



Reducing exclusions from school: A systematic literature review and exploration of educational professionals' experiences

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Declaration

I certify that the work in this thesis is my own and has not been submitted or assessed for any other qualification.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to all the participants for giving up their time to contribute to the research. Without your contributions, this research would not have been possible. Thank you for sharing your stories and experiences with me.

Thank you to my supervisors, Tracey, Simon and Dave. Thank you for your encouragement, words of wisdom and support throughout the process. A special thank you for reminding me that research is important, but you can't cut a tree down without taking the time to sharpen your saw.

Cohort of 2024, thank you! It has been emotional. We've laughed, we've cried, and we've made it through together.

Thank you to my family. To my mum, dad and brothers who have always encouraged me to try my best because that is all you can do. You have always been there for me, even when I chose not to listen and attempt things the hard way. Adam, thank you for supporting me throughout this whole process and beyond. I appreciate every cup of tea at the end of the day. I am forever grateful for you and the encouragement you provide.

Last appreciation, Bones the dog. He might as well be the co-author because he knows as much about this thesis as me due to our long (and slightly one way) conversations. I wish he understood how hugely appreciated he is.

Overarching abstract

This thesis explores the education professionals experience of interventions designed to minimise the exclusion of young people from mainstream schools. It contains four chapters: a systematic literature review (SLR), a bridging chapter including the philosophical journey, methodological and ethical implications, an empirical research project and a reflective synthesis considering the implications of this thesis.

Chapter 1: The SLR aimed to explore the effectiveness of education-based approaches within the United Kingdom intended to support the reduction of suspensions and permanent exclusions. The review focused specifically on interventions. Five papers were analysed, four from England and one in Scotland. Findings suggest there may be some interventions that support the reduction of school exclusions; however the evidence is not conclusive. Qualitative data explored some factors that may have contributed to the effectiveness of these interventions. Implications of this are discussed. This paper is written in the style of the nominated journal: Educational and Child Psychology.

Chapter 2: This chapter considers the rationale and the link between the SLR and empirical research. Personal motivations, key underpinning philosophical assumptions and the rationale for the methodology are discussed. Additionally, ethical implications are considered.

Chapter 3: The empirical research project explored the experiences of education professionals in supporting inclusion with the aim of reducing suspensions and permanent exclusions from secondary schools. Participants included headteachers, educational psychologists and Local Authority team managers in one Local Authority. Interviews in the form of a narrative conversation were analysed using reflective thematic analysis. Findings are discussed in relation to the shared relationships of the three groups interpreting how they have supported inclusion with the aim of reducing school exclusion. Limitations and implications for practice are discussed. This paper is written in the style of the nominated journal: European Journal of Special Needs Education.

Chapter 4: This chapter includes a reflective synthesis of my research journey. It provides me with an opportunity to consider how this research has impacted on myself and my practice. Implications of further research and wider practice are discussed.

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Chapter one: Education-based interventions for reducing the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions in UK schools: a systematic review.

Abstract

Aim: This systematic literature review (SLR) aimed to explore the effectiveness of education-based interventions in reducing the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions in mainstream schools.

Rationale: Research has suggested that exclusions are associated with a range of negative long-term outcomes, yet in England the rates of exclusions continue to increase (Department for Education, 2023c).

Method: The ten-step roadmap to systematic reviews described by Boland et al. (2017) was completed. A database search, hand search and citation chaining were carried out, resulting in five studies for in depth review. To assess quality of the studies the EPPI Centre Weight of Evidence tool (Gough, 2007) was used.

Findings: Four studies were conducted in England and one in Scotland. Each study implemented a different intervention with a range of time frames and training requirements. Four of the studies reported a decrease in exclusions following implementation of the intervention. Qualitative data was also gathered that suggested three themes that may impact effectiveness within the interventions: delivery method, adult to pupil relationships and emotions.

Limitations: Some studies did not provide a clear definition of the term 'exclusion'. This made it difficult to distinguish between suspension and permanent exclusion. The studies used varying outcome measurements making it problematic to compare between studies.

Conclusions: There may be some education-based interventions implemented in the UK that support the reduction of suspensions and permanent exclusions. Further research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn regarding what support strategies can reduce exclusions in schools in England.

Key Words: school exclusion, suspension, inclusion, intervention, education

This study has been prepared to be submitted to the journal Educational and Child Psychology.

1.1 Introduction

This section discusses some of the current research around suspension and permanent exclusion from school. For ease of repetition, these will be referred to as school exclusions, unless specifically identified. Consideration is given to the prevention of such exclusions and the impact these may have upon a pupil, family, school and community. The rationale for undertaking this systematic review, including the aims and objectives are also discussed.

1.1.1 Definitions

This section aims to define the key terms that are used throughout the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to allow for a consistent understanding. Permanent exclusion is defined as 'when a pupil is no longer allowed to attend a school' (Department for Education, 2023c).

This should only be undertaken:

- in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and
- where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others such as staff or pupils in the school (Department for Education, 2023b).

When a pupil is permanently excluded, headteachers are required to take reasonable steps to ensure work is set and marked for the pupil for the first five days should they not be attending an alternative provision (Department for Education, 2023b).

Suspensions, previously known as fixed-term exclusions, are defined as, 'where a pupil is temporarily removed from the school.' A pupil may be suspended for one or more fixed periods within an academic year for up to a maximum of 45 school days (Department for Education, 2023b). During this time, headteachers are required to ensure steps are taken for work to be set and marked during the first five days of a suspension.

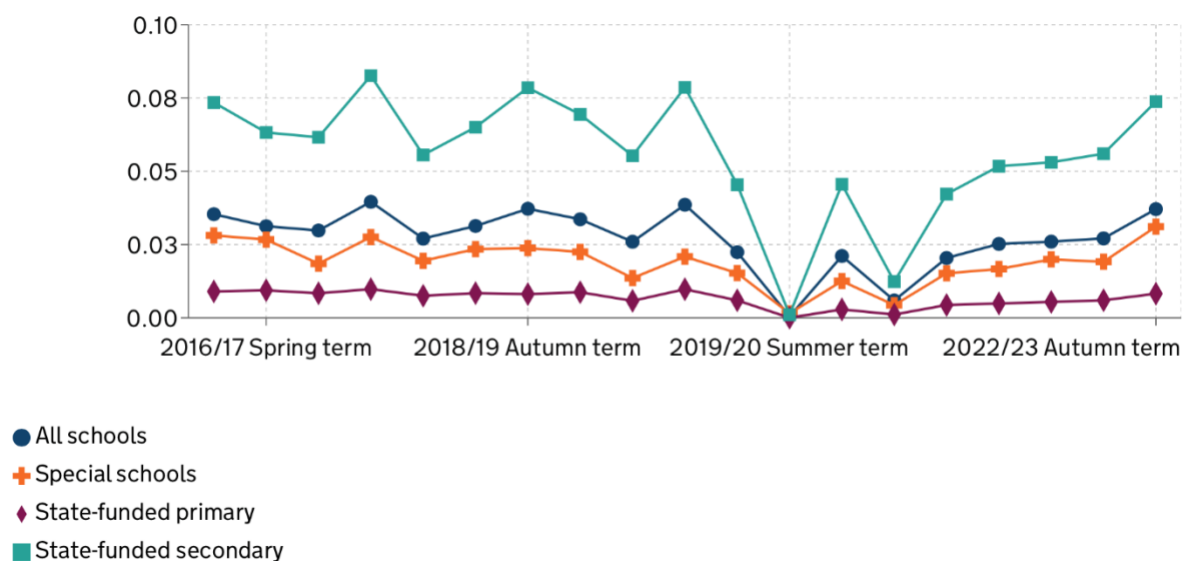
Only a headteacher has the authority to suspend or permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds. Professional judgement is expected to be used based on individual circumstances when deciding whether to exclude. The most recorded reason for school exclusion is the term 'persistent disruptive behaviour'. There is no clear government guidance or examples as to what constitutes this, including frequency or level of disruption. However, there are some definitions in the literature such as, 'any behaviour that is sufficiently off-task in the classroom, as to distract the teacher and/or class peers from on-task objectives' (Nash et al., 2015, pages 167-168).

