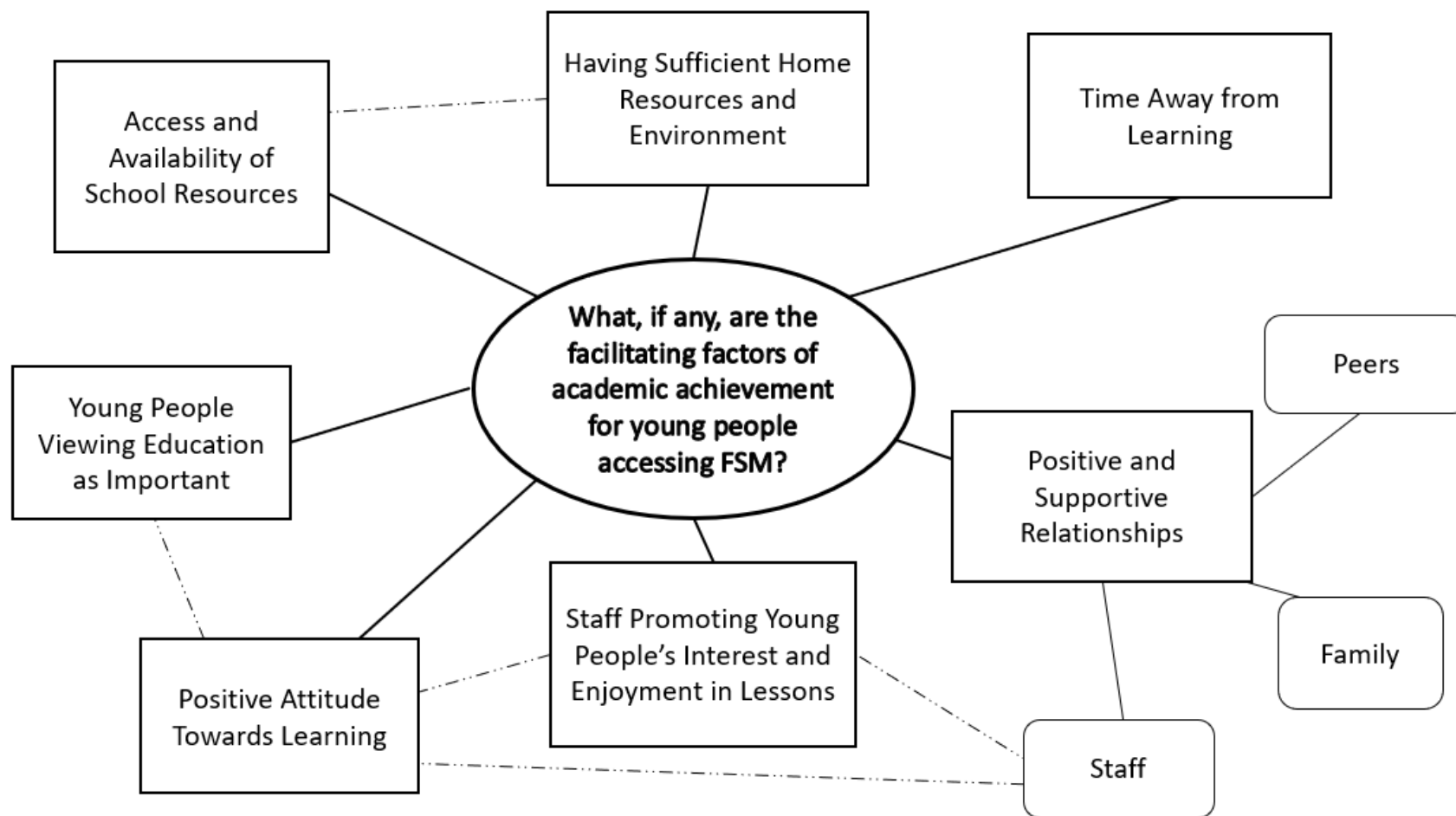


Figure 7. Thematic map of themes arising from RTA in relation to research question one.

4.2.1 Positive and Supportive Relationships

Positive relationships were an important and recurrent theme for all participants. Relationships is a key theme for both facilitating and hindering factors and other themes appear to build on it. For these reasons, it was decided that it would be discussed first.

Participants spoke about these relationships providing support, connection and motivation which in turn supported their academic achievement. Positive relationships with staff, peers and family were recurrent sub-themes.

4.2.1.i: Staff

All participants inferred positive relationships with staff facilitated their academic achievement by making them feel supported and valued. This supports research that also found that young people accessing FSM view relationships with their teachers as important to their education (Mulcare, 2020; Willott, 2013) as well as research that has consistently highlighted the influence of the pupil-teacher relationship in promoting academic outcomes (Holzberger et al., 2019; Mainhard et al., 2018; Sammons et al., 2014; Sylva et al., 2014).

Previous research noted how teachers' behaviours and interactions can influence the pupil-teacher relationship (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). This was also recognised by participants. Participants spoke about teacher characteristics and behaviours as well as interactions with their teachers that helped build a positive relationship. By applying Hamre and Pianta's (2005) framework to this research, it seems that participants who viewed teachers as providing both emotional and teaching-related support appeared to have formed more positive relationships with participants. Teachers who made participants feel valued, cared for, supported and understood their needs, positively influenced participants' perceptions of them. This in turn appeared to increase participants' academic motivation. Additionally, participants referred to the formation of this relationship beginning on the first interaction. This is important to consider in secondary schools where pupils have various teachers for different lessons and generally have these teachers for at least one academic year.

So teachers are very good at kind of helping us, whether it's after school or during lunch time, to just go over things... if I do struggle with something I can go and they can explain it more detailed just one on one which I find quite helpful sometimes. It just kind of helps you understand it more.
(Anna)

I'm able just to go up and if I need some space on my own, or anything just 'cause I can't concentrate or something on my learning, she'll [referring to a teacher] try and get that space for

me or she'll sit down and talk with me and we'll kind of work something out on what's going on and stuff. (Beth)

I suppose teachers, it's about first impression for me. So if the teacher starts off being, gives the impression that they're calm, nice, supportive you're going to enjoy the subject more and then you're gonna put more effort in. But if your first impression is guh, they're miserable, they're shouting, you're just not going to care. And then that'll affect, you know, your grade in the long term, whereas if you're enjoying it, you're probably gonna get a higher grade. (John)

...the teachers you like the most are probably going to make you feel a lot better about yourself. (Robert)

Anna spoke about how teachers provided her with teaching and learning related support and recognised that teachers appeared to be willing to provide this support to pupils. Beth described how she can seek and receive emotional support from a teacher who she feels comfortable with when needed. John's extract appears to be referring to teachers that provide him with emotional support by being supportive and nice. Both John and Robert recognised and described how a teacher's behaviour, interactions with them and their relationship with a teacher, can impact aspects of their learning and self-belief. This relates to findings that suggest teachers' emotional support fosters a supportive and relational context which is beneficial to children's learning (Wentzel et al., 2010).

An aspect of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2017) proposes the need for emotional support and relatedness within the school context to support children's motivation and learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Participants appeared to recognise the benefits of a positive pupil-teacher relationship on their motivation and engagement in lessons. John's extract below appears to support the need for teacher relatedness to encourage his learning, as he referred to putting more effort into his lessons when he perceived a positive relationship with his class teacher.

...English last year, we had two teachers. They gave the first impressions that they were nice so all of us [his class] enjoyed the lesson. Maybe not the content itself, but the actual lesson we enjoyed so we'd like going to our lessons and we put the effort in...they [referring to class teacher] were just nice in general, they wouldn't ever start shouting at the littlest things... (John)

John indicated that the positive relationship with his teachers motivated him to engage with his learning despite not liking the lesson content. I believe this quote highlights the importance of positive pupil-teacher relationships facilitating academic achievement. The way that the teachers interacted and behaved with John seemed to influence his perception of the teachers and in turn his

relationship with them. I interpreted John's quote as him implying that a positive relationship with staff outweighed his interest and enjoyment of the subject. This quote highlights the significance of the pupil-teacher relationship in supporting academic achievement.

Teachers play an integral part in pupils' academic achievement including by marking coursework and, previously, allocating GCSE grades (Ofqual, 2020b). One participant appeared to explicitly recognise how the pupil-teacher relationship influenced grades:

Well again, it's just the supportiveness [from teachers]. I think that's what perhaps put my grades up or got a better forecast grade because of them teachers. They can actually see that I could perhaps get two, three grades higher than what I'm currently getting. (John)

I have interpreted this as John recognising how a positive relationship with staff means that the staff member understands the individual more and what they are capable of. In turn, teachers who know their pupils better may have a greater understanding of the young person's individual abilities. Subsequently, this may impact the accuracy of the teacher's predicted grade for those young people. This finding questions the objectivity of the teacher allocated GCSE grades over the lockdown period and whether the nature of the pupil-teacher relationship influenced grading.

4.2.1.ii Peers

All participants spoke about how peer relationships supported their academic experience and achievement. This is also highlighted by wider research including Mulcare (2020), Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) and Willott (2013). Participants referred to the significance of friendships by discussing how their friends had positively supported and influenced factors relating to their academic achievement such as their learning, emotions and behaviour.

A few participants distinguished between peers being positive and negative influences which is in line with the wider research (Gremmen et al., 2017; Rambaran et al., 2017; Wentzel et al., 2010). For example, Harry talked about his friendship group's positive influence throughout his school career, particularly on his behaviour. Whereas Robert outlined the significance of positive peer influences by comparing his academic trajectory to a similar peer in his year:

So I've always had a really close friend group and our group as a whole we've never got into trouble or never done anything wrong. People in my friend group have come right through primary with me and most of them I've been friends with them since year seven as well, so I know them pretty well and we've been pretty good and never had any mishaps. (Harry)

...there's another student that in year seven, eight and nine, we both did BTEC Sport and both relatively similar and both doing really well, both getting full distinctions, doing well in everything.

I personally think he's got involved with couple of people in the wrong crowd and he's doing less and less well... (Robert)

Participants also reported how their friends support them with their learning by deepening their understanding of academic concepts whilst also acting as a source of healthy competition and motivation.

One of them [referring to a friend] I'd argue like makes me want to do better [in achieving higher grades] because of that competition, 'cause I want to beat them. Putting on bets and things. Friendly, of course... (Robert)

I do have a lot of friends who do revise a lot and, I think, if they're revising, I find it easier to revise because I can revise with them. I recently went to a friend's house to help her with some maths and geography and she said it helped her and as I was teaching it to her, it helped me learn it better as well which was very good. (Anna)

Similarly to Wentzel et al. (2010), the findings indicate that friends can act as motivating factors for participants by encouraging them to achieve more and engage in revision which in turn impacts their academic achievement. For example, Anna's peers provided her with opportunities to re-teach learning by acting as a 'peer tutor'. In turn, Anna recognised that this helped deepen her understanding and retention of learning. This finding links with Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) research that also found peer tutoring to facilitate pupil's positive self-perception and learning.

Peer relationships also provided emotional support to participants, within and outside the classroom. This ranged from friends being a source of happiness for participants to providing support to help cope with difficult emotions. This was the case for Beth who spoke about her friends being a source of emotional support within school to help her cope with difficult home situations.

There's been like some bits and pieces that just are harder than others, like the good days and bad days and everything. But I've always kind of had someone to help me through it, whether it be my mom or my friends... (Beth)

Overall, it appears that positive peer relationships facilitated academic achievement by providing emotional and academic support and being positive influences on participants' behaviours in school, for example, by 'not getting into trouble' and encouraging them to engage in learning.

4.2.1.iii Family

Most participants recognised positive relationships with their family as a facilitating factor of their academic achievement. Family members provided academic and emotional support as well as resources. Family members included parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Much research has identified how family support can influence academic achievement (Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Sammons et al., 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Participants recalled that parents supported their GCSE choices implying that they provided participants with a sense of autonomy in their education, as also found by Mayo and Siraj (2015).

Well, I think it's good that my parents support me, well my mum is very supportive of me and my stepdad is very supportive of me in my academics and they're happy that I'm doing well. (Robert)

Family members including parents were also a source of emotional support by supporting participants' happiness as well as encouraging and motivating their academic achievement. It appears that family believing in participants supported their academic achievement by providing motivation and encouragement as well as boosting participants' confidence in themselves and their abilities. Beth spoke about her Mum posting Beth's educational accomplishments on Facebook and the comments from others further motivated her desire to academically achieve. On the other hand, Beth also recognised how parental support could also be a source of added pressure to academically achieve. I interpreted this as there is a fine balance between family support and expectations unintentionally placed upon by family.

...it's kind of a key factor 'cause I think it kind of helps as well when you have, like, some adult or parental figure in your life that kind of keeps telling me you can do it and stuff. (Beth)

She [mum] kind of shows off my grades sometimes. It gets really embarrassing 'cause she puts it on Facebook and it's like please 'don't, please don't. Please don't do that.' So, I get the whole 'well done' stuff and 'keep going' and 'you've got this' and stuff. (Beth)

...what if they (referring to parents) don't like believing me anymore if I've gotten this (bad grade)...I suppose I just want to try and make them happy...we all do have that person that we just want to please and want to make them be happy. Like, we think that they'll be happy, we'll be happy, if they're happy with this. If I do this, they're going to be happy and stuff. (Beth)

Some participants spoke about how their family helped them with their homework, this included parents and grandparents. Similarly to findings by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011), Beth mentioned that her parents try to provide academic support with homework despite not having the knowledge. It appears that even if family members may have not known what the answers are, the offering of

support and family being available seemed to support the participants' learning.

I know if I'm stuck with homework or anything I can always go talk to my mom, nan or granddad. So they're there to help me, I suppose. (Harry)

My mom and my dad have helped because they've always had that kind of support in me and belief that I can do it. And like if I'm stuck in any homework or anything, even if they don't know, they'll try in some ways to help me. (Beth)

Additionally, Anna spoke about how her older siblings supported her by providing her with resources and sharing their experiences of school.

We have a lot of revision guides from school, and I have my sister's old books. They're helpful for subjects and my sisters do like helping me. They're constantly asking me 'if you need with anything, just say'... they've gone through everything through school, like, the system hasn't changed much. That helps quite a lot. So, I know what sort of stuff to focus on exams and what stuff not to. (Anna)

4.2.2 Staff Promoting Young People's Interest and Enjoyment in Lessons

This theme relates to teaching practices promoting participants' interest and enjoyment in learning, in turn appearing to influence their self-interest, motivation and concentration in lessons. This was done through teaching methods used such as making teaching fun, interactive and going on school trips.

High-quality teaching has been found to positively support children and young people's learning and academic outcomes (Demie & Mclean, 2015; Macleod et al., 2015; Shain, 2016; Shaw et al, 2017; SMCPC, 2014). Most participants indicated that teachers being enthusiastic and passionate and lesson delivery as interactive and fun positively influenced their engagement, and enjoyment and increased their interest in the subject. These descriptions have been highlighted by researchers as features of high-quality teaching (Harackiewicz et al., 2016; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Smimou & Dahl, 2012).

You kind of need the enthusiasm to get them [pupils] interested. (Beth)

Another teacher I have, I think is a very good teacher because she loves the subject and she goes through everything slowly rather than rushing. (Anna)

But, if there's some fun way that teachers can make that learning fun, then people are going to, you know, pay attention and start doing it and lesson's more enjoyable. (John)

So that interaction to pick you out for a question to make sure you're paying attention make sure you can at least have a go at answering that question. It's going to be a lot more inclusive and it's probably gonna keep people a lot more interested... (Robert)

It appeared that this theme was closely linked with the sub-theme: positive and supportive relationships with staff. Most participants who spoke about staff increasing their interest indicated that they had a positive relationship with them and spoke positively of them. For example, Robert spoke about how he really liked his history teacher and then mentioned how he makes lessons interesting and enjoyable for Robert.

I really like him [history teacher]... The way he does his lessons makes me interested. He's always got something that like you don't know. Like you can know some things and then the next part of the lesson will be like 'this is this' and generally a surprise, it can be interesting... (Robert)

Staff promoting participants' interest in lessons can be related to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2017). According to an aspect of self-determination theory, pupils having a greater interest in a topic promotes their autonomy which facilitates pupils' intrinsic motivation which in turn may increase academic achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Taylor et al., 2014).

4.2.3 Positive Attitude Towards Learning

Participants described having a positive attitude towards learning in general and toward specific subjects which in turn seemed to motivate their engagement in learning. This opposes Carter-Wall and Whitefield's (2012) findings that attitudes did not influence children's achievement. It is important to clarify that a positive attitude towards learning does not imply they were satisfied with Pine school's policies and practices, as discussed in section: 4.4.2: Ineffective and Discouraging School Practices and Policies.

Participants appeared to recognise that their attitudes and beliefs influenced their academic achievement. This suggests that participants were aware of how they recognised they were active agents in their learning and subsequent achievement.