In line with the government guidance stated above, the use of the word pupil, will refer to any child or young person.

1.1.2 Current context

The UK Government Department for Education (2023b) describes the use of school exclusions as ‘essential behaviour management tools for headteachers.’ It is acknowledged that such behaviour management tools should be used as a ‘last resort’ as part of a wider process of procedures and must be avoided where possible (Gazeley et al., 2015). The literature suggests that when a UK jurisdiction works to proactively reduce school exclusions, rates fall significantly (Cole et al., 2019). Exclusion rates are reported to be higher in England, compared with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Duffy et al., 2021). Permanent exclusions have steadily increased in England since 2012 until the COVID-19 pandemic (Caslin, 2021). These rates dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic when many children were not attending school or were attending in different circumstances to the usual school setting as demonstrated in Figure 1. Permanent exclusion rates since the pandemic are continuing to increase but have not reached the rates recorded pre-pandemic. Suspensions from school also continue to increase and are currently the highest since the 2016/2017 academic year.

Figure 1: Rate of permanent exclusions by school type, autumn term 2016/17 to autumn term 2022/2023 (Department for Education, 2023c).



The UK Government guidance from the Department for Education (2023b) does not apply to independent schools other than academies, sixth form colleges and other forms of school that are funded by central government. These schools have separate procedures. Further critique of such data suggests it to not fully show the extent of exclusions as many informal school exclusions take place, such as managed moves, reduced timetables and elective home education (Gazeley et al., 2015; Parsons, 2018; Power & Taylor, 2020).

A large-scale review into school exclusions in the UK was conducted in 2019 (Timpson, 2019). This review emphasised the need for schools to consider how they manage exclusions, suggesting they be held accountable and only used as a last resort. It also highlighted the disproportionate use of exclusions of certain groups of pupils, such as those from particular ethnic groups or those with special educational needs (Timpson, 2019). A following review the same year explored the factors that may result in why some groups may be more likely to be excluded, concluding that there are multiple factors that drive exclusions, such as approaches used in school and pupils' sense of belonging (Graham et al., 2019).

1.1.3 Impact of exclusion

Research suggests school exclusion has a long-term impact on a pupil's future. School exclusion is a form of disadvantage in which the effects appear to be self-perpetuating (Daniels et al., 2022; Kulz, 2019). The perception that school exclusion is closely associated with social disadvantage is reflected across the literature (Gazeley et al., 2015; Paget et al., 2018). Further, it seems segregation or exclusion from school in childhood has pervasive medium to long term adverse effects for young people (Madia et al., 2022; Obsuth, 2022). There are multiple risk factors once pupils are excluded from school and young people are more likely to be disadvantaged across multiple aspects of life, such as having low academic attainment, less stable career patterns and greater unemployment (Gazeley et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2019; McCluskey et al., 2016). There are some suggestions that these impacts can be intergenerational. For example, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children suggested that when a mother had been previously excluded from school, their child was more likely to also experience exclusions (Paget et al., 2018).

1.1.4 Alternatives to exclusion

Literature highlights that schools may refer to alternatives to suspensions and permanent exclusions. Gazeley et al. (2015) suggest some school policies focusing on reducing rates of permanent exclusions have encouraged a shift towards other sanctions and approaches.

Some alternatives identified within the literature include managed moves (Messeter & Soni, 2018), isolation, segregation and part-time timetables (Martin-Denham, 2021), and within school isolation units (Gazeley et al., 2015; Power & Taylor, 2020). However, there appears to be a lack of evaluation within the scoping literature as to the impact these alternatives have at reducing exclusion from school.

1.1.5 Aims and rationale

The current review addresses the question:

What are the effects of education-based interventions to decrease the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions in UK schools?

In doing so, the review examined the interventions taking place within UK educational settings, the impact these interventions have on school exclusions as well as the factors that may facilitate or inhibit the effects of an intervention.

As discussed, the Department for Education (2023c) report increasing cases of school exclusion. The guidance provided to schools indicates that exclusions should be used as a last resort. Therefore, suggesting that other approaches, support and interventions may have been implemented prior to an exclusion taking place. Consequently, understanding what is available and the effectiveness may be an important area of study and research. This review focuses on interventions, which are designed to be implemented in an educational setting.

My initial scoping of the literature in this area, highlighted two previously published SLRs which explore this question (Mielke & Farrington, 2021; Valdebenito et al., 2018). However, these reviews use an international perspective and include few studies from the United Kingdom. Therefore, the research question focused on studies that were completed within a UK context.

The aims of this review are to explore:

- What strategies or teaching interventions can be used to support pupil behaviour with the intent of reducing school exclusions in the UK?
- How effective these approaches are?

1.2 Method

This section describes the methodology and methods applied to provide a transparent and replicable process. I will discuss the design, implementation and ethical issues surrounding this review.

1.2.1 Review process

To conduct this SLR Boland et al. (2017)'s 10 steps were adopted (see Table 1). The SLR process was further informed by literature which describes the process of using this method (Petticrew, 2006; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Table 1: 10 Step Roadmap to your Systematic Review (Boland et al., 2017).

| Step | Description |
|------|--|
| 1 | Planning your review |
| 2 | Performing scoping searches, identifying the review question and writing your protocol |
| 3 | Literature searching |
| 4 | Screening titles and abstracts |
| 5 | Obtaining papers |
| 6 | Selecting full-text papers |
| 7 | Quality assessment |
| 8 | Data extraction |
| 9 | Analysis and synthesis |
| 10 | Writing up, editing and disseminating |

1.2.2 Locating the studies

Scoping searches

Scoping searches were undertaken between July and September 2022. The topic area of decreasing school exclusions was identified as an initial area of interest. This was followed by considering what supports this to happen, resulting in interventions being identified as a further research focus.