I suppose having the mindset to do it. Because on some days you could go in and just go 'well, I can't be bothered so I'm not gonna do anything'. You've got to have the mindset that you're gonna do it 'cause if I went to a lesson now and had a good mindset that I was relaxed and whatever, you're more likely to actually do something, whereas if I was tired and miserable now, I'd be I wouldn't be bothered and I'll be like 'I'm not doing it.' (John)

I interpreted John's attitudes and beliefs as impacting and perhaps determining his engagement with learning. This perhaps links to the sub-theme: staff positive relationships and theme: staff promoting

interest and enjoyment in lessons. This may be because if teachers had a good relationship with John, they would perhaps be able to recognise when he needs emotional support and provide this in order to support his engagement with learning.

Most participants also suggested that they enjoyed learning which subsequently drove their engagement in learning beyond the classroom. This is similar to previous research that found children and young people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds whilst academically succeeding had positive attitudes toward education and learning (Mulcare, 2020; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Beth's fondness for learning appeared to motivate and influence her behaviour beyond the classroom, leading to her engaging in further research and learning to fill gaps in her knowledge.

I do kinda like learning about it... sometimes it's like I don't know what a word means or stuff I'll try like Google it when I'm at home and try find a way for me to understand what the word means without, or like the technical words. 'cause it's when you get those really long technical words and it just doesn't make sense in my head. (Beth)

Below, Anna stated that her self-interest and enjoyment of a subject promoted her engagement in that subject.

I think if I enjoy the lessons and I'm actually interested in the subject that helps like I said with maths, I do the homework straight away because I love maths. So if I don't enjoy the subjects, I'm not as motivated to learn stuff. (Anna)

4.2.4 Young People Viewing Education as Important

Most participants inferred that they valued education and that it was important to them for reasons pertaining to future outcomes and meeting career aspirations. This is consistent with Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) finding that goals appeared to support children and young people's achievement. For example, Harry spoke about how achieving well at school can lead to gaining a job and a higher quality of life which is also in line with Mulcare's (2020) findings. This belief is supported by evidence that has consistently demonstrated a link between academic achievement and positive life outcomes (Hayward et al., 2014). Thus, suggesting that participants are aware of how educational achievements can be a mechanism toward positive future outcomes.

Starting my GCSEs, this is where it really counts. (Beth)

I think being able to achieve good grades and leaving school with good grades, which will really help me get a good job that can really help me in life. (Harry)

This attitude and belief towards education subsequently appeared to drive participants' behaviour and organisation by prioritising educational activities, such as homework, before engaging in enjoyable activities:

But since then, I've learned to control myself more to make sure I do that homework and make sure I revise enough to do relatively well. (Robert)

I interpreted this as Robert's attitudes towards education and learning changing as he has gotten older and progressed through school. It appears that as Robert has grown older, his attitude towards education has changed and the value of education has become more significant to him. Therefore, this has changed his behaviour as he now prioritises his learning and incorporates it into his schedule. Furthermore, Robert goes on to suggest that even if he dislikes a specific subject, he will still complete the relevant work. I interpreted this as Robert viewing education as important, subsequently driving this behaviour.

Like maths, I'm not a massive fan of maths at all, but I know that I've just got to get it done, get it out the way, achieve what I need to and move on. (Robert)

4.2.5. Time Away From Learning

Most participants reported that spending time away from education (including homework, school and learning) is important to them and their academic achievement which is similar to findings by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) and Mulcare (2020). It appeared that this break supported the participants' wellbeing and cognitive skills such as attention and focus. Participants spoke about the importance of breaks in terms of engaging in their interests as well as within the school day.

I don't think it's good to go straight from school, go straight back by bus, go straight home, start doing more work. I feel like you need to have a break. (Robert)

Participants spoke about engaging in their hobbies such as physical exercise, sports and being in nature. The participants' hobbies appeared to provide them with break away from education.

I think I just get out a lot, I like going on the bike and ((inaudible)) and just go to the fields and there's so many places to go and get out and sometimes I like just being independent so I'll just go places do things. (Harry)

Others reported how clubs and religious groups supported them to have a break from education. Similarly to Mulcare (2020), these experiences provided opportunities to connect with others. It also appeared that participants received additional support from these groups.

I go to the church. I'm a Christian and they have these clubs for the different age groups where you just kind of go and chat and have a snack and play games which is quite nice. I mean, I tend to go with one of my friends who also goes to my church, and if one of us isn't going then the other is like 'I'm not going to go by myself'. Recently there was a girls course called 'Flourish' where it was just all the girls would go and we'd talk about different topics and we could talk about problems and insecurities. And it was quite relaxing. (Anna)

4.2.6 Having Sufficient Home Resources and Environment

Most participants inferred that having the appropriate resources and environment at home was important so they could engage in learning. Additionally, the participants appeared to acknowledge how home events could influence their academic achievement. A great deal of previous research has highlighted the significance of the home environment impacting academic achievement (Lehrl et al., 2020; Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Hunt, 2008; Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Jelcic, 2008; Sylva et al., 2008).

The home resources mentioned by participants included access to a laptop and materials, such as textbooks, as well as needing adequate space and a quiet environment to be able to focus and concentrate on their homework and revision. These resources would have been particularly important during the lockdown period when learning was remote, as identified by Andrew et al. (2020). Therefore, young people would have needed the basic materials and resources such as a laptop or computer and Wi-Fi to be able to engage with learning.

I guess having quite a vacant area to work is very helpful ... Having that space, that time alone. (Robert)

I've got the essential things I need to help me revise or do homework or whatever...I don't have many things to set me aside from school, to distract me. (Harry)

4.2.7 Access and Availability of School Resources

Participants referred to access to extra support sessions and school facilities as supportive to their academic achievement. Additionally, a few participants directly acknowledged the PP funding supporting their education.

Research has highlighted the usefulness of schools providing extra academic support (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Most participants said that they found the homework club and additional revision sessions provided by Pine school to be helpful. However, only one participant had attended the revision sessions on offer. This is likely to have been because the interviews were conducted in February which was three to four months before GCSE exams typically begin. Therefore, participants

may not have felt that they needed the additional support at that time. Additionally, participants did say that they hoped to attend the sessions nearer to their exams. Therefore, I interpreted this as the availability and opportunity to access the revision sessions were positively perceived and appreciated by participants, although the participants had yet to attend these sessions.

So they're always like offering like extra education, if you really need the help. So that's quite good. (Harry)

I suppose interventions, like I think tonight after school, there's a revision for physics or summit and then starting next week they're going to start doing more revision sessions for the PPEs [coursework] coming up in February. So sometimes I think that can help. (John)

Two participants explicitly referred to the PP funding in supporting their academic achievement by providing resources such as textbooks and contributing to a proportion of school trips. This, therefore, suggests that some pupils are aware and acknowledge that they are beneficiaries of the PP funding. Additionally, based on participants' accounts of the use of the funding, this indicates that Pine school aims to raise attainment by spending the PP funding similarly to other schools as demonstrated by Barrett (2018), Craske (2018) and Morris and Dobson (2020).

...they help with like money costs of stuff. So like free school meals and pupil premium, and they'll pay for some... a percentage of some stuff on certain things, like any trips, or anything that can help with that. (Beth)

I have got the updated versions, I get them (textbooks) for free through the pupil premium, which is very helpful. (Anna)

Access to school resources was particularly vital to Anna during the months of online learning. Anna shared that she does not have access to Wi-Fi or a laptop at her Mum's house which is her main residence. Anna discussed how Pine school provided her with a laptop and Wi-Fi that allowed her to access online learning. However, Anna mentioned that these resources were given temporarily only during the periods of online learning.

The school was quite good for that... they gave me a laptop and like a little, I don't know, what it was like a dongle, maybe, which I could connect and do the teams which was helpful. But I think, school was quite helpful in that sense. (Anna)

4.3 Deductive Analysis: Linking Inductive Analysis to the Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Table 7 outlines the integration of the themes developed from the inductive analysis and Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (1979).

The deductive analysis highlights the complexity of academic achievement based on pupils' perspectives. Based on the findings it is clear that academic achievement is facilitated by complex interactions among various factors within multiple systems. Similarly, to Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) and Willott (2013), this research highlights the particular significance of the child, home and school.

System	Description	Themes and sub-themes linked to the system
Microsystem	This includes the child or young person who is at the centre of the model. It includes relations between the child or young person and their immediate surroundings including the family and home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people viewing education as important • Positive attitude towards learning • Having sufficient home resources and environment • Positive and supportive relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family
Mesosystem	Interaction between two micro-systems. For example, the interaction between home and family and school staff and children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time away from learning • Positive and supportive relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff ○ Peers • Staff promoting young people's interest and enjoyment in lessons
Exosystem	These systems indirectly impact development through interaction with other systems. This may include school enactment of policies and processes within schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and availability of school resources
Macrosystem	The wider and overarching socio-cultural context such as legislations and cultural values.	

Table 7. Application of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to the inductive facilitative themes and sub-themes developed.

4.4 What, if any, are the Hindering Factors of Academic Achievement in Young People Accessing FSM?

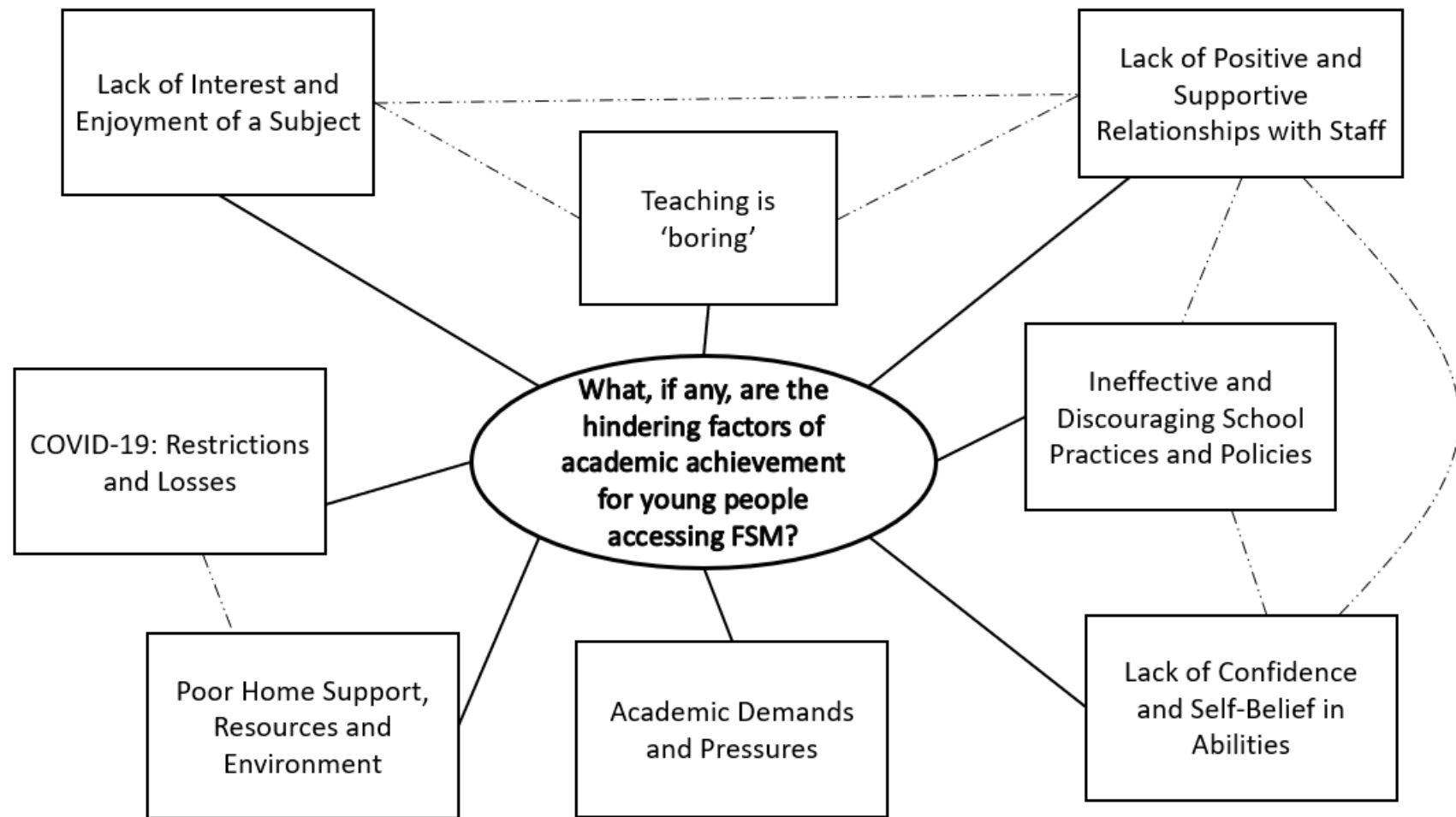


Figure 8. Thematic map of themes arising from RTA in relation to research question two.

4.4.1 Lack of Positive and Supportive Relationships with Staff

All participants inferred that a lack of a positive relationship and connection with teachers hindered their academic achievement. This appeared to influence participants' academic achievement by reducing their interest and motivation to academically achieve which is consistent with McGrath and Van Bergen (2015). This may be explained by the participants' basic psychological needs for connection and relatedness not being sufficiently met, as proposed by the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2017). In turn, impacting the intrinsic motivation of participants (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This is likely in secondary schools when considering that pupils have various teachers for different subjects within the school day.

It appeared that when there was a lack of emotional and teaching-related support (Hamre & Pianta, 2005) from teachers, participants had not formed a positive relationship with those staff. John appeared to distinguish between positive and negative relationships with teachers. As discussed in section 4.2.1.i: staff, positive and supportive relationships, teachers' interactions with participants and their characteristics are important in establishing the nature of the pupil-teacher relationship.

Participants referred to how a lack of teaching-related support influenced the nature of the pupil-teacher relationship. I interpreted Anna's extract below as suggesting that a lack of connection and positive relationship with her teacher appeared to result in a lack of understanding of Anna and her needs. Additionally, the lack of connection may also impact Anna's confidence to seek help from her teacher. It appeared that Anna's teacher is heavily focused on the pupils' grades and therefore omits to respond to her individual needs.

There is this teacher I have who, I feel like is a bit blinded because in a way, I feel like she sees all the whole class as very intelligent and she's constantly saying you're all very capable of achieving grade nines and, you know, then, actually I feel like some students in that class do struggle... Which I think doesn't help with the learning , 'cause if she's so focused on us being amazing, she doesn't seem to see that we do need help with things. 'cause I think it's good to know what you're not doing well in because then you can do better in it, but she thinks we're all doing amazingly, which isn't very helpful. (Anna)

Robert's quote below is interesting as research has highlighted the need for positive pupil-teacher relationships to facilitate academic achievement (Holzberger et al., 2019; Mainhard et al., 2018; Sammons et al., 2014; Sylva et al., 2014) yet Robert believes teachers do not want him to do well. I interpreted Robert's extract as indicating that there may be harmful implications when there is a lack of a positive pupil-teacher relationship including Robert thinking the teacher does not want him to succeed. In turn, this may impact Robert's sense of trust and safety within that particular teacher's classroom.

If you have a teacher that doesn't really want you to do well then it's not going to go well. (Robert)

4.4.2 Ineffective and Discouraging School Practices and Policies

Most participants felt that Pine school implemented ineffective policies and practices that did not consider the needs and desires of the pupils. The ineffective and discouraging practices mentioned concern teaching approaches used within the classroom. The policies included a focus on punitive measures and uniforms which the participants did not agree with. Additionally, one participant mentioned that they thought the FSM policy was ineffective.

Anna and Beth described an approach called 'cold calling' which involves pupils being randomly selected to answer questions in the classroom. There is another approach teachers use within the classroom that Beth described as stages that pupils must work through independently when they do not know an answer, the last of these stages is being able to ask the class teacher.

...in cold calling, they have this rule where we're not allowed to say 'I don't know' or 'I'm not sure'. If they [pupils] genuinely don't know, the teacher just pressures them and keeps asking them, which it's quite terrifying for me, which makes me quite scared in lessons if I get picked on and I don't know the answer then I'll panic and go red and be embarrassed. It's just like a chain of things. So I really don't like cold calling or answering questions because you're not allowed to say 'I don't know' and if you say that then teachers just keep pressuring you to answer it. Which I think isn't good. (Anna)

...brain, your book, your buddy, and your boss, that's kind of the stages as you go through. So first you've got to look through your brain to see if you know it. Then your book, is it in your book? Then you ask a friend that's sat next to you. The last resort is you go to the teacher. Some kids they just go straight to the teachers, so they don't know [the answer] or don't do the buddy or boss or brain. And it's [the approach] kind of a way to stop you from going to the teacher or your buddy so you kind of just sit there and just try and work it out yourself. And it doesn't really help if sometimes you missed that lesson or you missed something or you don't understand it or you've been told to copy something down, but it still doesn't make sense 'cause you can't go and ask. You can't put your hand up to ask as a lot of teachers they follow it [the approach] strictly, so they will not answer 'cause it's like 10 minutes long. It's however long they [the teachers] want it to be. (Beth)

These practices described by Anna and Beth seem to induce fear and stress in participants. In turn, this negatively impacts their concentration and perhaps perceived sense of safety within the classroom. Additionally, I interpreted the extracts as the school staff possibly thinking that these practices encourage and promote academic independence in pupils. However, inadvertently, these practices appear to induce stress in pupils as well as reinforce an unhealthy attitude towards failure and the message that teachers are unavailable to provide support. The latter point may impact the pupil-teacher relationship as this may suggest to pupils that teachers are not available to provide teaching-related support (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Participants also spoke about how they believed the school policies were ineffective and focused on

the wrong things. For example, there is a heavy emphasis on behaviour and school uniform within the school.

I suppose when teachers will go 'if you don't do this work, then it's going to be say an after-school detention or break-time detention', it's not really teaching you anything. You're just stood in the room or sat in a room for however long, and you don't learn anything from it, and a lot of people will continue to get these detentions and they still don't learn anything from it, because I've known people that, they've got detentions at year seven and they're still getting them now so they haven't learnt anything, they'll just continue to do it... They'll [teachers] just threaten you with detentions when it shouldn't really need to be at all. (John)

...we came back to school after Christmas we had to have the covid lateral flow tests in school and my friend and I were reading the bulletin and it said that if you can't go there to get it and your parents haven't signed the consent form, then you get a break time [detention]. And we thought it was a bit extreme because they could just send them back to lessons... (Anna)

John and Anna implied that Pine school appears to focus on punishing pupils' behaviours. These views support the findings by McClusky et al. (2013) regarding secondary aged pupils' beliefs that their school focused on punishing pupils' behaviours. John spoke about how he believes that the behaviour policy within Pine school is ineffective. Anna inferred how staff use punitive measures ineffectively to manage pupil behaviour by, possibly, threatening pupils with detentions or inducing fear to act in a certain way. It appeared that the participants were inferring that detentions are ineffective as pupils do not learn anything from them. When John was asked what he thought the school could do instead, he said the following:

I suppose if you're going to give out detentions, make sure that detention is actually used for time to do some sort of the lesson work. Not saying just get out a bit of paper and do summet, actually use it as time to, you know, encourage people to not, you know, do whatever. (John)

Payne (2015) highlighted how the pupil-teacher relationship can be negatively influenced by detentions. I interpreted John's quote as indicating that he wants school staff to be supportive and encouraging of pupils rather than punishing them. This indicates that John perhaps also finds that the use of punitive measures damages his relationships with teachers, similarly to Payne's (2015) results. John's desire of having supportive approaches to behaviour management lends itself to a relational approach to behaviour.

John also spoke about how the FSM funding was insufficient to buy a healthy and adequate amount of food for the school day. This questions whether the FSM policy is serving its intended purpose effectively.

...they'll give you about £2.35 a day and I think it's quite unfair because a lot of the prices keep going up but the money we get stays the same, so by the end of the day I'm left with one pence. But it does get re-topped each day by whoever does it, but you don't get much and sometimes the quality of that food is,

I've gotta say it, awful, it really is. And so at break usually I'll get like a pizza and a small drink. And then it's like, that small drink is seventy-two pence, so it's about three-hundred and thirty mil (laughs). And if we were paying that ourselves, it'd be 'why pay that when you can just go Tesco and get five-hundred mils, four of them for a quid' and at lunch I can only afford probably one small drink so I have to bring food in... (John)

Participants inferred that they wanted their voices to be listened to and to be incorporated into policies and practices within the school. This aligns with findings that suggest pupils did not feel that they were fully listened to by school staff (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Burke & Grosvenor, 2015) but wanted to be involved in decision-making within their schools (McClusky et al., 2013).

...all of us [students] have like really effective ideas, but they never get like known or shared... (Harry)

I think it's mainly the pressure of everything and then focusing on stuff that I don't see as important. Like another thing is with uniform, they have a lot of uniform rules which kind of put pressure on you. And focusing on stuff like how we appear to other people and how we're like acting rather than our attitude to the learning and our mental health. (Anna)

4.4.3 Academic Demands and Pressures

Most participants indicated how academic demands and pressures including high volumes of homework, the curriculum and exams induced worry and stress. This supports Owen-Yeates's (2005) finding that academic stress, including homework and exams, was the main source of stress for year 11 pupils.

It's just with homework, 'cause teachers are quite focused on homework and you need to have your homework done and if you don't then it's a break time [detention], which I think is quite stressful. (Anna)

...the curriculum, at times it can be really stressful. And it can like drag you into bad places I guess overall mentally, so that's not good. Especially with the homework 'cause sometimes, especially after like a hard day and you've got stressful things like exams coming up and you want to go home and relax and wind down but if you have homework, then you constantly have to be mind active and it can get a bit too much sometimes. (Harry)

Harry indicated that academic pressures cause him to feel stressed and negatively influence his wellbeing which was also found by Roome and Soan (2019). Additionally, the high volume of homework appeared to hinder his time to be able to engage in enjoyable activities away from learning which is highlighted as a facilitating factor for participants' academic achievement (see section 4.2.5: Time Away from Learning).

Most participants recognised how years 10 and 11 were important years for exams and this appeared to induce stress for participants. This seems to link with participants viewing education as valuable (see

section 4.2.4: Young People Viewing Education as Important). For example, Harry recognised his grades could influence his future:

I think as it's gone on obviously it's got more important with exams coming up and coming to the end so you got to really think about what you gotta do. So I think just the big build-up to leaving and thinking what you gotta do next, and constantly being self-conscious if you have to be good enough and like get the right things. (Harry)

4.4.4 Poor Home Support, Resources and Environment

Participants described how the lack of adequate home resources including Wi-Fi, a sufficient home learning environment such as adequate space, and family situations hindered their academic achievement.

Beth and Anna described how their home and family situations negatively influenced their learning. This is contrary to Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) finding that children and young people who were academically achieving did not allow negative home situations to influence their learning. Beth is a young carer, she indicated that this impacted her emotional regulation and in turn her cognitive skills in lessons.

...sometimes you don't know whether to put your home life or education first. ...sometimes it [home situation] has been a bit of a barrier because I will spend all day worrying about that thing. And sometimes I just can't concentrate normally in lessons. (Beth)

Beth's status as a young carer and her home situation was recognised by school staff and she said that appropriate support in school was implemented. However, for Anna, this did not appear to be the case. Anna also spoke about how she worries about her Mum and this impacts her concentration and attention in school.

...my mum gets a bit stressed about that [landlady making decisions without consulting Anna's mum] and annoyed. And I think being the only person living with my mum, I do get her complaining to me a lot, which makes me worried about her. My mom cried. She's quite emotional with things like that and I don't know how to help her, 'cause I can't do anything but, yeah, I think the situation at home needs to improve a bit... Well, because I'm quite worried about my mum at home and I don't know how to help, I'm usually thinking about that. Like at the minute especially, my mom wants to move house. I've always wanted to move house. But we can't because yeah, some stuff takes ages to sort through and it'll be too expensive. I think it makes me stressed about that and so I'm also stressed about stuff at school so I don't really focus on learning as much. (Anna)

Anna's account demonstrates the influence that home situations can have on academic achievement. This emphasises the need for school staff to be aware of pupils' home situations. However, if there is a lack of connection and a trusting relationship between pupils and teachers in school then perhaps Anna does not

feel like she can talk to school staff about her concerns.

Below, Anna discussed how her lack of home resources and materials impacted her access to and engagement with school-related work. She spoke about how she predominately lives with her Mum and in their home, they do not have access to Wi-Fi. This is important as, based on other participants' accounts, it appears that much of the homework and revision is online. Therefore, this hindered Anna's academic achievement by limiting her access to materials and resources, particularly during the covid-19 pandemic restrictions when Wi-Fi was essential to access online learning (Andrew et al, 2020). This finding suggests that having access to adequate resources at home is an important factor which may contribute to academic achievement.

...I'd say where I live, is the main problem because there's not much space at the minute, there's no area, like no study area... think with homework, it sometimes, I don't know about homework because I can't check class charts and then I have to explain to the teacher and they do understand. Then they gave me like a substitute thing or something. But I think it is quite hard because some of the tasks, it is all online rather than researching and writing notes or something like that. It's like a proper website or an app that you have to do everything online, which is annoying. So obviously I can't do homework as well as other people. (Anna)

4.4.5. Covid-19: Restrictions and Losses

Most participants recognised the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions hindered their learning progress and academic achievement. Participants discussed their dissatisfaction with online learning and how the restrictions meant that they could not engage in clubs and activities that provided enjoyment and time away from learning.

Covid hasn't helped the past few years... (Harry)

Well, obviously the entire situation of online learning has not helped cus everything has been inside you've been starved of quite a lot, of every sport, lots of trips have been cancelled due to covid... (Robert)

Furthermore, John captured the significant impact online learning had on his education. He described how he missed roughly a year's worth of learning because he did not access online lessons. This must have had a significant impact on his learning progress.

John:...online learning at home, it was the way it was done, it was all a bit of a mess 'cause nobody knew what they were doing. I don't think teachers were taught very well about how to use it [online learning platform] cus a lot of the time there were issues people could kick each other out the session so a lot of people just took it as a joke as opposed to actually doing something and that's why I just gave up after a week. So I actually attended no lessons after about a week or two in- during year nine.

Interviewer: So out of the whole year nine, you participated in two weeks [of online learning], is that correct?

John: Yeah, it was year ten as well 'cause it went back into online learning, and that was arguably worse in that year so it's just, 'no, I'm not doing it', and some lessons I wouldn't attend at all...

It appeared that John was deeply unsatisfied with the quality of online learning as he missed at least a year of teaching input. Additionally, he indicated that teachers were not prepared and did not have the skills to facilitate effective online learning. This supports findings by Walters et al. (2022) who found that secondary aged pupils' engagement to be much lower during online learning compared to classroom-based learning.

4.4.6 Lack of Interest and Enjoyment of a Subject

This theme pertained to participants' attitudes towards a subject consequently impacting their academic achievement. Participant accounts inferred that a lack of interest or enjoyment in a subject influenced their engagement, motivation and concentration within the lesson. Participants' interest and enjoyment appeared to be subject dependent and closely linked to teacher relationships and teacher practices.

I think... so if I don't enjoy the subjects, I'm not as motivated to learn stuff. I think it's just kind of my attitude towards what we're doing... (Anna)

Like maths...I'm just so bored of the subject that it's harder for me to concentrate or do better in. (Robert)

Beth seemed to identify that her lack of interest in a subject influenced her ability to increase her grade in that subject. This indicates that Beth recognised how her engagement in learning and academic achievement was affected by her personal preferences. This, therefore, implies that Beth recognised the active role she has on her academic achievement which supports the findings of Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011).

...two subjects I just can't seem to move my grade up, but I think that's just because I'm not really interested in them... (Beth)

Additionally, participants' interest in a subject appeared to be linked to teaching practices and delivery. For example, Anna summarised and recognised how her interest in a subject was influenced by teaching approaches.

I mean, I said previously, how if I don't really enjoy the subject, which obviously can be to do with the teachers in the way they teach. (Anna)

John described how his lack of enjoyment influenced his attendance during online learning.

You'd sit there and go "well why am I doing this for an hour and I could be doing that" and it just puts you off attending it 'cause it's... well, you're not enjoying it. (John)

4.4.7 Teaching is 'boring'

Participants appeared to recognise the significance of pedagogy and its influence on their academic achievement. All participants said that teaching delivery which is not fun and lacks enthusiasm hindered their academic achievement by negatively impacting their motivation and engagement in lessons.

Beth and John described how teaching delivery that is repetitive and lacks fun hindered their academic achievement. This is similar to findings by Willott (2013) who found monotonous learning resulted in participants being bored in class.

And when the teacher doesn't seem enthusiastic and it's 'you've got to learn this and that' and it kind of does effects your grades a bit 'cause you're not going to get the best out that subject... some teachers still have like Big PowerPoint and loads of questions and you've got to do this and that, but sometimes a lot of people don't understand it, like when it comes to philosophy for me, I don't really understand what I meant to do, but I'm just being shown a question on the board and then I get confused and I'm sat there and I've got to put something down otherwise I'm going to be picked 'cause of cold calling they do. (Beth)

...it's just as long as they're [teachers] not always, you know, there's like they don't care or they're just moody and miserable.... a lot of teachers will just have their classes and then they'll just repeat the same thing they do for any other class. So it's like the same structure, like 'we're going to do this so do that. Read out this textbook. Write that down.' You're not learning anything you're just writing things down. (John)

Based on participants' accounts, it appears that they want teaching to be engaging and enjoyable. This seems to be summarised by John when he was asked about what he would want teachers to do to facilitate his achievement.

But if there's some fun way that teachers can make that learning fun, then people are going to, you know, pay attention and start doing it and the lesson is more enjoyable. (John)

Furthermore, participants wanted their learning and the curriculum to be meaningful to them in terms of their interests and to develop skills and knowledge for the future.

[we have] 3 philosophy lessons over 2 weeks and we only have 1 character and culture lesson a week. And character and culture lesson I feel is the most important 'cause actually teaches you what you need to learn in life like drugs, gambling and all that. I feel it should be more prioritised, especially one every two weeks. (Harry)

4.4.8 Lack of Confidence and Self-Belief in Abilities

Most participants implied a lack of confidence and self-belief in their academic and personal capabilities. A lack of self-belief appeared to manifest as participants doubting their academic capabilities and behaviours

within the classroom. Previous research has highlighted how confidence and belief in cognitive abilities are supportive factors of academic achievement (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Additionally, research has demonstrated a correlation between a pupil's confidence and self-belief and academic performance (Chowdry et al., 2011; Hansen & Henderson, 2019). However, the participants in this research appeared to contrast this finding as they are considered to be high achievers despite their lack of perceived confidence.

According to an aspect of the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2017), participants' lack of academic and personal competence may indicate that their basic psychological needs are not being sufficiently met. As a result of this, their intrinsic motivation may be hindered (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

I feel like I've always been, not the smartest, but I've always been, er, ok. (Harry)

I'm not really sure of myself sometimes if I'm doing the right thing or the wrong thing... (Beth)

Most participants indicated that they lacked confidence and self-belief in themselves and their academic abilities despite being considered high achievers. This was also found by Mulcare (2020). Participants struggled to confidently communicate and recognise that they were academically achieving.

I mean, my friends constantly say I'm clever, which I always just be like, 'no, I'm not that clever, I don't understand things that well'. (Anna)

Anna's extract above appears to describe how she struggled to recognise that she is a high achiever and is clever despite her friends telling her this. This finding opposes Siraj-Blatchford et al.'s. (2011) finding that positive reinforcement appeared to develop positive perceptions of abilities, as Anna described her friends telling her that she is clever but still not recognising this.

Participants' lack of confidence also related to them doubting their belonging in the highest ability classes. Anna compared her knowledge and behaviours to those of her peers, in turn, this seemed to negatively influence her confidence. This is concerning as Nieuwenhuis et al. (2019) found that pupils who did not perceive themselves as fitting in at university were less likely to apply to high-status universities regardless of their academic achievement. Therefore, indicating the importance of increasing pupils' confidence and beliefs in their academic and personal capabilities.

I mean, I don't think I should be in top set English. But... and sometimes I don't think I should be in top set science because there are a lot of very clever people like the people who just know things that you're not taught at school and kind of going 'how, how did they know that?'. It's like 'should I be here?'. (Anna)

Participants also spoke about lacking the confidence to ask a question or seek adult support in lessons. For example, Anna reported that she would wait until the end of the lesson to speak with her teachers. This seemed to be influenced by the fear of peer judgement and may also be influenced by teaching practices, such as 'cold-calling' (see section 4.4.2: Ineffective and Discouraging School Practices and Policies) that

reinforce teachers being unavailable to support pupils during lessons. Furthermore, the lack of a positive pupil-teacher relationship may also influence participants' confidence to seek help from teachers.

...like one reason I don't like talking in front of people is because, like in English, if I'm asked to read out what I've written, I feel like a lot of people might judge me about if it's not good enough... if I have a question I don't like putting my hand up, so I tend to try and work it out by myself. But then I can ask them [teachers] at the end of the lesson which is easier. (Anna)

4.5 Deductive Analysis: Linking Inductive Analysis to the Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Table 8 shows the themes developed for hindering factors of academic achievement applied to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Similarly to Section 4.3, the deductive analysis demonstrated the complexity of academic achievement in pupils accessing FSM. It shows the various factors within each system impacting academic achievement. A difference between the results of the deductive analysis for research question one and research question two is the influence of the macrosystem, specifically the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions.

The use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework for the data analysis adds strengths and limitations to this research. The strengths include the model acting as a useful organising framework to understand and think about academic achievement for pupils accessing FSM whilst considered to be high academic achievers. Conversely, limitations may include that the inductive themes developed from the data did not easily fit into Bronfenbrenner's model. For example, some of the themes may have been considered to go in more than one of the systems rather than explicitly one system.