Eligibility Criteria

The initial population of interest was students in English secondary school settings. However, following scoping searches there appeared to be little research in the topic area with this population. Therefore, the population of interest was adjusted to young people of

compulsory school age across the UK, which is 5 years to 16 years. Only studies involving strategies or interventions with the explicit aim of reducing exclusions were included. The outcomes of these studies had to involve some measure of exclusions, either permanent or suspensions. Studies published from 2012 onwards were included following the publication of the School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations (2012). This publication was also chosen as it coincided with the coalition government and subsequent increase in exclusions from this year. Following this guidance, more power to exclude was provided to headteachers due to changes in the appeal process (Kulz, 2019). Papers were limited to studies in a UK context. However, it is acknowledged that there continues to be differences between each countries' education systems and exclusion rates.

Literature search

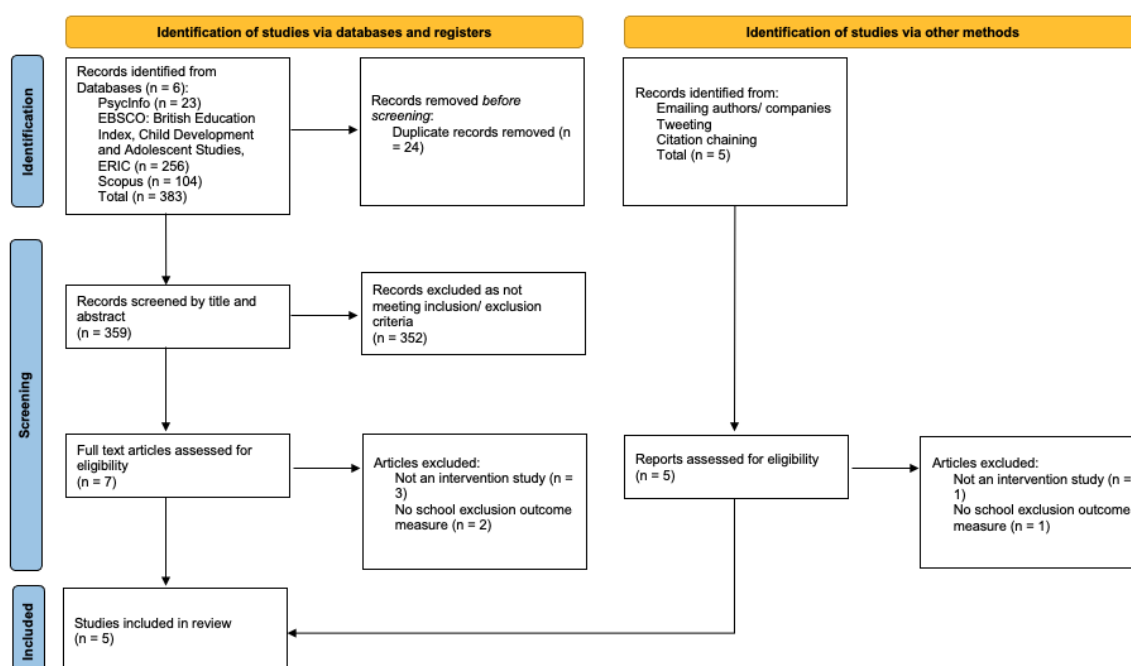
There were several methods employed to obtain a sample of studies for this review:

- Electronic database searches;
- Emailing authors and companies from interventions/ programmes used within schools;
- Tweeting;
- Citation chaining; and
- Grey literature searches

Electronic Database searches

Electronic databases were searched between September and November 2022. Databases searched were; PsycInfo, EBSCO (British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies and ERIC) and Scopus. See Figure 2 for details of these searches. My searches began with broad search terms for the retrieval of journal articles and relevant literature. From these, relevant material was selected. I used three main search terms. These were: 'strateg*', 'behaviour' and 'school exclusion'. These were the terms I initially encountered during the early stages of reading in this area. The search strategy was created in PsycInfo before being translated to the other databases searched. Controlled vocabulary searches were used, and some terms exploded.

Figure 2: PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021) showing search process.



Tweeting and emailing authors

Following the electronic database search, it became apparent most of the studies conducted were from the United States. Therefore, it was decided a Tweet on the social media platform Twitter, now called X, would be sent out to scope within the educational psychology social media community. This was tweeted from my own account using the hashtag #TwitterEPs. From this, three accounts contacted me to share information. No further papers were identified directly from this. However, this identified a recent systematic literature review (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022) in a similar topic area which allowed for further handsearching.

Also, many schools within my placement LA use interventions which make claims to reduce exclusions. Therefore, the companies and authors linked to these interventions were emailed to ask for any recent literature to support this. However, no further papers were identified through this method.

Citation chaining

Following on from the previous searches and the non-eligible papers gained through tweeting, I conducted forwards and backwards searches of the key papers to identify further relevant papers. The practice of looking at the bibliography of one article to find other related

articles is called citation chaining (Boland et al., 2017). Through this, three additional papers were identified.

Searching the grey literature

Grey literature refers to the array of evidence that is not peer-reviewed by commercial publishers (Boland et al., 2017). During the searches, some databases did provide unpublished thesis which are identified as grey literature. However, none were eligible for further analysis, after screening for relevance.

The search for studies was then stopped as no further relevant studies were being identified.

1.2.3 Screening the studies

The next stage of screening included the application of an inclusion / exclusion criteria to identify those relevant for review. 359 papers were screened by title, key words and abstracts according to the PICO inclusion criteria as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: PICO table showing the inclusion descriptors.

| Criteria | Description |
|---------------------|--|
| Population | Young people of compulsory school age (5 years to 16 years) were the target population or involving staff working with these young people in an education setting. |
| Intervention | Interventions which can be employed in an educational setting such as a school, pupil referral unit or alternative provision. |
| Comparison | Studies with and without a control or comparison group were included due to paucity of research in the area. |
| Outcomes | Only studies including an outcome of exclusions, both permanent exclusions and suspensions. |
| Setting | Interventions all took place in educational establishments. The educational establishments must be within an educational system in the UK. |

The screening included two stages. Firstly, I excluded 352 papers based on title and abstract. This left 12 studies, which I read in full, applying my inclusion criteria. Following this, I had 5 papers remaining for in-depth review.

Quality assessment

To assess the quality of the data I used the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) centre Weight of Evidence tool (WoE) (Gough, 2007) (see Table 3) alongside some supplementary questions (see Appendix 1). Quality assessment and the WoE is regarded to be a subjective measure as researchers are expected to use their judgement (Petticrew, 2006). Therefore, the supplementary questions were used to prompt further thinking and reflections across each area.