System	Description	Themes linked to the system
Microsystem	This includes the child or young person who is at the centre of the model. It includes relations between the child or young person and their immediate surroundings including the family and home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interest and enjoyment of a subject • Lack of confidence and self-belief in abilities • Poor home support, resources and environment
Mesosystem	Interaction between two micro-systems. For example, the interaction between home and family and school staff and children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of positive and supportive relationships with staff • Teaching is 'boring'
Exosystem	These systems indirectly impact development through interaction with other systems. This may include school enactment of policies and processes within schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic demands and pressures • Ineffective and discouraging school practices and policies

System	Description	Themes linked to the system
Macrosystem	The wider and overarching socio-cultural context such as legislations and cultural values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid-19: restrictions and losses

Table 8. Application of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to the inductive hindering themes developed.

4.6: Summary of Findings

This research found that when participants are provided with space and voice (Lundy, 2007), they can recognise the influences of their academic achievement and reflect on their educational experiences. Participants referred to various factors facilitating their academic achievement, primarily located in the micro and mesosystem. It is important to acknowledge that some of the facilitating and hindering factors identified may reflect a young person's typical development and experiences in secondary school.

Positive and supportive relationships with teachers, peers and family appeared to significantly influence academic achievement. Family and peers provided academic and emotional support to participants. Peers were highly influential in motivating participants' engagement with learning and their behaviour in school. Family members supported participants by being available and offering academic support, despite not having the skills.

Participants appeared to recognise the influence they have on their learning such as their attitudes and own interests. However, these appeared to be influenced by other factors such as teaching practices and relationships between participants and staff. Additionally, participants spoke about the need to engage in activities away from education. These activities included extracurricular activities and religious groups which provided opportunities to spend time with others and have fun.

The home learning environment was found to be an important influence on academic achievement. This supports the wider literature that also found evidence for this claim (e.g., Lehl et al., 2020; Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Hunt, 2008; Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Jelcic, 2008; Sylva et al., 2008). In particular, this research highlighted the need for access to resources and an adequate home learning space to be able to effectively engage in school-related work. For example, one participant described how her lack of access to technology at home appeared to compromise her access to homework and, initially, her engagement with online learning. However, the temporary supply of technology by the school allowed this participant to access online lessons.

Participants recognised the influence of teaching pedagogy on their academic achievement. Previous research has emphasised the significant influence of high-quality teaching on raising the attainment of pupils accessing FSM (Macleod et al., 2015; Shain, 2016; SMCPC, 2014). This research found that when teachers promoted participants' interest and enjoyment in lessons through teaching practices including

being enthusiastic, passionate and using a range of activities, this appeared to increase young people's own interest in the lesson and their engagement. Conversely, participants reported that repetitive teaching practices increased their boredom in lessons and subsequently decreased their engagement. Teachers who were described by participants as using positive teaching approaches were spoken of favourably by participants, indicating a link between quality teaching and pupil-teacher relationships.

The findings of this study demonstrate the significance of the pupil-teacher relationship and the influence it has on academic achievement for pupils accessing FSM. Teachers' behaviours and interactions with participants influenced the pupil-teacher relationships. Furthermore, it appeared that the nature of this relationship was influenced by whether teachers provided emotional and teaching-related support, as suggested by Hamre and Pianta (2005). Positive pupil-teacher relationships seemed to be linked with teachers promoting young people's interest and enjoyment in lessons. Participants who perceived positive relationships with a teacher often spoke highly of their teaching practices which supported their enjoyment and engagement in lessons and learning.

Hindering factors of academic achievement included ineffective school policies and practices as well as academic stress and pressures. Participants felt that their school assigned high volumes of homework which influenced their engagement in activities away from education and also felt that the school's behaviour policy was ineffective. Participants believed Pine school was using their behaviour policy to threaten young people to behave appropriately. Additionally, practices which teachers used in the classroom such as 'cold-calling' appeared to induce fear in participants and inadvertently communicate an unhealthy attitude towards failure and that teachers were not a source of help. These policies and practices appeared to negatively influence the pupil-teacher relationship. Alternatively, participants wanted school policies to focus on their mental health and to be listened to in decision-making within the school.

The covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions appeared to have a large impact on participants' academic achievement. Participants recalled their dissatisfaction with the quality of online learning, with one participant claiming he did not access online lessons for at least a year. This is likely to have significant consequences on their learning progress. Additionally, participants recalled how the home learning environment was particularly important during this period. Aspects of the home learning environment that appeared to be important included needing adequate space and resources to access and effectively engage with online learning.

Overall, the analysis identified a range of facilitating and hindering factors that influence the academic achievement of young people accessing FSM who are considered to be high achievers. By applying the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), findings infer that their academic achievement cannot be comprehended effectively without investigating the interconnectedness between multiple factors and layers within the ecological environments of participants.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief recap of the significant findings and then discusses the key implications of these for school staff and the educational psychology profession. This is followed by a summary of the strengths and limitations of this research and the directions for future research. To finish, concluding remarks are made.

5.2 Recap of Main Findings

Findings highlight the range of interrelated factors impacting the academic achievement of young people accessing FSM and considered to be high achievers. Factors related to the child, home and school are demonstrated to be significant influences on academic achievement, with particular emphasis on school-related factors. School-related factors included the nature of the pupil-teacher relationship, pedagogy and policies within the school.

5.3 Implications for Policies and Practices

Firstly, the key implications for school staff are discussed and suggestions are made about how staff can spend the PP to support young people within their schools. Then, implications for EP practice are discussed.

5.3.1 Implications for School Professionals

The PP guidance for school leaders (DfE, 2022c) states that pupils who are considered to be academically able (the terms used by the guidance) “*should receive just as much focus in your [school staff’s] use of pupil premium as less academically able pupils*” (p.9). This, therefore, suggests that school staff should be using the PP funding to target the needs of eligible pupils who are also considered to be high achievers.

Therefore, by using this research’s findings, conceptual implications and suggestions of how the PP funding can be spent in schools, which includes targeting young people considered to be high achievers, can be made.

Results highlight the significant influence of pedagogy, including positive relationships with pupils and teaching approaches, on the academic achievement of pupils accessing FSM and considered to be high achievers. Previous research has demonstrated similar findings on the influence of high-quality teaching (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; SMCPC, 2014) and positive pupil-teacher relationships (Mulcare, 2020; Willott, 2013) on academic achievement.

The current study confirmed the importance of teaching approaches promoting pupils’ engagement and interest in learning. Based on this finding, school professionals should consider spending the PP funding on the development of school staff’s teaching skills and knowledge. This development should focus on teachers learning how to make their lesson delivery fun and engaging for pupils. This can be done through inset training days and funding staff to engage in continual professional development initiatives.

Furthermore, the nature of the pupil-teacher relationship was found to be a barrier or facilitator of academic achievement. Therefore, school professionals should focus on reviewing the school culture, policies and practices that may be a barrier to the formation and maintenance of positive relationships between pupils and teachers. This may include reviewing the policies and approaches toward behaviour management in schools as research has highlighted that a behaviourist approach can negatively influence positive pupil-teacher relationships (Payne, 2015). Therefore, school professionals may benefit from spending a proportion of the PP funding on alternative approaches which promote and nurture positive pupil-teacher relationships.

Participants inferred that positive teacher relationships and support were integral to academic achievement. Furthermore, participants expressed that they would like opportunities to talk to an adult within school. Therefore, school professionals may want to consider spending the PP funding on providing these opportunities for pupils. This can be done through approaches that recognise and facilitate a positive relationship and aim to support the growth and development of pupils such as mentoring and coaching (van Nieuwerburgh & Barr, 2016). This may promote positive relationships between teachers and pupils as well as provide pupils with a consistent teacher within school that could support their education.

This research also demonstrated the complex interactions between different systems which contribute to academic achievement in young people accessing FSM and considered high achievers and, in particular, how home situations and resources can influence academic achievement. Participants recalled how they can be distracted by home situations throughout the school day which impacts their engagement with learning. This, therefore, suggests that school staff should be aware of the home situations of this cohort of pupils so that appropriate support can be provided, if necessary. Teachers having an understanding of a pupil's home life can be facilitated through building trusting pupil-teacher relationships. Therefore, through either mentoring or coaching approaches, the selected school staff can be the link between home and school, be aware of pupils' home situations and provide the necessary support.

The attainment gap highlights the vulnerability of children and young people accessing FSM to not achieving the benchmark grades required for access to positive future outcomes. Therefore, it is paramount that professionals continue to try to understand the educational experiences of this population as also suggested by McCluskey (2017) and McIntyre et al. (2005).

This research found that a potential barrier to the academic achievement of pupils considered to be high achievers whilst accessing FSM was that the school policies and practices did not focus on the needs and desires of these pupils. Therefore, based on this result, the PP funding should be spent towards further gaining pupils' views and incorporating these into policies and practices within the school. School staff can use Lundy's model (Lundy, 2007) as a guide to ensure that pupils' views are appropriately and respectfully

gained and listened to by adults in school. Additionally, pupils who are accessing FSMs' views can also be incorporated into the decision-making of how the PP funding is spent in their school.

School staff can attempt to break down the barriers and promote the facilitators of academic achievement for young people accessing FSM as identified in this research by implementing or considering the implications outlined.

5.3.2 Implications for Educational Psychologists

The use of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) presents implications for EPs, who tend to work across various systems such as direct work with young people, consulting with parents and supporting school policy development and implementation. The findings from the deductive analysis of this research emphasises that academic achievement is a complex process involving various factors across different systems. Therefore, this highlights the need for EPs to continue working with young people, families and school systems to support the educational experiences of young people accessing FSM.

EPs could play an important role in supporting school professionals on how to spend the PP funding. An EP's practice and knowledge are primarily informed by evidence-based claims, as required by the professional standards and guidance (Health and Care Professions Council, 2015). Additionally, the government's guidance on spending the PP funding in schools (DfE, 2022c) encourages school staff to use evidence-based approaches. Therefore, EPs are well suited to support schools in deciding how to spend the PP funding in evidence-informed ways through research and consultation.

Furthermore, EPs often work directly with senior school staff (Jackson Taft et al., 2020). Therefore, the EP is in a good position to support school staff to review the current policies and practices enacted in their school. This research found that participants inferred that the behaviour policy was a hindering factor of their academic achievement. EPs could therefore support school staff to review the current behaviour management policies and support the implementation of alternative approaches through training, as discussed in section 5.3.1: Implications for School Professionals.

EPs tend to work holistically and apply psychology to try to understand young people, the potential barriers for young people and ways forward to support the positive development of young people. The research discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review describes the vulnerability of children and young people accessing FSM not academically achieving as well as their non-FSM counterparts, as demonstrated by the attainment gap (Hutchinson et al., 2020). Therefore, EPs should be gathering information about the FSM status of the children and young people they work with. Through this information gathering, EPs can then consider the relevant literature about children accessing FSM and the barriers that these children and young people may experience. All of this information should be considered within EPs' formulations about the child or young person and their needs. The information about a child's FSM eligibility could be gathered

through talking with school staff or consent forms which are typically sent to adults with parental responsibility.

This research has shown how valuable pupil participation is in understanding the educational experiences of pupils. Additionally, previous research has shown that pupils want their voices to be listened to by adults (McCluskey, 2017). EPs can support schools to facilitate pupils' voice in creative ways. This can be done by sharing Lundy's model of participation (Lundy, 2007) with school staff to ensure that school professionals are providing pupils with space, voice, audience and influence. This can also be used by the school mentors or coaches as suggested in section 5.3.1: Implications for School Professionals.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

This study contributes to the existing research exploring the facilitating and hindering factors of secondary school pupils accessing FSM and considered to be high achievers. As previously highlighted, existing literature has focused on merging children and young people's views with parents and school staff (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011), despite research highlighting the significance of focussing on pupils' views to understand what supports learning and in an attempt to close the attainment gap (McCluskey, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2005). Research that has used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore views of young people accessing FSM has focused on young people who are underachieving (Willott, 2013) and in year 12 who needed to reflect on their experiences (Mulcare, 2020). This current research is novel in that it explores insights into the experiences of academic achievement from the perspectives of young people in years 10 and 11 who are accessing FSM in Wiltshire using RTA, therefore contributing to the evidence base.

Research has demonstrated pupil's desire to have their views listened to by adults (McCluskey et al., 2017) and the need for gaining pupil views to promote understanding of their learning (McCluskey, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2005). Personally, I find that the most significant strength of this research is that it provided young people accessing FSM the opportunity to share their views about their education. This is highlighted by an email I received from Anna after the interviews were conducted. Within the email, she states that she appreciated having the opportunity to voice her opinions and it helped her to "clear her mind". Anna's response appears to indicate that having the space and voice (Lundy, 2007) to express her views was appreciated and important to her. Anna's email further strengthens some of the implications outlined in section 5.3: Implications for Policies and Practices, particularly about the importance of providing young people with the space to share their views.

A strength of this research is the use of RTA and in particular the focus on reflexivity. The emphasis on reflexivity prompted me to reflect and interrogate my reflections and decisions throughout the research journey. For example, the use of a reflexive journal allowed me to reflect in great depth about how I, as an individual, influenced the research process including from the decision making of the topic of this research,

to the influence I had on the data analysis and subsequent write up of the research project. This allowed me to understand and recognise how I may have influenced the knowledge production process throughout the research. Refer to Appendix 2 for extracts of my reflexivity throughout the research process.

A limitation of this research includes the use of Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) as an anchoring paper. Siraj-Blatchford et al's. (2011) paper was used to guide the section of the literature review that explored factors that influence academic achievement due to the extensive literature about this topic. A potential limitation is that this may have limited the scope of the research discussed in this paper. Therefore, meaning that other relevant and significant literature relating to factors that influence academic achievement for children and young people accessing FSM may not have been discussed.

Limitations of this research include the small sample size. As discussed in section 1.2: Covid-19 Impact Statement, the covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the recruitment of a school and participants for this research. This research aimed to gain the views of six to eight participants. It took approximately seven months to recruit a school. Additionally, on the day of the planned interviews, several pupils had to self-isolate. Therefore, this had a significant impact on conducting the research within the allocated time frames. A potential impact of the small sample size is the lack of diversity in participants and their views, and the amount of data gathered. However, the data gathered was rich and in-depth.

The measure of academic achievement used in this research may be criticised by others. This is because the measure is based on the teachers' predictions rather than awarded GCSE grades. The year 10 and 11 participants had not yet completed their GCSEs, therefore having actual grades was not possible at the time the research was conducted.

A limitation of this research is the use of a pilot interview with a participant who only partially met the participant criteria for this research and the subsequent influence this may have had on the development of the interview schedule. The participant was of Indian heritage and was not accessing FSM. This may have influenced the language that was included in the interview schedule. For example, the concept of the term 'community' appeared to be more fully formed to this participant compared to the participants within this research.

A further limitation of the interview schedule employed in this research is the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to shape the interview schedule. The ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) model was used to inform the questions within the interview schedule. This may have led to the data gathered being narrowed which may have resulted in other factors influencing academic achievement being missed.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

As discussed in the limitations of this research, the participants were measured as high achievers based on teachers' predicted grades. Therefore, future research could conduct follow up interviews to see if the participants recruited did achieve five GCSEs including English and maths at 9-4 grades.

This current research has highlighted the significance of pupil voice in understanding the facilitators and barriers of academic achievement. Therefore, future research should use these findings to facilitate action research to promote collaboration between young people and school staff for spending the PP funding in their school.

Similarly to Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011), this research used Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework to consider the multi-faceted influences of academic achievement in young people accessing FSM. Results found different interconnecting systems impacting learning and academic achievement. Future research should consider using an updated version of Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) that includes the chronosystem to explore the change over time by using a narrative approach.

The interview schedule was designed to broadly explore different systems impacting on academic achievement. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used and interview questions were open so that discussions could be informed by participants (Cohen et al., 2017). However, this resulted in a holistic and broad overview of the factors influencing academic achievement. Therefore, it would be useful for future research to explore in greater depth significant findings within this research.

For example, this research found that the pedagogy of teachers is an important component of facilitating and hindering academic achievement in participants. This is supported by previous research that has demonstrated how teaching is important in raising the attainment of pupils accessing FSM (SMCPC, 2014). Therefore, future research could further explore how teaching pedagogy influences the academic achievement of children and young people accessing FSM and considered to be high achievers. This could be done through interviews with pupils and using techniques such as the 'Ideal School' to elicit pupils' views regarding teaching practices and stimulate discussions. This would help to create further understanding about practices that support pupils' academic achievement and learning.

The findings of this study that positive relationships with teachers are key to academic achievement is supported by the wider literature (Sammons et al., 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). In-depth exploration of specific factors identified was unable to occur due to the breadth of this research focussing on factors within various systems rather than individual systems. Therefore, future research should further investigate what constitutes a positive and quality relationship between pupils and teachers, focussing on young people accessing FSMs' views. Based on the results of this future research, a framework of positive pupil-

teacher relationships could be developed and compared to Hambre and Pianta's (2005) framework. This would further support teachers' pedagogical practices that contribute to creating positive relationships with pupils.

The findings of this current research and previous research (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Willott, 2013) have demonstrated the microsystem as being highly influential in the academic achievement of young people accessing FSM. Within the microsystem, positive and supportive relationships with family and teachers are consistently regarded as significantly impacting academic achievement (Mulcare, 2020; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Therefore, it would be useful to gain family members' and teachers' views of contributing factors to pupils' academic achievement. Previous research that has done this merged these views (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). Rather, future research should focus on comparing young peoples' views with those of key adults so that similarities and differences can be made between the young peoples' views and key adults' views.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

Academic success has consistently been shown to be important for positive future outcomes (Hayward et al., 2014; Jerrim, 2022). Therefore, educational professionals need to continue to support the academic achievement of children and young people.

Research has shown that educational inequalities exist including the difference in academic achievement between pupils accessing FSM and their non-FSM counterparts (Andrews et al., 2017). The PP funding is a policy that aims to support the academic achievement of children and young people accessing FSM. Despite this initiative, the attainment gap exists and research has indicated that the gap has stagnated and may be increasing (Hutchinson et al., 2020).

Research has suggested that pupil voice and participation is a key principle in attempting to close the attainment gap (McCluskey, 2017) and in understanding what supports learning (McIntyre., 2005). Despite this, there is currently a limited body of research exploring the views and educational experiences of young people accessing FSM and considered to be high achievers. Therefore, this research aims to add to the body of literature by exploring young people, in years 10 and 11, who are considered to be high achievers and accessing FSM views' on what supports and hinders their academic achievement. This was done by using interviews and the data produced was analysed using RTA.

The findings of the research demonstrate the complex interactions of multiple factors influencing academic achievement. In particular, individual factors as well as factors within the home and school appeared to influence academic achievement.

A number of implications surfaced from the findings of this research. Key implications for school staff included the need to form and nurture positive relationships with young people accessing FSM and for

school staff to incorporate young people's views into decision-making within the school. Implications for EPs included the continued need for EPs to work across multiple systems, to support school staff to effectively spend the PP funding and to consider the young person's FSM status within formulations.

By exploring the perspectives of young people accessing FSM and considered to be high achievers, this research has found that various multi-systemic factors influence academic achievement. Therefore, the need for multi-systemic collaboration and consultation of pupils' views is essential to support the academic achievement of young people accessing FSM.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1. Letter for School Staff about the Research Project



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Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Tara Janda and I am a trainee educational psychologist in the 3rd year of my doctoral studies at the University of Birmingham. I am currently on placement at 'Hutshire County Council. During my time with the service, I am hoping to complete a research project on the experience of Year 10-11 pupils who are eligible for free school meals and academically achieving. Interviews will be conducted with these pupils to find out about what factors they believe facilitate and hinder their academic achievement.

I am seeking your consent as I (the researcher) would need to visit the school to work with the pupils and would be asking questions about the pupil's school experiences. I am seeking pupils who meet the following criteria:

- Be in Years 10 or 11
- Prior to the pandemic and currently eligible for free school meals
- Prior to the pandemic and currently predicted a minimum of 5 9-4 (A*-C) grades at GCSE by teaching staff (including in Maths and English)
- Accessing the Pupil Premium funding but are not from military families or a child in care
- Do not have special educational needs

The pupil and their parent will receive an information sheet and consent form. Data about the pupil's predicted academic achievement would be required and I will need to arrange suitable date(s) to meet individually with each participant. The interviews will aim to be an hour. The interviews with pupils will be held during the school day and would mean the pupil missing some lesson time. The interview questions will explore what factors the pupil perceives to facilitate and hinder their academic success. If a pupil wishes to no longer partake in the research, they can withdraw their data up to two weeks after the date of their interview by speaking to me in person or by using my contact details below.

This research project will form part of my doctoral thesis and will be written up as a formal report. It is important to mention that all participants and school names will be anonymised and confidentiality maintained.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions or would like further information, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED]

My supervisor is Anita Soni and can be contacted at [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully,

Tara Janda
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Birmingham

Senior staff consent form

Name (please print): _____

School (please print): _____

Please sign below to give consent for pupils to participate in the project.

I have read the attached letter and I give consent for pupils to be involved.

Signed (signature) _____

Please sign below to give consent for the researcher to undertake information gathering in your school.

I acknowledge that the researcher will need to work with the pupils in school and consent to them doing this.

Signed (signature) _____

Date: _____

Notes from reflectivity activity detailed in Braun and Clarke (2021) (pg.16 and 17).

I reflected on how aspects of my personal and social identity impacted on my worldview and research. Below are some key notes from this activity:

My practical experiences of conducting research include completing my undergraduate Psychology dissertation. This involved exploring non-verbal reasoning and maths anxiety by participants completing a questionnaire and an assessment. On reflection, my undergraduate teaching and research experience was predominately aligned with the positivist perspective which has impacted on my researcher thinking and skills. For example, I instinctively think of measuring research quality through reliability and validity rather than other more qualitative measures as outlined in section Quality assurance. Braun and Clarke (2021) frequently refer to 'positivism creep' referring to the unrecognised obedience to positivist assumptions and values in qualitative research. However, through active reflection and the use of a reflexive journal, I have been able to recognise and correct this.

It was important to me that I actively attempted to make participants feel safe and comfortable when meeting me and throughout the interview. In addition to using a relationship building activity with participants prior to the interviews, I considered how my personal and visible characteristics (e.g., gender, age and race) may influence how participants perceived me. For example, being fairly young and having family members who were the same ages as the participants meant that I had some sense of possible interests of young people in that age range, e.g., gaming etc, that I could relate to. I also reflected on my clothing and considered what impression I wanted to portray with my clothes. I didn't want to dress formally so that I may have come across as authoritative or as someone who was affiliated with the school. Therefore, I went with clothing which I thought was relaxed to attempt to make the participants feel more comfortable.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Engaging with Research Philosophy

RTA is adaptable and flexible in terms of philosophical orientation, data collection approach, sample size and analytic orientation Braun and Clarke (2021). Therefore, RTA aligns with the decisions made for this research. Personally, as RTA is theoretically flexible, I found that this required me to fully engage with and think about the philosophical orientation of this research and myself. Subsequently, developing my understanding of research philosophy. I believe if I had chosen IPA that is a theoretically informed methodology, this level of engagement would have perhaps been absent.

The potential impact of interview disruptions

During Anna's interview there was a knock at the door from a member of staff who needed to collect something. As the member of staff warned us of their intention to enter, we were able to pause the interview rather than being suddenly interrupted ensuring confidentiality was adhered to. The interruption impacted the flow of the conversation and, I believe, Anna's trail of thought. For example, when we re-started the conversation, I had to remind and prompt Anna of what she was previously talking about. The conversational flow and rhythm regained itself very quickly which I believe is partly due to the initial rapport building activity that Anna and I completed.

How data collection method may have influenced the data gathered

I critically reflected on how different data collection methods may have impacted the resulting data collected. I did this by considering the pros and cons of different methods of data collection. Focus groups were deemed inappropriate and unethical as pupils may not have wanted to share their FSM status with their peers. Whereas interviews protected participants from sharing their FSM status with their peers. Additionally, participants may not have felt safe or comfortable enough to openly reflect and share their academic experiences with their peers. Semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to say things they would perhaps not have said among their peers.

By using semi-structured interviews, the data gathered was unique to each participant as the conversation flowed differently however the core topics were consistently discussed due to the framework used. Through conversation, participants were able to verbalise their thoughts and experiences and rich and in-depth data was gathered. By using techniques such as online surveys, it may have been difficult to capture this richness of data and unique insights may not have been gained due to the lack of discussion.

Appendix 3. Pupil Information Sheet and Consent Form

Hi, my name is Tara and I am a trainee educational psychologist. I work with children and young people to find out about their school experience and support them in school.

I am doing some research exploring young people's educational experience and would like you to take part.

Why am I contacting you?

I am contacting you because I am interested in young people who are considered to be academically achieving and receiving free school meals.

I would love to hear about your school experience and what factors you think help and don't help you to academically achieve. I will also be interviewing a family member and teacher to gain their views on what factors they think help and don't help you to academically achieve.

What would happen?

1. I would ask you to complete a few activities/have a think before we meet.
2. We would meet to have a conversation about your school experience (more information of the back page).

Location: we would meet in your school. The interview will be in school time so you will miss some lessons if you chose to take part.

Duration: the interview should take 1 hour.

What will happen with the conversation details?

The conversation will be recorded and I will listen and type up the conversation afterwards. I will not use your real name so no one will know who you are apart from me. I will have to tell relevant adults if I think you are in danger or not safe.

What to do if I want to take part?

If you decide you would like to take part, please complete the consent form and ask your parent/carer to send it back to me or the school's reception.

Contact details:

If you have any questions about taking part, please do contact me or my tutor.

Please feel free to contact me by email at any time. My email address is

My tutor is called Anita Soni. You can contact her if you need to. Her email address is:

What would the conversation be about?

I am interested to find out about:

- ◆ What individual, school, home, community and other factors help and support you to academical achieve and how?
- ◆ What individual, school, home, community and other factors don't help and support you to academical achieve and how?

What are individual factors?

Individual factors are things about you to which impact your learning. For example, your view of learning and education, pressures, goals, motivations, aspirations, significant life events.

What are school factors?

School factors are those within your school which you believe to impact your learning. For example, relationships in school with teachers and friends, lesson delivery, lessons enjoyment, career advice.

What are home factors?

Home factors are those factors within your home which you believe to impact your learning. For example, your family expectations for you, family achievements and jobs, family input on your learning, study environment, e.g., access to a laptop and books, home environment.

What are community factors?

Community factors are those factors within your community which you believe to impact your learning. For example, friends, youth or sports or other clubs, religion, feelings of safety in local community.

Other factors?

Anything else that you think has impacted your learning. For example, any laws or policies, social media, impact from covid-19.

Please use the activity sheet attached to write any notes down about factors which you believe facilitate and hinder your academic achievement.

Pupil consent form

My name: _____

Date: _____

My school: _____

Please circle your answers:

I want to take part in the project	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information sheet	Yes	No
I know that I will be audio recorded and this will be heard by Tara only	Yes	No
I understand that if Tara becomes concerned about me she will need to let another adult know	Yes	No
I understand that the views I share with Tara in the interview will not be shared with my family and teachers unless Tara is concerned about me	Yes	No
I understand that my views will be written in a report but my name will be changed so only Tara will know they are my views	Yes	No
I know that I can withdraw from the project by contacting Tara	Yes	No
I am happy for data about my school achievements, e.g. predicted grades to be shared with Tara	Yes	No

Appendix 4. Parent Information Sheet and Consent For

Why am I contacting you?

Dear Parent,

Your child has been suggested as a suitable participant for my project. I am seeking your consent for your child to be involved in the project.

I am interested in exploring experiences of children who are receiving free school meals and academically achieving.

What are the benefits?

- It is a great opportunity for your child to learn research skills.
- It will allow your child to share their valuable experiences, providing insights and knowledge into their unique learning experience.
- I can provide a summary of the findings from the overall study to you and your child.

Some things to know about the project:

- The interviews will be audio-recorded. Only I, Tara, will listen to the recording.
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. This means:
 - Your child's name will be changed in the formal report. This means that only I, Tara, will know who said what.
 - Locations, school names and other participants' names will also be changed.
 - The recorded interviews will be kept in a password-protected and secure format.
- I will have to share information with the school's designated safeguarding lead(s) if a safeguarding concern arises.
- The views your child share in the interview will not be communicated with you and a teacher (unless there is a safeguarding concern and they are the safeguarding lead). Although, the research project will form part of my doctoral thesis and will be written up as a formal report.
- If your child decides that they no longer wish to take part then they can withdraw their data up to two weeks after the date of the interview. This can be done by contacting me (Tara).

1

What does the project involve?

I would like to interview your child to find out the following:

- What individual, school, home, community and other factors help and support your child to academically achieve and how?
- What individual, school, home, community and other factors don't help and don't support your child to academically achieve and how?

What happens next?

If you consent to your child taking part in the project please sign the form attached and return to me (by email) or to the school's reception.

Contact details:

I'd love to talk to you about this project or if you have any questions please feel free to contact me at tarajanda@ or on

My supervisor is Anita Soni and can be contacted at anita.soni@

Parental consent form for child

Parent name (please print): _____

Child's name (please print): _____

Please sign below to give consent for your child to participate in the project.

I have read the attached information and give consent for my child to be involved.

Signed (parent signature) _____

Please sign below to give consent for voice recording to be used with your child.

I know that voice recording will be used with my child and that the recordings are confidential and for the use of the researcher only. I give my consent for voice recording to be used.

Signed (parent signature) _____

Finally, if researcher needs to contact you regarding your child please provide a telephone number that you can be contacted on

Phone number: _____

I consent to being contacted by the researcher should they need to speak to me regarding my child.

Signed (parent signature) _____

Date: _____

What is your educational level? For example, no qualifications, GCSEs, A levels etc.

Appendix 5. Interview Schedule

Issue / topic	Issue / topic	Possible question	Possible follow-up questions [Prompt]	Probes
Personal information about the participant/to get the participant to think across their whole academia		Thinking of your experiences of primary and secondary school, overall, how has your school experience been?	Can you tell me a bit more about that?	
		Have you known you were academically achieving?	Can you tell me a bit more about that?	
			Can you tell me a bit more about that?	
Facilitating factors of academic success	Individual factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, individual factors do you believe have facilitated/supported your academic achievement?	How has that factor supported your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
	School factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, school factors do you believe have facilitated/supported your academic achievement?	How has that factor supported your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
	Home factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, home factors do you believe have facilitated/supported your academic achievement?	How has that factor supported your academic achievement?	Can you give an example?

			Can you tell me a bit more about that?	
	Community factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, community factors do you believe have facilitated/supported your academic achievement?	How has that factor supported your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
	Other factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, other factors do you believe have facilitated/supported your academic achievement that you haven't already mentioned?	How has that factor supported your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
Hindering factors of academic success	Individual factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, individual factors do you believe have hindered/been a barrier/negatively impacted your academic achievement?	How has that factor hindered your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
	School factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, school factors do you believe have hindered/been a barrier/negatively impacted your academic achievement?	How has that factor hindered your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
	Home factors	Thinking across you whole school career, what, if any, home factors do you believe have hindered/been a	How has that factor hindered	Can you give an example?

	barrier/negatively impacted your academic achievement?	your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	
Community factors	Thinking across your whole school career, what, if any, community factors do you believe have hindered/been a barrier/negatively impacted your academic achievement?	How has that factor hindered your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?
Other factors	Thinking across your whole school career, what, if any, other factors do you believe have hindered/been a barrier/negatively impacted your academic achievement that you haven't already mentioned?	How has that factor hindered your academic achievement? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Can you give an example?

Appendix 6. Relationship Building Activity

What are your likes/hobbies?

What is your favourite film?

What is your favourite game?

How would the person that knows/loves you best describe you?

What do you find difficult?

What are your strengths/what are you good at?

Do you think you are successful?

Yes

No

Why?

Tell me about a time when you did something well:

1.

2.

3.

What are your aspirations?