Table 3: Weight of Evidence (Gough, 2007).

| | Weight of Evidence | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| | A The coherence and integrity of the evidence | B Appropriateness of answering the review question | C Relevance of the study to the review question | D Overall weight, considering A, B and C |
| Obsuth et al. (2017) | Low/ Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Rose et al. (2018) | Low | Low | Low/ Medium | Low |
| Waters (2015) | Low | Medium | Low/ Medium | Low/ Medium |
| Ewen and Topping (2012) | Medium | Low/ Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Rose et al. (2015) | Low/ Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |

The WoE (Gough, 2007) allows for the multiple methods within the study to be considered and reviewed against whether they are appropriate for answering the research question.

1.2.5 Data collection and analysis

The remaining studies were analysed according to aims, participants, context, design, intervention, outcome measures and findings to assess heterogeneity (see Table 4). Some studies used mixed methods. There was not enough qualitative data relevant to the review question to perform an in-depth qualitative analysis. Therefore, I analysed relevant qualitative alongside the quantitative measures.

Table 4: Description of studies.

| Study | Participants | Context | Aims of the study | Intervention | Design | Outcome measure of exclusion | Quantitative findings *Significance not reported | Qualitative findings |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Obsuth, Sutherland, Cope, Pilbeam, Murray and Eisner (2017) | 644 Year 9 & 10 Pupils with: Previous exclusion Unauthorised absences and/or behaviours leading to disciplinary measures. 539 Teachers | 36 Inner London Secondary Schools | To examine whether the intervention can reduce the incidence of school exclusion in high-risk populations. | Engage in Education – London | Randomised control trial Pre and post measures | Records of school exclusions from the National Pupil Database. Teacher and student self-rating | Official records: OR = 1.444 (not statistically significant) Pupil self-report: OR = 1.470 (p=.038) Teacher self-report: OR = 1.022 (not statistically significant) | N/A |
| Rose, Stanforth, Gilmore and Bevan-Brown (2018) | 12 headteachers | 18 Primary schools included in South-East England | To determine whether the Transferred inclusion process | Transferred inclusion and behaviour plan. | Case study: mixed methods | <u>Quantitative</u> Descriptive statistics on the number of | Suspensions decreased over time * | Themes identified: Professional practice, Adult self-Regulation |

| Study | Participants | Context | Aims of the study | Intervention | Design | Outcome measure of exclusion | Quantitative findings *Significance not reported | Qualitative findings |
|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| | | | worked in practice. | | Pre and Post measures | TI referrals and suspensions. <u>Qualitative</u> Semi-structured interview – coded thematically and open-ended questionnaires | Number of TIs decreased over time* Less than LA average after 2 years Calculated results from the data provided: 4.1 times more likely to be excluded prior to TI compared to 4 years after process in place. | and behavioural impact on pupil. |
| Waters (2015) | 12 pupil and parent pairs. | 7 Primary Schools | To evaluate the effects of the | 10-week Story Links programme | Case Study: mixed methods. | <u>Quantitative</u> School reported | Significant decrease in pupils' rates of | Interview themes: Positive impact |

| Study | Participants | Context | Aims of the study | Intervention | Design | Outcome measure of exclusion | Quantitative findings *Significance not reported | Qualitative findings |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|---|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| | Pupils at risk of exclusion and at least one year behind in reading age. | | programme on a range of pupils' outcomes including exclusion rates. | (based on Therapeutic Story Writing Groups). | Pre and Post measures | number of exclusions. <u>Qualitative</u> Semi-structured interviews Content analysis of parent/pupil stories | exclusion from school, the classroom and the playground. 0 suspensions from 2. Calculated results from the data provided: 2 times less likely to be excluded from school. | on home-school relationship, Increase in home reading and Improved engagement in reading. Content analysis: Reminder of the parents' nurturing role. Absent fathers. Friendship difficulties. |
| Ewen and Topping (2012) | Pupils in their final year of education (n= 30). | END – an education provider located within | To evaluate the END project's aims of reducing exclusions and | Extended New Directions (END) project – Scottish context. | Mixed method design | <u>Quantitative</u> Attendance and exclusion data directly from school | *Mainstream schools excluded three and a half times as often | Focus group themes: curriculum and structure, tutorials, staff- |

| Study | Participants | Context | Aims of the study | Intervention | Design | Outcome measure of exclusion | Quantitative findings *Significance not reported | Qualitative findings |
|--------------------|---|--|--|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| | Staff working directly with the young people (n=13) Key stakeholders including key workers, teacher and EST coordinator (n=37) | the pupils' own community. | establish the key factors that made a difference to impact. | | Parallel and simultaneous design | records. Achievement records from school. <u>Qualitative</u> Focus groups. Semi-structured interviews Questionnaire | as END (183 to 50). | young people relationships and family relationships. Semi-structured interview themes: broadly consistent with focus group. |
| Rose et al. (2015) | 127 Teaching staff, teaching assistants and early years practitioners. | 11 schools (primary and secondary) 1 focus school | To evaluate the use of emotion coaching techniques as a shared, consistent strategy in work with | Emotion Coaching Techniques | Pilot Study over 2 years. Mixed methods Pre and post measures | <u>Quantitative</u> Pre and post training indices (call outs, exclusions, rewards and consequences) <u>Qualitative</u> | Exclusions decrease (t=2.54, p<.05) Call outs decrease (t=2.35, p<.05) Consequences decrease | Themes: Professional practice, adult self-regulation and Behavioural Impact on Child. |

| Study | Participants | Context | Aims of the study | Intervention | Design | Outcome measure of exclusion | Quantitative findings *Significance not reported | Qualitative findings |
|-------|--------------|---------|---|--------------|------------|---|---|----------------------|
| | | | children to support pro-social behaviour. | | Case Study | Focus group and Exit questionnaire free response. | (t=2.84, p=<.05) Rewards decrease (t=2.08, p=<.05) | |

Synthesising findings

I synthesised the studies using a mixed methods design due to the nature of the primary studies providing quantitative and qualitative data. Following procedures recommended by Heyvaert et al. (2017), I employed segregated synthesis to take into account distinct natures of the qualitative and quantitative data. Therefore, using narrative synthesis for the quantitative and thematic synthesis for the qualitative data to allow for identification of the prominent themes. Both ways of synthesis were chosen as they are identified as being designed to inform policy and practice (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009) which supports the research question. As these findings are segregated, they were then synthesised into a set of conclusions to suggest ways in which they complement each other within the discussion.

Ethical issues

This review utilises the findings of previous studies which should have undergone ethical approval prior to being conducted. Therefore, the ethical issues surrounding this review were minimal.

Methodology summary

The methodological perspective, methods used, sample obtained, data analysis techniques utilised, and ethical issues considered by this review have been discussed. The aim of this review is to explore the literature about what works. Next, the findings of the review will be discussed.