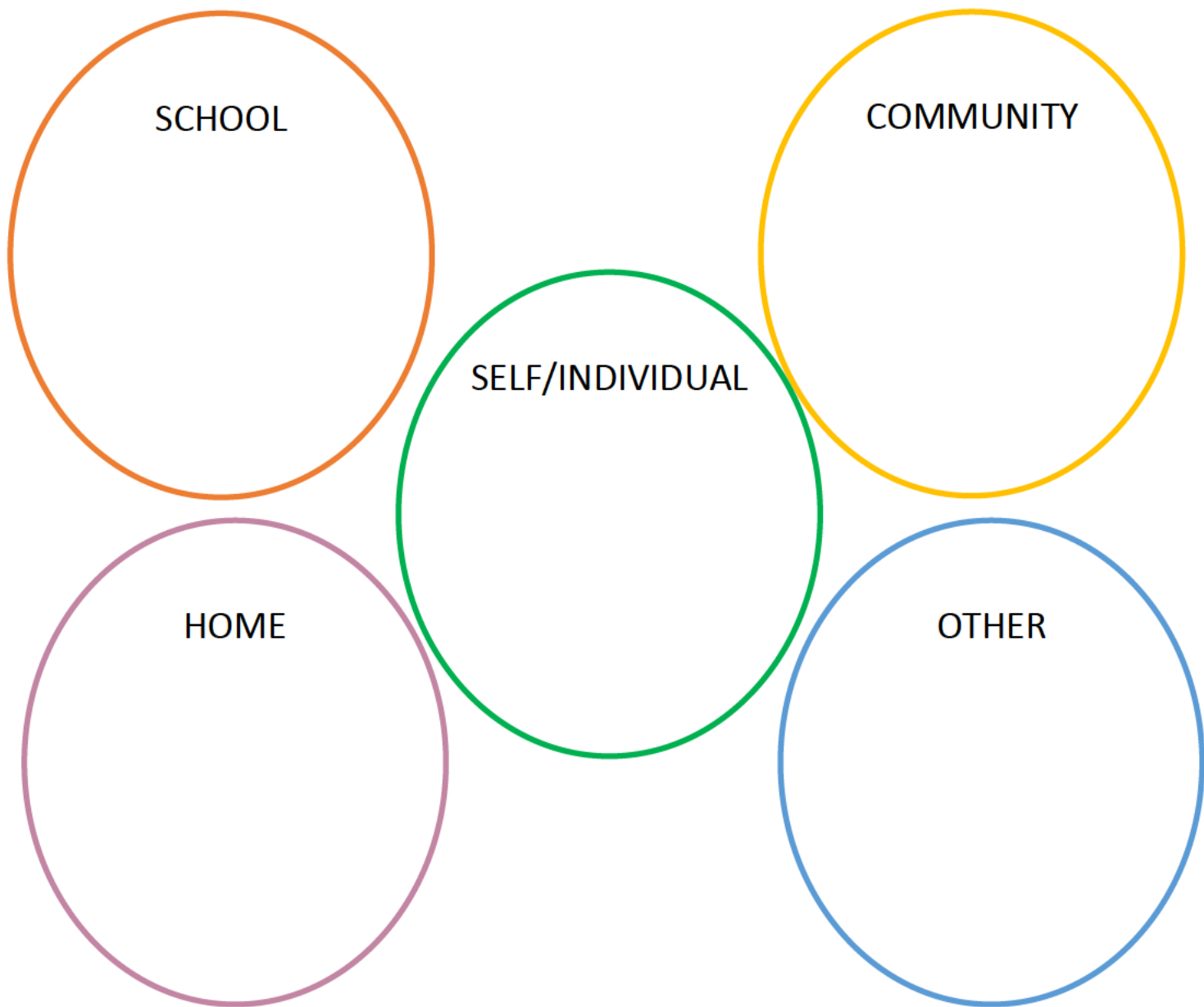
In 2 years I would like to be....

In 5 years I would like to be...

In 10 years I would like to be...

Draw you or something that represents you

Appendix 7. Accompanying Visual Material for Interview



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Application for Ethics Review Form

Guidance Notes:

What is the purpose of this form?

This form should be completed to seek ethics review for research projects to be undertaken by University of Birmingham staff, PGR students or visiting/emeritus researchers who will be carrying out research which will be attributed to the University.

Who should complete it?

For a staff project – the lead researcher/Principal Investigator on the project.

For a PGR student project – the student's academic supervisor, in discussion with the student.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice

When should it be completed?

After you have completed the University's online ethics self-assessment form (SAF), **IF** the SAF indicates that ethics review is required. You should apply in good time to ensure that you receive a favourable ethics opinion prior to the commencement of the project and it is recommended that you allow at least 60 working days for the ethics process to be completed.

How should it be submitted?

An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

What should be included with it?

Copies of any relevant supporting information and participant documentation, research tools (e.g. interview topic guides, questionnaires, etc) and where appropriate a health & safety risk assessment for the project (see section 10 of this form for further information about risk assessments).

What should applicants read before submitting this form?

Before submitting, you should ensure that you have read and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)
- The University's Code of Practice for Research (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>)
- The guidance on Data Protection for researchers provided by the University's Legal Services team at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx>.

Section 1: Basic Project Details

Project Title: An exploration of the perspectives of pupils eligible for free school meals, their teachers and families about what factors facilitate and hinder academic achievement

Is this project a:

University of Birmingham Staff Research project ☐

University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project ☒

Other (Please specify below) ☐

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Details of the Principal Investigator or Lead Supervisor (for PGR student projects):

Title: Dr

First name: Anita

Last name: Soni

Position held: Academic supervisor

School/Department School of Education

Telephone: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Email address: a.soni@bham.ac.uk

Details of any Co-Investigators or Co-Supervisors (for PGR student projects):

Title: Dr

First name: Anjam

Last name: Sultana

Position held: Academic supervisor

School/Department School of education

Telephone: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Email address: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Details of the student for PGR student projects:

Title: Miss

First name: Tara

Last name: Janda

Course of study: Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Email address:

Project start and end dates:

Estimated start date of project: 01/02/2021

Estimated end date of project: 01/07/2022

Funding: Sources of funding: Department of Education

Section 2: Summary of Project

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon - please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases. Please do not provide extensive academic background material or references.

Key Terms

Pupil Premium (PP): a government scheme which aims to help close the attainment gap between 'disadvantaged' (defined as children receiving free school meals) pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils. Schools receive varying amounts of money, depending on the child's status, to support the academic success of PP pupils. Pupils are eligible for PP if they:

- Are eligible for free school meals.
- Are looked after or previously looked after.
- Parents are in the armed forces.

Free School Meals (FSM): The Education Act (1996) required maintained schools, academies and free schools to provide FSM to disadvantaged pupils who are aged between 5 and 16 years old. A criteria is used to determine which pupils are eligible for FSM, this includes parents who are in receipt of Universal Credit, income support and more. For the detailed eligibility criteria please visit: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700139/Free_school_meals_guidance_Apr18.pdf. A pupil is only eligible to receive FSM when a claim for the meal has been made on their behalf, and their eligibility has been verified by the school or by the local authority (Department of Education, 2018).

PP and FSM: A child and young person (CYP) who receives FSM therefore receives PP funding.

Purpose

The purpose of the proposed research is to explore, in detail, the perspectives of pupils eligible for FSM, their teachers and families about what factors facilitate and hinder academic achievement. The research aims for the pupils to be at the centre of the research, thus, the teachers and family members who shall be approached to participate in this research will be based on the pupil's suggestions. The research endeavours to provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences of academic achievement for pupils eligible for FSM and produce suggestions/considerations for the policy and practice within schools and professionals supporting this population of children.

The research aims to be exploratory by:

- Examining the facilitating and hindering factors pupils accessing FSM, their teachers and family members believe to impact the pupil's academic success.
- Examining how much the parent and teacher perspectives align with the pupils.

Background rationale:

1. Widening of the attainment gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils. Literature has evidenced the attainment gap for many years and across all school ages (Department of Education, 2019). Recent research conducted by Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal (2020) found that pupils eligible for FSM had lower average attainment than their non-FSM peers. This difference was roughly a full GCSE grade in English and Maths. Additionally, pupils eligible for FSM were less likely to achieve 5A*-C including English and maths. Further results reported that the attainment between 'disadvantaged pupils' - which was defined as pupils who have been eligible for FSM at any point in the last six years and non-disadvantaged as if

pupils have not, using the same definition as the Department of Education – and non-disadvantaged pupils as having stopped closing over the last 5 years and indicates the gap has begun to widen. This research demonstrates how the attainment gap is still present and the impact disadvantage can have on a pupil's GCSE grades. The proposed research endeavours to learn from the pupils who are eligible for FSM and academically achieving.

2. Literature is heavily focused on negative outcomes and achievements of FSM pupils. Much of the literature and government documents about pupils accessing FSM is based on comparing their academic achievement to their non-FSM peers. Although it is important to research and report this, it may also perpetuate a harmful discourse for this population, particularly in terms of their ability and academic achievement. Thus, this research hopes an exploration of the participants' views will help to provide a new perspective on this population.
3. Outliers are underreported in the literature. Due to much of the research focusing on the negative outcomes for FSM pupils, there is a lack of research which focuses on the FSM pupils who are academically successful. Demie and McLean (2015) explore cases of schools with a high population of FSM pupils and are lowering the attainment gap. Although, this research gains the perspectives of pupils through structured questionnaires, the school learning environment is the focus of this research. Whereas the proposed research seeks to aim a holistic overview of the factors which may facilitate and hinder academic success by looking at individual, home, school, community and other factors.
4. Pupil voice is underreported in the literature. Pupil voice is important as it provides insight into the experiences of these pupils which professionals can learn from. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2011) conducted a large-scale study similar to the proposed research. They sought the perspectives of pupils, parents and teachers about what factors facilitate and hinder academic achievement for disadvantaged pupils. This research will be novel in comparison to Siraj-Blatchford et al (2011) as it may potentially encompass the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this population of pupils, their families and teachers.
5. Suggestions for policy and practice. Through better understanding of the facilitating and hindering factors which contribute to academic success, current policies and practices can be reflected upon.

Research questions:

- What factors (individual, home, school, community and other) facilitate academic success?
- What factors (individual, home, school, community and other) hinder academic success?
- How much do the factors identified by parents and staff align to those identified by the pupil?

Expected outcomes:

The aim of this research is to explore pupils, teachers and family members lived experiences of what hinders and facilitates academic achievement. Thus, the main objective of the project is not to provide necessarily generalisable outcomes.

It is expected that this research will contribute to the research currently available about the pupils accessing FSM who academically achieve.

It is expected the findings will have relevance in providing school staff, parents/families and educational psychologists (EPs) with information about what pupils accessing FSM believe to

facilitate and hinder their academic achievement. This may have an impact on policies and practices within schools to ensure that the appropriate support is enforced for these children and to help inform what support may be appropriate for pupils accessing FSM. Additionally, it will have implications for EPs to reflect and inform their own practice when working with these young people and families.

Additionally, I hope my findings will be provide a platform for the voices of pupils accessing FSM and academically achieving to be listened to. If a pupil accessing FSM was to ever research about the expected outcomes for young people eligible for FSM, I hope they are to see the positives and success stories among the negative statistics.

Section 3: Conduct and location of Project

Conduct of project

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used. If more than one methodology or phase will be involved, please separate these out clearly and refer to them consistently throughout the rest of this form.

A multiple nested case study design will be used to gain an in-depth understanding of pupils accessing FSM academic achievement. A case study design will be utilised as the pupils accessing FSM can be considered 'outliers/special cases' due to their predicted academic success. Semi-structured interviews will be used within the case study design to explore all participants perceptions of the facilitating and hindering factors of the pupil's academic success. Interviews are a way for the researcher and participant to work in collaboration to uncover and interpret the participant's meaning-making of a particular topic.

Stage 1

Contacting secondary schools in the local area about the research. I am aiming to email the school senior staff with the information letter (see Appendix A) and discuss the project with them over the phone/video call or in person, if possible. I would aim to cover the research aims, participants criteria, the type of information required, e.g., predicted grades and FSM status, and potential participants. Approach potential pupils and their families about the research.

Stage 2

A pilot interview will be conducted prior to the main data collection. This will provide an opportunity to trial the interview schedules (see Appendix G, H, I) and make any necessary adjustments if required.

Stage 3

Prior to the interview, all participants will be provided with an information sheet (see Appendix B, E & F) describing the research and explaining individual, home, school, community and other factors. Pupils will also be given two activities to complete:

- an activity sheet to support them to think about the facilitating and hindering factors (see Appendix C).
- an activity in which the CYP has to rank three of their teachers whom they believe they have the closest relationship to and family members who they believe they have a close relationship to and has supported their learning (see Appendix C).

Stage 4

Interviews will last approximately one hour with each participant. All the semi-structure interviews will be accompanied by visual communication materials (See Appendix J). These will help the interviews to be interactive and provide an ongoing visual way of the participants knowing what they discussed. Different coloured post-it notes will represent facilitating and hindering factors.

Pupils along with their parents and teachers will be interviewed. The research aims for the pupil to be at the centre, therefore, parents and teachers approached to participate in this research will be guided by the pupil.

Stage 5

My research will employ Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) as this approach is theoretical flexible and aims to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed.

Geographic location of project

State the geographic locations where the project and all associated fieldwork will be carried out. If the project will involve travel to areas which may be considered unsafe, either in the UK or overseas, please ensure that the risks of this (or any other non-trivial health and safety risks associated with the research) are addressed by a documented health and safety risk assessment, as described in section 10 of this form.

I am currently on placement at Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service. Therefore, the research will take place in mainstream secondary schools in Warwickshire.

Section 4: Research Participants and Recruitment

Does the project involve human participants?

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

Yes ☒
No ☐

If you have answered NO please go on to Section 8 of this form. If you have answered YES please complete the rest of this section and then continue on to section 5.

Who will the participants be?

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

The study will aim to recruit between 3-4 pupils in Years 10-11, 3-4 parents or family members and 3-4 teaching staff. The pupils will be attending a mainstream secondary school. The teaching staff will be employees of the mainstream secondary school the pupil attends.

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria will be used for the pupils:

Inclusion criteria for pupils:

- Year 10-11

- Currently and prior to the pandemic, predicted to achieve a minimum of 5 9-4 (A*-C), GCSEs (including in Maths, English Language as they are compulsory subjects)
- Currently and prior to the pandemic, eligible for free school meals and aware of this
- Accessing the PP funding but are not from military families or a child in care

Exclusion criteria for pupils:

- Pupil from a military family
- Looked after child or previously looked after child
- Pupils with special educational needs
- Pupils who can not competently communicate in English (as judged by school staff)

Parents or family members as participants:

Inclusion criteria for parents or family:

- 18 years old or older

How will the participants be recruited?

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student). Please ensure that you attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

Firstly, I will identify secondary schools in Warwickshire with a high number of pupils accessing Pupil Premium funding by looking at the publicly accessible data on school websites. I will then contact school senior staff (e.g., SENCo's/Headteachers) in Warwickshire about my research and provide them with an information letter about the research project (see Appendix A). I will also ask the Educational Psychologists within Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service for recommendations of schools to approach.

I will then liaise with the appropriate member of the school staff about potential pupils who would be suitable for participants for the research. Once suitable pupils have been identified, information sheets, which detail the project aims, and consent forms will be sent to the pupils (see Appendix B) and a parental consent form to their parents (see Appendix D); this will be done by the appropriate member of the school staff. Additionally, I may speak at an assembly and invite those pupils (and school staff) who are interested to listen to my pitch. The pupils can take an information sheet and consent form home and the school staff who attended can pass on these documents to pupils they believe are suitable for the research.

Once pupil and parental consent are gained. I will then give the pupil the pre-interview activities (see Appendix C).

Parents and family members

The parents or family members approached for recruitment will be based on the pupil's recommendations. I will ask the pupil to rank three family members who they have a close relationship to and has supported their learning. The highest ranked person will be approached for recruitment, however, if they do not consent to participating, I will then approach the second ranked and so on. The family member will be given an information sheet, detailing the project aims, and a consent form (see Appendix E).

School staff as participants:

The school staff approached for recruitment will be based on the pupil's recommendations. I will ask the pupil to rank three teachers who they believe they have the closest relationship with. The highest ranked person will be approached for recruitment, however, if they do not consent to participating, I will then approach the second ranked and so on. Staff will be sent an information document, detailing the project aims, and a consent form (see Appendix F).

Section 5: Consent

What process will be used to obtain consent?

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are under the age of 16 it would usually be necessary to obtain parental consent and the process for this should be described in full, including whether parental consent will be opt-in or opt-out.

Informed consent for the pupils will be gained from the pupils themselves (see Appendix B) and a parent/carer (see Appendix D) both of which will be opt-in. Opt-in consent will also be gained for the family member (see Appendix E) and staff member (see Appendix F).

Please be aware that if the project involves over 16s who lack capacity to consent, separate approval will be required from the Health Research Authority (HRA) in line with the Mental Capacity Act.

Please attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.

Note: Guidance from Legal Services on wording relating to the Data Protection Act 2018 can be accessed at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx>.

Use of deception?

Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?

Yes ☐

No ☒

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and the nature of any explanation/debrief will be provided to the participants after the study has taken place.

N/A

Section 6: Participant compensation, withdrawal and feedback to participants

What, if any, feedback will be provided to participants?

Explain any feedback/ information that will be provided to the participants after participation in the research (e.g. a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

A summary of the information they provided will be given to them at the time of the interview. This will aim to recap the information they provided as well as to re-check the information they said is accurate.

Feedback of the main findings will be shared with all participants once the research is complete and has been written up as a formal report.

What arrangements will be in place for participant withdrawal?

Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project, explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw, up until two weeks after the interview, at the time of consent. All participants will have my contact details should they wish to withdraw from the project after the interviews have taken place.

Please confirm the specific date/timescale to be used as the deadline for participant withdrawal and ensure that this is consistently stated across all participant documentation. This is considered preferable to allowing participants to 'withdraw at any time' as presumably there will be a point beyond which it will not be possible to remove their data from the study (e.g. because analysis has started, the findings have been published, etc).

Data can be withdrawn up until two weeks after the interview.

What arrangements will be in place for participant compensation?

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

Yes ☐

No ☒

If yes, please provide further information about the nature and value of any compensation and clarify whether it will be financial or non-financial.

Click or tap here to enter text.

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 7: Confidentiality/anonymity

Will the identity of the participants be known to the researcher?