1.4 Findings

1.4.1 General characteristics

A total of five studies were identified and analysed. All studies took place in the UK with four taking place in England and one in Scotland (Ewen & Topping, 2012). These studies included a mixture of settings. One study included both primary and secondary schools (Rose et al., 2015), two studies focused on primary schools (Rose et al., 2018; Waters, 2014) and two were aimed at secondary settings (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Obsuth et al., 2017). There was no clear evidence from the papers identified whether there were differences in the exclusion rates between the primary and secondary schools included.

Four studies referred to alternative names for suspension, including fixed-term exclusions, day exclusions and external exclusions (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Obsuth et al., 2017; Rose

et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2018). One study lacked clarity in the term exclusion (Waters, 2014). However, due to their descriptions it may appear to also relate to suspensions rather than permanent exclusion. Despite, the search criteria, no studies relating to permanent exclusions were identified.

1.4.2 Interventions

All interventions aimed to reduce school exclusions. One study explored training staff in Emotion Coaching Techniques (Rose et al., 2015). This study describes these techniques as relational and skills-based approaches, used by staff, to support pupils through empathy and guidance. Training was provided and staff were encouraged to use these techniques over the study time (Rose et al., 2015). Two studies involved interventions that required a form of weekly session (Obsuth et al., 2017; Waters, 2014). Engage in Education – London required participants to attend one to one and group sessions focusing on interpersonal social skills over a 12-week period. Home visits or phone calls with parents/ carers were planned to maintain engagement by offering updates of progress (Obsuth et al., 2017). The Story Links programme (Waters, 2014) also included parents/ carers as they were required to attend a 10-week programme alongside a story links teacher, where together parents and pupils would co-create a story. This intervention also included check ins with a Teaching Assistant and reflection sessions for the parents.

Two of the interventions removed pupils from their current education setting to another. Transferred Inclusion required pupils to attend another school to work in isolation for one to five days. This was followed by a re-integration meeting which acknowledged the pupils' value whilst creating a behaviour plan (Rose et al., 2018). The final study involved pupils moving to an individualised timetable whilst being educated within the local community alongside a key worker (Ewen & Topping, 2012). The suggested aim of this is to provide learning to meet the pupils' needs in their own community.

The duration of interventions ranged from one day to two years. Some interventions had more components than the intervention itself. For example, Rose et al. (2015) and Waters (2014) required staff already employed by the educational setting to have completed a two-to-three-part training course, whilst Obsuth et al. (2017) employed and trained core-workers for the purpose of delivering the intervention. Ewen and Topping (2012) and Rose et al. (2018), as mentioned, remove the pupil from their original setting as a form of intervention. Therefore, some of these interventions may be considered easier to implement within educational settings than others.

1.4.3 Exclusion outcomes and effectiveness

It is important to note that the way in which exclusion data was recorded varied in each study as demonstrated in Table 4. This contributed to the difficulty in making comparisons between studies. Where possible, statistical significance and effect sizes are quoted. It was considered not possible to calculate effect sizes for all data set due to insufficient information. Throughout the studies, there were varying methodological issues which reduce the quality of the studies included. Therefore, the evidence from these studies may be contemplated but it is important to consider the critiques alongside. All studies provided some form of pre and post-test measure. Although, as noted, these methods and time frames varied considerably between studies.

Two studies reported their findings as effect sizes. Obsuth et al. (2017) reported that following the intervention, pupils were significantly more likely to self-report exclusions when in the treatment group, compared to the control group (OR=1.470, $p=0.038$). This directional change was also reported within teacher self-reporting and the official records. There are multiple methodological issues with these suggestions which make it difficult for comparison against other studies. For example, the baseline data referred to exclusions over one school year for the official data, whilst post-intervention exclusion data referred to the 6 weeks following intervention and the self-reported measures referred to shorter periods of time.

Rose et al. (2015) also reported a significant effect size when comparing the mean number of exclusions in the year pre-training to post-training following emotion coaching training ($t = 2.54$, $p = <0.05$). However, this study included no comparison group to identify whether these decreases in exclusions may have been related to other factors within the school environment, such as staff changes or policies, rather than the intervention alone.

Three studies shared descriptive statistics to identify changes in exclusions following intervention (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rose et al., 2018; Waters, 2014). Pupils participating in the END intervention were excluded three and a half times less than when they were participating in mainstream education, without the END intervention (183 days exclusion without the END intervention and 50 days exclusion in the END intervention) (Ewen & Topping, 2012). Similar descriptions can be compared with Rose et al. (2018), based on the data provided. It was noted pupils were 3.5 times less likely to be excluded following the intervention being embedded within school policy for three years and 4.1 times less likely

after four years. However, no statistical significance was identified within either of these studies.

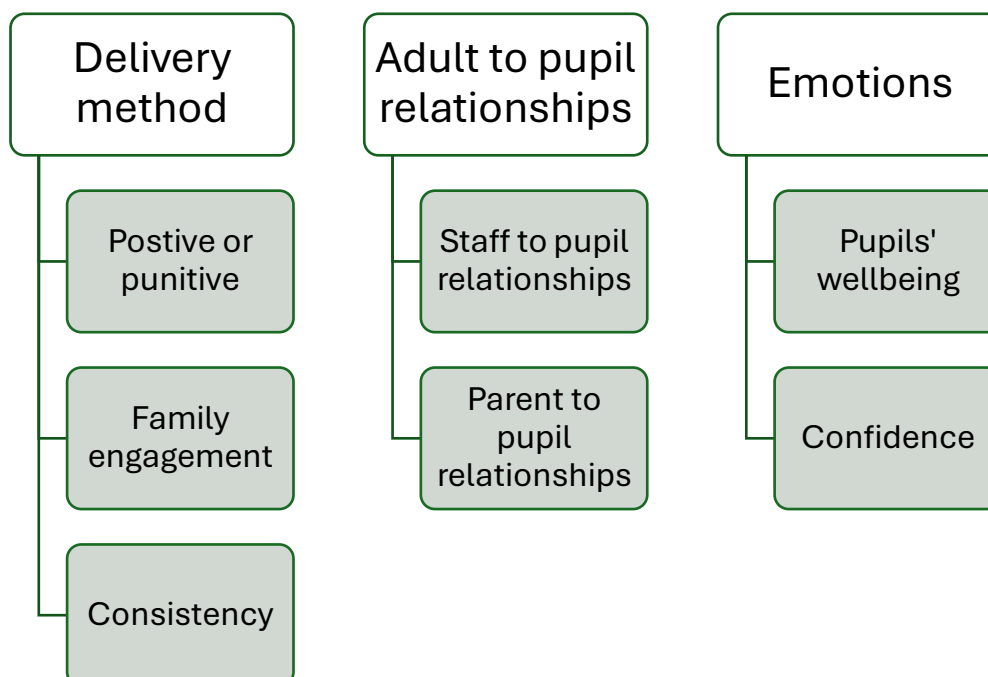
Waters (2014) reported a significant decrease in pupils' rates of exclusions from school. However, the descriptive data showed exclusions from school the year prior to the intervention as 2, with 1 self-exclusion, becoming 0 following the intervention. There were no indications as to how significance was determined within this study.