Will participants be truly anonymous (i.e. their identity will not be known to the researcher)?

Yes ☐

No ☒

In what format will data be stored?

Will participants' data be stored in identifiable format, or will it be anonymised or pseudo-anonymised (i.e. an assigned ID code or number will be used instead of the participant's name and a key will be kept allowing the researcher to identify a participant's data)?

The interviews will be audio recorded on two password protected electronic devices. Two devices will be used as a precaution if one fails. These files will then be transferred onto a computer and backed up onto an encrypted external hard drive, the files will be password protected. The password will only be known to the researcher, myself. The files will immediately be deleted from the devices once the files have been transferred. Once my viva is completed, all recordings will be deleted from my computer and external hard drive. The University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Research indicates that all interview data should be stored and retained for 10 years. Once this time has passed, all data will be destroyed, which will involve paper documents being shredded and computer files being deleted.

Photos of the visual communication aids (Appendix J) will be captured on the researcher's password protected work phone. These images will immediately be uploaded onto a computer, backed up onto an encrypted hard drive and uploaded onto UoB BEAR DataShare, the files will be password protected. Once these images have been uploaded, they will be deleted from the phone. The hard copies of the activities will be confidentially discarded.

Anonymity cannot be offered as the research involves conducting face-to-face interviews. To ensure confidentiality, participants will be informed that their names will not appear in the final report, nor will any other identifying information but their relation or role in the school will be. Pseudonyms will be used, and a key will be kept by the researcher to enable the identification of a participant's data. This will be stored separately from the data in a password protected file on the UoB BEAR DataShare to ensure data is stored securely and can be withdrawn on request. Some information about the participants (e.g., role, age, pupil premium/free school meal status, predicted grades) and the school (e.g., OFSTED rating, number of pupils eligible for PP) may be gathered and included to provide contextual and background information. Participants will be informed that excerpts from interview transcripts will be included in the final write-up of the research project, provided there are no risks that quotations would render participants identifiable.

Will participants' data be treated as confidential?

Will participants' data be treated as confidential (i.e. they will not be identified in any outputs from the study and their identity will not be disclosed to any third party)?

Yes ☒
No ☐

If you have answered no to the question above, meaning that participants' data will not be treated as confidential (i.e. their data and/or identities may be revealed in the research outputs or otherwise to third parties), please provide further information and justification for this:

All efforts will be made to ensure all participants' data is treated as confidential. There is a risk that individual participants could be identified by other participants through the research within triads (pupil, family member and teacher). This risk will be minimised by the researcher not disclosing the name or any other identifying information about the participants, except the pupil, to the other participants in the triad during the interviews. Additionally, all names of participants and schools are not reported in the written presentation of the research. Although, some information about the participants (e.g. gender, role and relation to the child) and the school (e.g. size, OFSTED rating,

number of pupils eligible for PP) will be reported. Direct quotations will not be used where their content or wording may constitute any risks to participants' identifiability.

Confidentiality may need to be breached if a disclosure were made which suggested that the participant or others were at risk of harm. In the event of risks relating to safeguarding or child protection arising from an interview, school and local authority safeguarding procedures would be followed.

Section 8: Storage, access and disposal of data

How and where will the data (both paper and electronic) be stored, what arrangements will be in place to keep it secure and who will have access to it?

Please note that for long-term storage, data should usually be held on a secure University of Birmingham IT system, for example BEAR (see <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/it/teams/infrastructure/research/bear/index.aspx>).

Electronic data and transcripts of the interviews will be stored on the UoB BEAR DataShare system and an encrypted external hard drive, to which the researcher alone will be able to access.

Data retention and disposal

The University usually requires data to be held for a minimum of 10 years to allow for verification. Will you retain your data for at least 10 years?

Yes ☒
No ☐

If data will be held for less than 10 years, please provide further justification:

N/A

What arrangements will be in place for the secure disposal of data?

Immediately after each participant interview, the electronically audio-recorded data will be transferred from the audio-recording devices to a password-protected folder on UoB's BEAR DataShare. The audio files will then be erased from the audio-recorders. Electronic transcripts and notes will be held in a password protected folder on UoB's BEAR DataShare and an encrypted external hard drive. Printed transcripts, written notes and consent forms will be scanned into and stored in the UoB BEAR DataShare and encrypted external hard drive.

In accordance with university research policy, data will be stored on UoB's BEAR DataShare for 10 years after completion of the project. A 10-year expiry date will be set for the electronic data stored on UoB's BEAR DataShare.

Section 9: Other approvals required

Are you aware of any other national or local approvals required to carry out this research?

E.g. clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), Local Authority approval for work involving Social Care, local ethics/governance approvals if the work will be carried out overseas, or

approval from NOMS or HMPPS for work involving police or prisons? If so, please provide further details:

I am not aware of any national or local approvals required to carry out this research.

For projects involving NHS staff, is approval from the Health Research Authority (HRA) needed in addition to University ethics approval?

If your project will involve NHS staff, please go to the HRA decision tool at <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/> to establish whether the NHS would consider your project to be research, thus requiring HRA approval in addition to University ethics approval. Is HRA approval required?

Yes ☐

No ☒

Please include a print out of the HRA decision tool outcome with your application.

Section 10: Risks and benefits/significance

Benefits/significance of the research

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

Contribution to the literature

There are only limited number of recent studies that have applied a case study approach to academic success for pupils accessing FSM; therefore, I expect this study will make a useful addition to the literature. This context of this research will be unique to the previous research which has had similar research aims (e.g., Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2011) as schooling and learning has drastically changed for pupils due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pupil Voice

Pupil voice is relatively unacknowledged in the literature. This research places the pupil at the centre of the research which makes it novel to research with similar aims (e.g., *Demie and McLean, 2015*). Alderson (2005) discusses the benefits of children being active participants in research, such as enjoying the process more and producing findings which more accurately reflect their experiences.

Case study methodology

Adopting a case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration into the experiences of pupils accessing FSM, their parents and teacher. Case studies are particular useful for research investigating outliers/special cases of a particular topic which is well suited to this research as the pupils, statistically, are expected to not academically achieve (*Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal, 2020*).

Practical implications

This research will provide valuable insight into the experiences of these pupils and what they believe supports and hinders their learning. This may allow practitioners to reflect on their own practice and schools to reflect on their policies in place to support this population. Additionally, the research may provide insight into whether the key adults views align with those of the pupil. This may allow for valuable reflections about how educational psychologists and other professionals work with the child/young person and the systems around them.

Risks of the research

Outline any potential risks (including risks to research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research, the environment and/or society and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.) Please ensure that you include any risks relating to overseas travel and working in overseas locations as part of the study, particularly if the work will involve travel to/working in areas considered unsafe and/or subject to travel warnings from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>). Please also be aware that the University insurer, UMAL, offers access to RiskMonitor Traveller, a service which provides 24/7/365 security advice for all travellers and you are advised to make use of this service (see <https://umal.co.uk/travel/pre-travel-advice/>).

The outlining of the risks in this section does not circumvent the need to carry out and document a detailed Health and Safety risk assessment where appropriate – see below.

Potential risks to the researcher, research participants and other individuals not involved in the research are outlined below. Both the British Psychological Society (2018) and British Educational Research Association (2018) ethical guidelines were consulted when considering potential risks associated with this project.

Pupils being unaware of FSM status

The FSM application is made on behalf of the pupil, therefore, initially, I was concerned that some pupils may be unaware of their FSM status. To attempt to ensure pupils are aware of their FSM status, I have included this in the pupil inclusion criteria.

Disclosure:

Participants' data will be treated as confidential. However, confidentiality may need to be broken if a participant makes a disclosure which raises safeguarding concerns, e.g., information which indicates significant risks to the participant or to others. Subsequently, the relevant local authority safeguarding procedures would be followed.

Power dynamics:

Informal verbal rapport building will occur before the audio-recorded interview with all participants. An informal rapport building activity will occur with the pupils, both the researcher and the pupils will complete an 'all about me' sheet (see Appendix K). This will help to address any power relations and make the participants feel a little more at ease. Power imbalance will be minimised with the pupils by conducting the interviews in their own school where they feel comfortable and is a safe environment with which the pupil is familiar. The interviews will be kept to a maximum of an hour, with an additional visit planned if necessary.

Emotional Distress:

If a participant becomes emotional or upset before, during or after the interviews. I will support the participant at the time to help them become regulated and I will inform the relevant member of school staff (e.g., safeguarding lead or pastoral care lead) so they are able to check in with the participant as a follow-up. Gentle questioning will be used throughout the interviews to minimise the risk of distress. If I sensed that participants were becoming distressed, I would interrupt the interview, inviting feedback on whether the interviewee would like a short break or prefer to discontinue the interview.

All participants will be made aware that they do not have to answer any questions if they do not want to. They will also be reminded that they can take breaks at any point during the interview.

After the interview has been conducted, there will be a conversation with each participant in which they will be debriefed and will be able to ask any questions that they have. Participants will also be provided with my contact details and those of my supervisor, should they have any questions or concerns after the interview.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic inequalities it has highlighted, if participants disclose any safeguarding concerns in regard to basic necessities or support. I will share this information with the appropriate school staff and signposting participants to appropriate services within the local authority.

Participants will be debriefed following their interview, giving them the opportunity to ask any questions and to share any concerns they have. If required, participants will be signposted to professional support from a colleague or mentor in their school, or to relevant external services and agencies. All participants will be provided with contact details of the researcher and university research supervisor, should they wish to ask questions or make any complaint.

Debrief:

All participants will be verbally debriefed following their interview, allowing them the opportunity to ask any questions and to share any concerns they have. Participants will be given my contact details and those of my academic supervision, should they have any questions or concerns after the interview. They will also be reminded of their right to withdraw their information along with the time frame.

University Health & Safety (H&S) risk assessment

For projects of more than minimal H&S risk it is essential that a H&S risk assessment is carried out and signed off in accordance with the process in place within your School/College and you must provide a copy of this with your application. The risk may be non-trivial because of travel to, or working in, a potentially unsafe location, or because of the nature of research that will be carried out there. It could also involve (irrespective of location) H&S risks to research participants, or other individuals not involved directly in the research. Further information about the risk assessment process for research can be found at

<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/worksafe/policy/Research-Risk-Assessment-and-Mitigation-Plans-RAMPs.aspx>.

Please note that travel to (or through) 'FCO Red zones' requires approval by the University's Research Travel Approval Panel, and will only be approved in exceptional circumstances where sufficient mitigation of risk can be demonstrated.

Section 11: Any other issues

Does the research raise any ethical issues not dealt with elsewhere in this form?

If yes, please provide further information:

No

Do you wish to provide any other information about this research not already provided, or to seek the opinion of the Ethics Committee on any particular issue?

If yes, please provide further information:

No

Section 12: Peer review

Has your project received scientific peer review?

Yes ☐
No ☒

If yes, please provide further details about the source of the review (e.g. independent peer review as part of the funding process or peer review from supervisors for PGR student projects):

N/A

Section 13: Nominate an expert reviewer

For certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks, it may be helpful (and you may be asked) to nominate an expert reviewer for your project. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

First name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Last name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Email address: Click or tap here to enter text.

Phone number: Click or tap here to enter text.

Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability:

N/A

Section 14: Document checklist

Please check that the following documents, where applicable, are attached to your application:

Recruitment advertisement ☐
Participant information sheet ☒
Consent form ☒
Questionnaire ☐
Interview/focus group topic guide ☒

Please proof-read study documentation and ensure that it is appropriate for the intended audience before submission.

Section 15: Applicant declaration

Please read the statements below and tick the boxes to indicate your agreement:

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent. ☒

The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it. ☒

I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines. ☒

I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer. ☒

I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer. ☒

Please now save your completed form and email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

Appendix 9. An extract of Harry's Interview Transcript and Coding for Research Question One

Harry's Interview Transcript

Interviewer: So Harry, are you ready then?

Harry: Uhum.

Interviewer: Hopefully that picks this up. OK, so the first question I'd like you to think about then is... Thinking about your experiences of primary and secondary school, overall, how do you think your experience has been?

Harry: Overall in school?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Harry: OK, I feel my experience has been quite good, I believe. COVID hasn't helped the past few years. But in primary, I think I had a great primary and it really helped me with it being really small, so it helped me a lot.

Interviewer: Brilliant. So your primary school was small which you think helped, but overall, you think you've had a good school experience?

Harry: Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer: Ok, fabulous. And so, just in terms of academic achievement then, so what is academic achievement to you, do you think?

Harry: Uh, I think being able to achieve good grades and, uh, leaving school with good grades, which will really help me get, uh, a good job that can really help me in life.

Interviewer: Oh brilliant, so academic achievement to you then is thinking about your future?

Harry: Yep.

Interviewer: And your jobs and your grades

Harry: Definitely.

Interviewer: Brilliant.

Interviewer: And then... have you known that you're academically achieving?

Harry: Uhm, I mean, I've had an idea, I've been quite consistent. I feel like I've always been not not the smartest, but I've always been, er, ok. Like I haven't ever dropped into some really bad sets or have really bad grades. I think I've been quite consistent with them. They (Harry's grades) haven't been like top top, but I can work towards the top.

Interviewer: Brilliant OK, fabulous. So, what I would like you to do now is, I want you to think about the factors and anything that you think has supported your academic learning and achievements. So, thinking across year seven to year 10. What, if any, individual factors, so kind of what have you done that you believe has helped your academic achievement? So, what you can do if you want to, you can write them on here and stick them or you can just speak. So completely, up to you...

Harry: So what I think is-

1

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - CYP viewing education as important
@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - CYP wanting to academically achieve
29 June 2022, 13:47
@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - Academic achievement influences positive future outcomes
@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - Academic achievement is important for aspirations
@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - more effort means learning progress
@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - CYP recognising areas of improvement
@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT) - Internal motivation
@mention or reply

Interviewer: Yes, so what have you done that you think has helped with your academic achievement?

Harry: I think, er, being around the right people.

Interviewer: Ah, brilliant. So can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Harry: So I've always had a really close friend group and our group as a whole, we've never got into trouble or never done anything wrong. And, erm, people in my friend group have, erm, come right through primary with me and most of them I've been friends with him since year seven as well, so I know pretty well and we've been pretty good and never had any mishaps.

Interviewer: Oh, that's lovely.

Harry: So, that's what I think has helped a lot.

Interviewer: Yeah, so the friendships of yours from primary school all the way to now, and what kind of people are your friends do you think?

Harry: I think, my friends are, erm, people who could help me if I really need to. They help me be happy. So yeah, I just like being around (them).

Interviewer: That's lovely and are there any other factors that you can think that you do or that you can think of that supports with your learning and your academic achievement?

Harry: Erm, I don't have many things to set me aside from school, to distract me.

Interviewer: OK.

Harry: I do swimming, that's alright, but it doesn't really affect with my learning or anything such as something big. So I think not having many distractions from school. Do you want me to write that down?

Interviewer: Yeah, if you want to. So not having many distractions and you mentioned that you do swimming, do you think that helps in any way?

Harry: Yeah, I think so. It takes my mind off school and it still makes me happy.

Interviewer: Brilliant, so swimming takes your mind off school and makes you happy?

Harry: Uhum.

Interviewer: Fabulous. And then can you think of anything else that you do that may help with your learning?

Harry: er... er...

Interviewer: Don't worry if not we can move on.

Harry: Not doing online lesson, I like to be in school 'cause online lessons really didn't help.

Interviewer: Oh did they not?

Harry: No, I, I probably hit my lowest point when I did online lessons.

Interviewer: Right...

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- not getting into trouble at school

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- groups providing sense of belonging

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- positive peer influences

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- groups providing sense of belonging

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- not getting into trouble at school

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- support from peers

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- peers provide emotional support

@mention or reply

Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- engagement in non-school related and enjoyable activities

Appendix 10. An extract of Harry's Interview Transcript and Coding for Research Question Two

have homework, then you constantly have to be mind-active, and it can get a bit too much sometimes... I feel. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, so thank you for sharing that, so school can be quite stressful at times...

Harry: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: And perhaps that impacts on you not having that downtime? Which it seems that you may need sometimes, I think that's really important for everyone to have.

Harry: Yeah. Yeah, I definitely that.

Interviewer: And what do you think... is there anything that makes school stressful?

Harry: Erm. No, I don't... I think as it's gone on obviously it's got more important with exams coming up and coming to the end so you've got to really think about what you gotta do. So I think just the big build up to leaving and thinking what you gotta do next, and constantly being self-conscious if you have to be good enough and like get the right things. So yeah.

Interviewer: That sounds like it can be really tricky to deal with all that. And in year 10, like you said, having to think about your future and what you're going to do next but also having to work hard at school, thank you for sharing that. Is there anything else that you can think of, any school factors that may not help with your academic achievement?