When synthesising across all intervention types, the interventions reduced exclusions, bar one. Across the five studies it would be difficult to suggest if there was any effect of the duration or training included in the interventions due to the nature of the varied exclusion data. As previously discussed, there are noticeable issues with the methodology and reporting of the findings within these studies which suggest these findings should be lightly considered. This is a finding within itself.

1.4.4 Thematic analysis of qualitative data

Four of the five studies were mixed methods and included a qualitative aspect to their research (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rose et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2018; Waters, 2014). The synthesis led to three overarching themes: adult to pupil relationships, delivery method and emotions with subthemes, as shown in Figure 3. These are discussed in turn below.

Figure 3: Themes identified across the qualitative data sets.



Delivery importance

All four studies discuss the need for the intervention to include positive experiences. One study suggests that the initial intervention may be 'punitive' by being a consequence of behaviour rather than a learning experience. However, upon their return to school, pupils should receive a positive experience within their reintegration meeting (Rose et al., 2018). The other studies expressed the importance of pupils gaining positive experiences within the interventions (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rose et al., 2015) with Waters (2014) further adding the importance of focusing on the positive behaviour the pupils demonstrate, rather than the negative.

The engagement of families within the intervention process appeared to be an aspect in three of the studies. Improved communication between families and education settings was suggested in the data (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rose et al., 2018; Waters, 2014). For example, these communications included discussions around recent changes in behaviour to allow for early intervention (Rose et al., 2018). Two of the studies discussed the added benefits that pupils experienced through their families being involved in the intervention, such as receiving their undivided attention away from siblings or home stresses (Waters, 2014) and receiving privileges at home for attending and engaging in education (Ewen & Topping, 2012).

Consistency of interventions was raised in all four studies. This included consistency of attendance and engagement to such interventions (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Waters, 2014) and using the intervention consistently (Rose et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2018).

Adult to pupil relationships

Across all four studies, staff to pupil relationships appeared to take a key role in the intervention. Rose et al. (2018) suggested that staff should ensure pupils feel welcomed upon their return to school whilst the other three studies described staff and pupils building positive relationships and developing an understanding of one another (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rose et al., 2015; Waters, 2014). Furthermore, two studies described how following the interventions, pupils and parents developed more positive relationships with each other, which they suggest positively impacted on behaviour within the education settings (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Waters, 2014).

Emotions

Pupils' sense of emotion was discussed in all four papers. These included pupils feeling valued and a sense of belonging following the intervention (Rose et al., 2018), emotions being recognised and validated (Rose et al., 2015) and a development of perceived positive emotions, such as improved mood (Ewen & Topping, 2012) and less anxiety (Waters, 2014). Two studies further discussed the improved confidence young people experienced during and following the interventions (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Waters, 2014). Furthermore, one study highlighted staff feeling more confident following the intervention (Rose et al., 2015).

Summary

The quantitative data suggests there are interventions which may support the reduction of school exclusions within the UK education system. However, due to the methodological issues that may occur within these studies, these might be considered with reasonable doubt. However, the thematic analysis of the qualitative data has highlighted themes which may identify aspects of interventions which could be important when considering what supports the reduction of suspensions within the UK education system.

1.5 Discussion

This review set out to find if there is any evidence to warrant the use of interventions to reduce rates of school exclusion in the UK. Four out of the five studies reported a reduction of suspensions following the interventions taking place (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rose et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2018; Waters, 2014). No studies located focused on the reduction of permanent exclusions. This suggests there may be interventions that can be implemented in educational environments that will support in the reduction of suspensions. Each of the interventions reporting decreases in suspensions also included additional qualitative data that explored the experiences of those involved.

Both studies conducted in secondary settings did not utilise the staff or resources within their settings. The interventions, which included staff within the educational setting, who know the children appeared to utilise systems around the child drawing on the existing relationships within the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). There may be benefits to this, including cost efficiency and ease of implementation. Further to this, there are concerns that funding issues are having a negative impact on schools by reducing the resources needed to decrease levels of exclusions (Cole et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2021).

The studies within this review highlight the key role policy makers have on the influence of practice within education. Four of the studies required some form of training to take place (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Obsuth et al., 2017; Rose et al., 2015; Waters, 2014) whilst the other required joint working between schools (Rose et al., 2018). Without the support of the key policymakers within these settings, these strategies would not have been implemented. Policy makers set the agendas which are required to embed the reduction of practices such as school exclusions (Gazeley et al., 2015), This is at a school and national level as political discourse impacts how the key policy makers in school, such as headteachers, may begin to see a change in culture and attitudes in school (Parsons, 2018; Thompson et al., 2021).

Students who experience inequalities outside of school, such as poverty, are more likely to experience school exclusions (Cole et al., 2019; Paget et al., 2018; Power & Taylor, 2020). Therefore, collaborating with families to reduce such factors has been suggested as an element of supporting in the prevention of suspensions (Paget et al., 2018). This review has suggested family engagement as a theme within the identified literature to support the reduction of exclusions. It is considered that parents may find it difficult to navigate school systems and feel judgement which may reduce their engagement with schools (Gazeley, 2012; Macleod et al., 2013). Other literature suggested that having clear expectations of parental involvement is necessary to facilitating effective engagement (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Therefore, it may be the explicit nature of what the parental engagement involved in the intervention that supported the parent and school relationship.

Within recent policy, the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan (Department for Education, 2023a) there are suggestions around the use of APs as early intervention to prevent permanent exclusion. An example of this was highlighted within the literature of this SLR (Ewen & Topping, 2012). However, it is important to identify that the AP within this review was within a Scottish authority. Therefore, the systems may vary to those outlined within the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (Department for Education, 2023a).

1.6 Limitations

Several methodological issues were noted during this review. Some studies were limited by very small sample sizes. For example, Waters (2014) and Rose et al. (2018) both drew conclusions from 12 participants. Similarly, the heterogeneity of the interventions and outcome measures made comparisons and drawing firm conclusions between the studies challenging.

Each study reported differences in data collection times and variations of measuring exclusions, meaning that there were differences in the comparisons being made. Gazeley et al. (2015) highlight the challenges when discussing rates of school exclusions as it may appear that one form of exclusion is reduced as another, such as informal exclusion increases. This may be problematic within the chosen studies due to the lack of comparison groups in some studies. Furthermore, the use of self-reported measure of exclusions were drawn upon within Obsuth et al. (2017) alongside database measures. In other literature, pupils were more likely to report exclusions than their parents. This was due to the pupils possibly identifying informal exclusions alongside formal suspensions and permanent exclusions (Paget et al., 2018).

Five studies were identified across the literature within the UK. Previous systematic literature reviews, with similar focus at an international level (Mielke & Farrington, 2021; Valdebenito et al., 2019) included many more papers. This highlights a gap in the literature as the number of school exclusions in the UK continues to rise, yet there is a lack of UK based research to explore what may support in reducing these numbers.

1.7 Conclusions

This review has illustrated a range of interventions that may support the reduction of suspensions from schools. These tend to focus on relationships and developing positive experiences through family engagement. It is possible that there are other practices that are in place to support the reduction of exclusions that have not been researched or have been conceptualised differently, and therefore were not identified by this literature search. What has been outlined in this paper can only be considered a 'snapshot' of what may be happening in the field.

Chapter two: Bridging document

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves to link the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) (Chapter 1) and the empirical research (Chapter 3). I will explore the research focus, my personal motivations and those linking to practice. From this I will discuss the philosophical underpinnings, methodology and further ethical considerations. The area of focus has remained broadly the same for both pieces of work – supporting the reduction of suspensions and permanent exclusions.

2.2 Developing the research focus

2.2.1 Why was this area chosen for the SLR?

My initial interest in the research area of suspensions and permanent exclusions arose from my earlier experiences as a teacher within mainstream schools and alternative provision. Whilst working with pupils who experienced school exclusions, I heard many anecdotal stories about their experiences. Drawing on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005), I wondered how the interacting systems around a pupil may influence the situation. Furthermore, there were multiple examples of experiences where exclusion appeared to be a gateway to more serious incidents, such as Cross County Lines. This is where children are exploited by adults to move illegal substances from one area to another (National Crime Agency, 2018). This resulted in my wondering as to whether schools considered where the pupil they excluded, were being excluded to.

The stories from the pupils I worked with as a teacher, echoed in my work as I moved into the Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) role. A large amount of my early case work would be identified as supporting pupils with previous suspensions or who staff described as at risk of permanent exclusions. Schools, families and other agencies have often raised the question, “What works?” Many schools were already using schemes that required payments, subscriptions or staff training with the aim of reducing exclusionary behaviours. The aim of the SLR thus focused on the exploration of education-based interventions that may be used to reduce school exclusions. However, I was aware that the approach of a SLR did not allow for an in-depth exploration of the narratives surrounding these interventions.

My decision to research this topic area was also influenced by the wider context. The current Statutory guidance on Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions was first published by the Department of Education in 2012 with updates following (Department for Education, 2023b).

This was then followed by the Statutory guidance for Behaviour in schools: advice for headteachers and school staff in 2013 and again since updated (Department for Education, 2024). Since the original publications, school exclusions have steadily increased in England, especially in secondary schools. During 2022 and 2023, the time this thesis was completed, numerous government documents were released with updated guidance for schools (Department for Education, 2023a, 2023b, 2024) suggesting its relevance at a national level. Additionally, the Local Authority (LA) that I am working in, has placed reducing and preventing exclusions high on their agenda.

2.2.2 Developing my empirical research question.

The SLR provided insight into possible gaps that are currently placed within the literature. These and how they influenced my empirical research will be discussed in this section.

The findings from the SLR suggested there may be some evidence that interventions may reduce suspensions within the education context. However, these findings came from few and proposed low quality studies. This reflects the little research that was available in the UK, particularly within UK secondary schools. Therefore, it may be suggested to be important that future research considers an understanding of what is currently happening and working well in UK secondary schools.

Additionally, some studies spoke with the staff members or pupils about their views on the intervention (Rose et al., 2015; Topping & Lauchlan, 2013; Waters, 2014), but not always senior leaders, such as headteachers. Headteachers are the main decision makers regarding school exclusions (Department for Education, 2023b). One study included the views of stakeholders such as key workers and teachers (Topping & Lauchlan, 2013), which led me to wondering what the views are of other stakeholders who may have a role or influence in the support that is provided by a LA.

Although not stipulated in the inclusion and exclusion criteria, four of the studies included were mixed method approaches. The qualitative data analysis in the SLR suggested the themes: delivery of the intervention, adult to pupil relationships and emotions as features of interventions. These elements may be considered aspects of the school environment, culture and ethos. However, these were not explored in detail due to the nature of the methods in the studies. Although many of the studies were mixed methods approaches, it did not seem that the studies included rich data about the experiences of the participants.

The research question to be explored in the empirical research is:

How do educational professionals, within one Local Authority, report the experience of supporting inclusion in secondary settings to reduce school exclusion?

The decision to focus on how to support inclusion, rather than solely reduce exclusion was developed through my values and discussions with my supervisor. At this point, I may suggest the features of inclusive education. I have chosen to use the definitions outlined by (Daniels et al., 2022). Inclusive education concerns all pupils in school, it focuses on participation and achievement. Inclusion is seen as linked with exclusion, whilst being a never-ending process. Although, I am aware of my assumption that schools aim for inclusion, there continues to be many in education who remain resistant to pupils with special needs being educated in mainstream schools (Daniels et al., 2022), which may not relate to a universal aim for inclusion.

To summarise, the focus of the empirical research aims to develop a rich picture of the experiences of headteachers, local authority managers and educational psychologists in establishing how to support secondary schools, in supporting pupils, to be more inclusive and reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions.

2.3 My philosophical research journey

Throughout this research, I have considered myself to be on a journey of exploring my philosophical stance. At times, this has felt challenging, particularly as philosophical positions may be interpreted differently by different individuals (Willig, 2013) and this is reflected across the literature. This section aims to explain my positioning and how it may have influenced the current piece of research.

As a practitioner in my TEP role, I base my practice on hearing the stories and experiences of others. The values of the researcher inspire the research topic and processes chosen within the investigation (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Therefore, there are clear links between my values in practice and in research.

Ontology and epistemology

Ontology is described as the nature of reality or being (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Willig, 2013). The planning and conducting of this research was underpinned by a pragmatic stance as a researcher. There have been discussions and debates about the definition and application of

pragmatism in research (Biesta, 2010; Briggs, 2019b; Mortari, 2015). Therefore, based on my interpretation from the literature, I will define pragmatism as there being no consistent truths. Experiences are based on action and the results of these actions provide individuals with a sense of truth and reality (Biesta, 2010; Briggs, 2019b). Any statement of truth may be subject to the judgement or beliefs of others promoting a subjective view. Life and knowledge are based on context, emotions and social experiences (Morgan, 2014). Therefore, our sense of truth and reality changes through experiences and interactions with others.