Harry: Well...No... I think obviously it's been harder with COVID, so I think they need to like kind of not like diss it or anything, but they, I think they need to relax a little bit because obviously there's been so much harder with all the lost learning we've had so I think they need to relax like the grades and expectations from other past years without any interference. And they need to just calm it down a little bit for the people who, especially year 10 and 11, 'cause it's vital that, the years that they've lost learning has really been a big impact, whereas in primary it won't be as big so they can look back up when they get here. So that would be right. But yeah, I think just covid and they need to relax and have a little bit lower expectations for years... like year 11 as well, they must have had it hard 'cause this year is so hard for them. So yeah. And I've got friends in year 11 and they're always like so stressed because of all the exams and they've got to think of what they gotta do and especially with the lost learning it's really hard for them so yeah.

Interviewer: Umm yeah, I think you made so many good points here about the lost learning and COVID, and perhaps the added stress that has brought on as well. Do you have any ways that you can deal with your stress?

Harry: Erm, I think I just get out a lot, I like going on the bike and ((inaudible)) and just go to the fields and there's so many places to go and get out and I sometimes like just being independent so I'll just go places and do things. Obviously not a lot, to a certain extent, I'll go out and do my own things when I need to or if no one can do anything. But yeah, and most of the time, like in the past, obviously I'm really close to my nan and grandad, so I always do things with them. I've done so many things with them, I've been on holiday with them and everything so, yeah. Yeah, well we go- It's always me, my mum, my nan, and grandad, we always go on holiday and we're going again this year. So yeah, that's quite good.

- Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- stress and/or worry about the future

@mention or reply
- Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- academic pressure and/or stress

@mention or reply
- Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- covid negative impact

@mention or reply
- Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- academic pressure and/or stress

29 June 2022, 14:59

@mention or reply
- Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

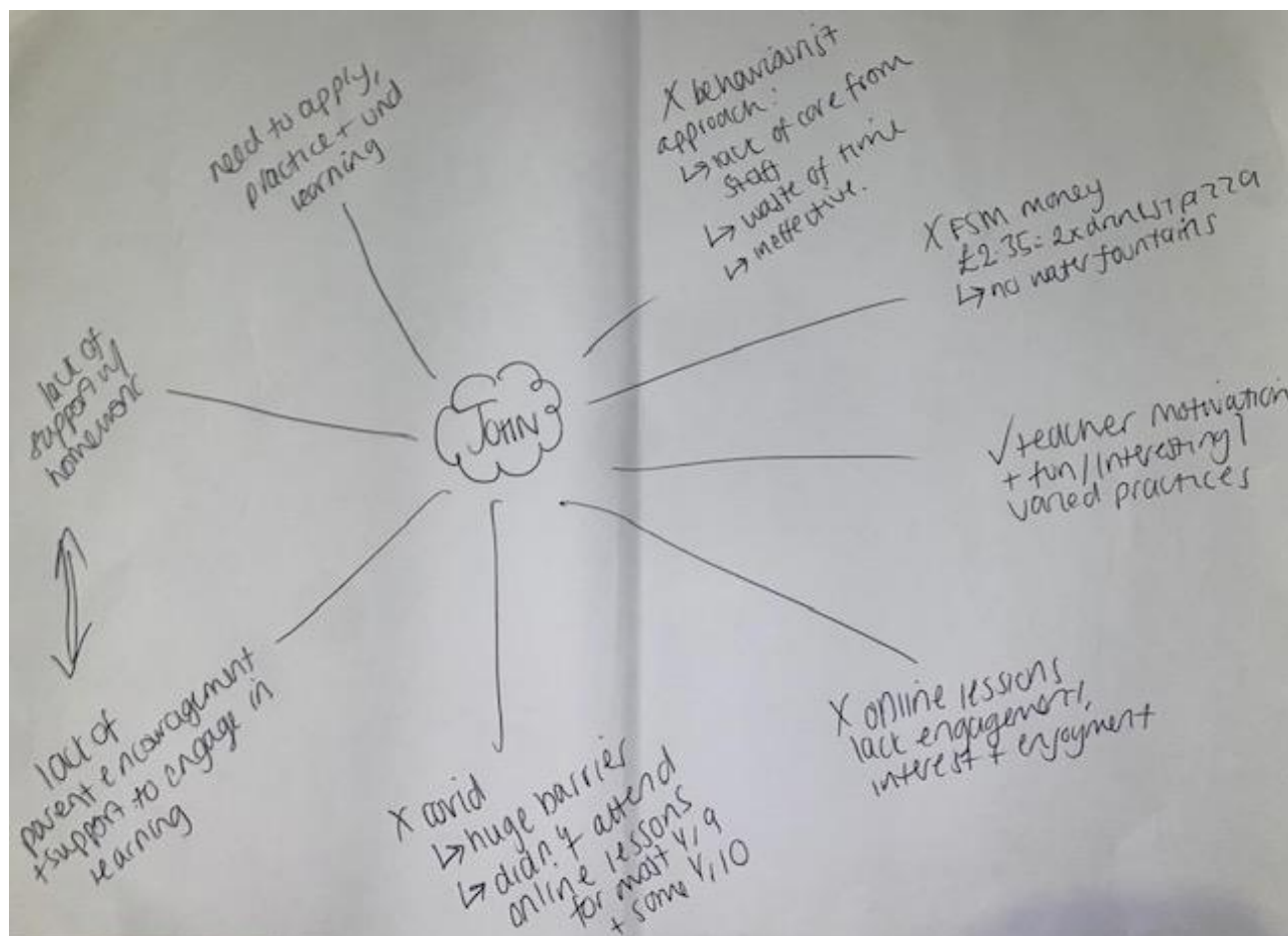
- covid negative impact

@mention or reply
- Tara Janda (Ap. Ed. and Child Psy. D. FT)

- covid negative impact on academics

@mention or reply

Appendix 11. Example of mind map for John



Appendix 12. Codes Developed for Research Question One

Codes

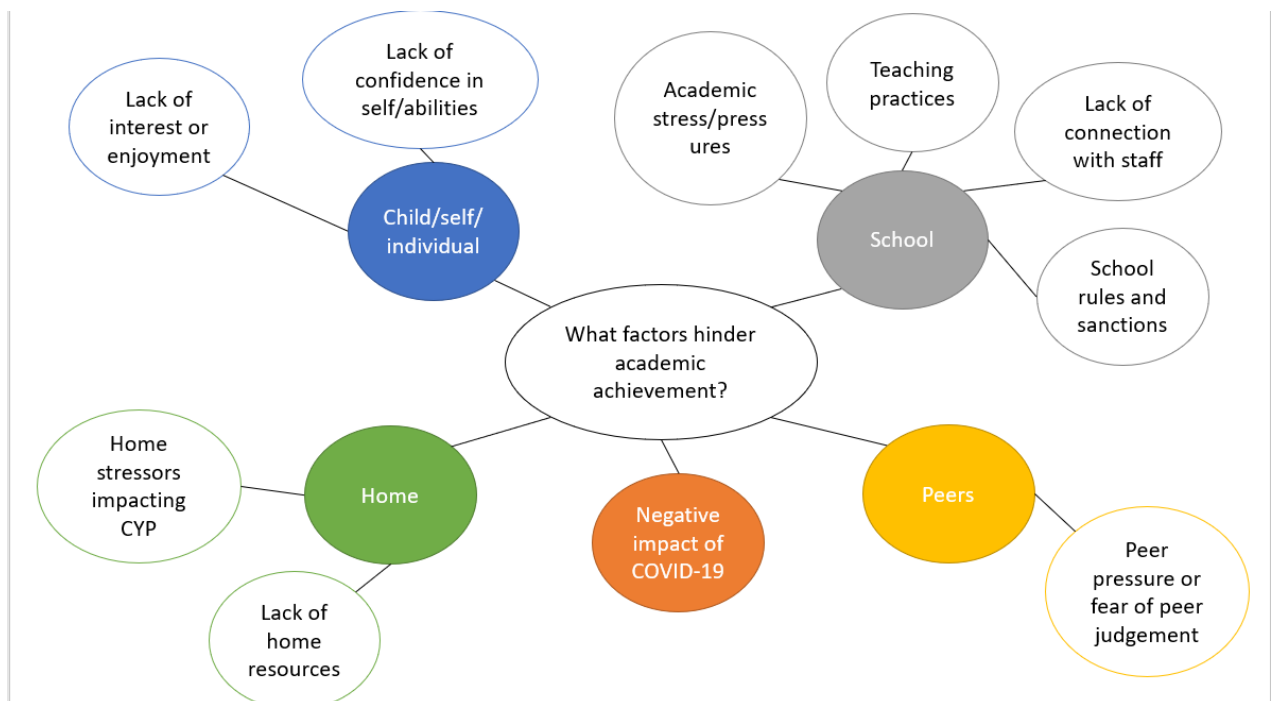
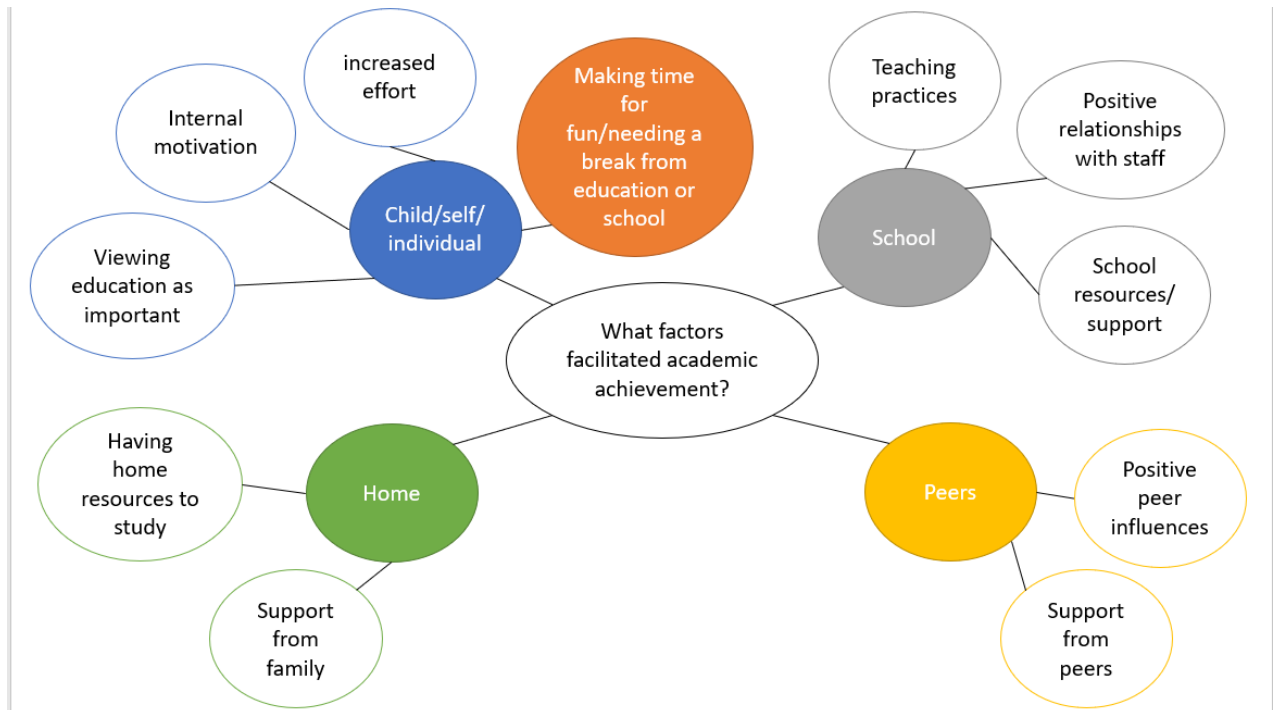
- Access to homework and revision clubs
- PP providing resources
- School facilities
- Positive teacher relationships
- Support from teachers
- Staff being available for YP
- Teachers provide emotional support
- Adults believing in CYP
- Motivation from others
- Positive teaching practice
- Upskilling pupils
- Support from parents
- Support from family
- Autonomy in deciding subjects
- Support from peers
- Peers provide academic support
- Distinguishing between positive and negative peer influences
- Positive peer influences
- Peers provide emotional support
- Club or group support
- Groups providing sense of belonging
- Not getting into trouble at school
- Experiential learning promoting enjoyment and interest in learning
- Interactive teaching
- Staff enthusiasm and engagement
- Staff promoting interest in learning through teaching
- Engagement in non-school related and enjoyable activities
- Community inclusion
- Religion supporting learning
- Feeling safe in the community
- CYP viewing education as important
- Academic achievement influences positive future outcomes
- Academic achievement is important for aspirations
- CYP prioritising learning
- CYP recognising areas of improvement
- More effort means more learning progress
- CYP wanting to academically achieve
- CYP enjoying learning
- CYP wanting understanding (not just surface level knowledge)
- CYP attitude impacting on engagement
- Internal motivation
- Self-interest promotes motivation
- Having home resources to study

Appendix 13. Codes Developed for Research Question Two

Codes

- Unenthusiastic teaching is boring
- Education or learning not being meaningful
- Ineffective behaviour policy
- Lack of school support on social, emotional and mental health
- A need for school support on social, emotional and mental health
- Strict school rules
- Wanting to be listened to and involved in decision making
- Seating plans negatively impact learning
- Wanting more responsibility and trust from staff
- Stress or worry caused by teaching practices
- Staff absence impacting on grades
- Inaccessible school resources or materials
- FSM amount is inadequate
- Lack of understanding from staff
- Lack of connection with teacher
- Low confidence and self-belief in abilities and choices
- Lack of confidence and self-belief in school to ask for
- Peers negatively impacting on learning
- Lack of internal motivation
- Lack of interest impact on grade
- Covid negative impact
- Covid negative impact on academics
- Covid impact on engagement in activities
- Social and emotional impact of covid
- Lack of home resources to study
- Lack of family support
- Lack of parental engagement with learning
- Home life impacting YP
- Academic pressure or/and stress
- Homework
- Stress and/or worry about the future
- Homework is unhelpful
- Homework causes stress
- Unhealthy attitude to failure in school

Appendix 14. An Example of Initial Themes Developed (not the final themes developed)



Appendix 15. The Codes and Final Developed Themes for Research Question One

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Subtheme</u>	<u>Codes</u>
Access and availability of school resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to homework and revision clubs • PP providing resources • School facilities
Positive and supportive relationships	Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive teacher relationships • Support from teachers • Staff being available for YP • Teachers provide emotional support • Adults believing in CYP • Motivation from others • Positive teaching practice • Upskilling pupils
	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults believing in CYP • Motivation from others • Support from parents • Support from family • Autonomy in deciding subjects
	Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from peers • Peers provide academic support • Distinguishing between positive and negative peer influences • Positive peer influences • Peers provide emotional support • Motivation from others • Club or group support • Groups providing sense of belonging • Not getting into trouble at school
Staff promoting children's interest and enjoyment in lessons		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential learning promoting enjoyment and interest in learning • Interactive teaching • Staff enthusiasm and engagement • Staff promoting interest in learning through teaching • Positive teaching practice
Time away from learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in non-school related and enjoyable activities • Club or group support • Community inclusion • Religion supporting learning • Feeling safe in the community
Children viewing education as important		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP viewing education as important • Academic achievement influences positive future outcomes • Academic achievement is important for aspirations • CYP prioritising learning • CYP wanting to academically achieve • CYP recognising areas of improvement • More effort means more learning progress • CYP wanting to academically achieve

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Subtheme</u>	<u>Codes</u>
Positive attitude towards learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP enjoying learning • CYP wanting understanding (not just surface level knowledge) • CYP attitude impacting on engagement • Internal motivation • Self-interest promotes motivation • CYP viewing education as important • CYP wanting to academically achieve • More effort means learning progress
Having sufficient home resources and environment to study		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having home resources to study • Support from parents • Support from family

Appendix 16. The Codes and Final Developed Themes for Research Question Two

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Codes</u>
Teaching is “boring”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unenthusiastic teaching is boring • Education or learning not being meaningful
Ineffective and discouraging school policies and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective behaviour policy • Lack of school support on social, emotional and mental health • A need for school support on social, emotional and mental health • Strict school rules • Wanting to be listened to and involved in decision making • Seating plans negatively impact learning • Wanting more responsibility and trust from staff • Stress or worry caused by teaching practices • Staff absence impacting on grades • Inaccessible school resources or materials • FSM amount is inadequate
Lack of a positive relationship with staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding from staff • Lack of connection with teacher • A need for school support on social, emotional and mental health
Lack of confidence in self and abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low confidence in abilities and choices • Lack of confidence in school to ask for • Peers negatively impacting on learning
Lack of interest and enjoyment of a subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of internal motivation • Lack of interest impact on grade
Negative impact of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid negative impact • Covid negative impact on academics • Covid impact on engagement in activities • Social and emotional impact of covid
Poor home support, resources and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of home resources to study • Lack of family support • Lack of parental engagement with learning • Home life impacting YP • Inaccessible school resources or materials
Academic demands and pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic pressure or/and stress • Homework • Homework is unhelpful • Homework causes stress • Unhealthy attitude to failure in school