Epistemology is considered as theories about how that knowledge is constructed (Braun and Clarke, 2022a) and the questions of 'what is?' (Willig, 2013). When considering the 'problem' within this research area, it may be described as suspensions and permanent exclusions. There are different interpretations on the purpose of suspensions and permanent exclusions, whether these should be reduced and what may support in the reduction, based upon individual stances and experiences. School exclusions are considered to be multifaceted culturally and historically as a process or intervention (Daniels et al., 2022). Whilst these are considered a part of the UK education system, they do not exist in other cultures. Thus, presenting a socio-cultural view of the world which may be considered objective within the UK context.

In accordance with this epistemological view, I wished not to rule out any research based on specific world views, which led to the inclusion of mixed method studies. The use of interventions and the approaches described in the SLR may lean more towards an exploration of the truth of how to reduce school exclusions. Although the research suggests these interventions may or may not work, I continue to hold my critiques that we must be aware of the context and influences that take place within each piece of research. The quantitative data tells us only of changes that have taken place, but not of the experiences taking place alongside these changes. Additionally, I made subjective decisions throughout the SLR process. This included defining my inclusion criteria, the application of this and my interpretation of the qualitative data during analysis. These decisions were shaped by my own understandings and perspectives. Therefore, I believe it is not possible to be an objective researcher (Mortari, 2015).

Pragmatist epistemology is focused on actions and the effects on future outcomes (Morgan, 2014). Therefore, I wanted my research to be useful for practice and education. Pragmatism suggests there is not a dichotomy between research and practice (Briggs, 2019b).

Therefore, the empirical research draws upon a method that relates to my practice, to support my own development of skills and knowledge.

When approaching my empirical research, narrative theory was drawn upon to explore participants' experiences. Within practice, I often draw upon narrative theory. Therefore, I needed to ensure that I was clear of the distinctions and similarities of using narrative theory in practice and using it for research purposes. Firstly, as in narrative practice, the discussion was based around an initiative (White, 1990). Within practice, this initiative is generally raised by the other person. However, within research, I arrived with a topic that I wished to discuss. As participants agreed to be involved in the research, there is an assumption this may be an area of interest to them. Furthermore, within narrative approaches in practice, there are discussions of thin stories and thick stories, sometimes focusing on events that lie outside the problematic story line (Combs & Freedman, 2012). There were not huge differences between this in practice, but I was aware this would be a one-off meeting that did not allow for multiple story lines to be explored.

To align with my philosophical positioning, I chose not to use the often-used terminology of 'at risk pupils' due to the typification that occurs when categorising into such terms (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Due to the nature of school exclusion, I do not believe we can categorise pupils into being 'at risk' as there are numerous trends which highlight higher exclusion rates across context and time, yet within this it is not clear as to the reasons why these pupils are more 'at risk' than others (Graham et al., 2019). This is not ignoring the trends as there are children of certain groups who are more likely to be excluded (Timpson, 2019). Instead, it is arguing that it is not these characteristics in isolation which make a pupil 'at risk'. Use of such terminology perpetuates the narratives around the typification. Therefore, I choose to use 'may be excluded'. This is not determining any pre-disposed characteristics which determine a child could be excluded, thus externalising the problem from the pupil (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

The aim of this research is to offer experiences to inform policy and practice. I value people's unique experiences and perspectives on their own lives, and how this can influence positive change. This draws upon a subjective view of reality that was constructed by the participants and me, as the researcher.

2.4 Methodology

Methodology describes the approach and decisions of a research area reflecting the researcher's philosophical positioning (Willig, 2013). In line with the research purpose and paradigm as discussed previously, I chose a qualitative methodology.

2.4.1 Building narratives

Semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate method as they would enable people to speak freely, enabling a focus on each participant's story whilst free from judgement of others in a group. Semi-structured interviews can be used to provide rich and in-depth data about a participants' perspectives and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The decision was made to conduct interviews rather than focus groups due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Due to the nature of the interviews, as a researcher I should acknowledge that the data generated is co-created, as the participants choose to share their narrative in relation to the context of talking with myself, as part of research (McAlpine, 2016; Walther & Carey, 2009). Moreover, this method would allow me to be reactive with my questioning, responding to the individuals' responses.

I decided to interview headteachers, local authority managers and educational psychologists. I believed this range of participants were all involved in the inclusion and exclusion process, either through making the decision or offering support for schools. The interviews would be conducted at a place of preference to the participant, with the options as their place of work (school or council office building) or via video calling technology. This would ensure the environment is familiar to the participant. Also, participants would be provided with arrangement options to practically suit their schedules.

2.4.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was chosen as the most appropriate method to use based upon the research question, aims and position as a researcher. Braun and Clarke (2022a) suggest that in research it is best to have an argument for why you choose to use a method, rather than considering why you did not choose another. Although, I did reflect upon a range of analysis strategies, this section will consider why I chose RTA, rather than why I did not choose other methods, such as Grounded Theory or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Within RTA, themes are produced by the researcher following systematic analytic engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Interpretation is a part of RTA due to the

suggestion that separation of semantic and latent analysis in qualitative research is ambiguous (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). My analysis involved both semantic and latent methods by focusing on the stories shared by participants along with interpreting the underlying meaning. Therefore, if someone else were to analyse the data, or if I was to analyse at another point in time, there may be different themes interpreted. This fits with my philosophical underpinnings.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Along with gaining ethical approval from Newcastle University Ethics committee, consideration was taken to work in accordance with the ethical recommendations outlined by the British Psychological Society (British Psychological Society, 2021a; 2021b). These include issues such as ensuring the informed consent of all participants, minimising risk of harm and data protection regulations. Some further ethical considerations will be discussed below.

2.5.1 Informed consent

Informed consent was gained during the interview process. Upon invitation to participate, information sheets detailing participants' involvement were shared, via email and in person (Appendix 2). Then written consent was gained prior to interview (Appendix 3). At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked that they had read the information sheet, and any further questions were answered. This is especially useful when considering whether the participant is fully informed (Willig, 2013). I aimed to be transparent ensuring that participants were aware their involvement was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw up until the point of analysis. Participants were provided with my contact details and those of my supervisors, should they have any further questions.

2.5.2 Confidentiality

As the participants were all from one LA, I was asked on numerous occasions whether the interviews would be anonymous and confidential. I shared what would happen with the data and that any identifiable information, such as specific job roles, school names or locations would be removed. Confidentiality can become an ethical challenge when using open ended approaches, such as those within the interviews (Willig, 2013). Whilst completing the research, I established that some schools use specific names for activities in their schools which may result in them being more identifiable than others. Therefore, care was taken to ensure that in the transcriptions generic terminology was used for some services or activities that may have identifiable names.

2.5.3 Power

Within the research, I was conscious that I was interviewing people who may be considered to have power over the decisions made for or about other people. Within a structuralist society, these expectations and discourses are reflected and sustained in the systems the participants are a part of (Walther & Carey, 2009). Within each interview, that person holds power of what they are choosing to share about their own experiences (Combs & Freedman, 2012). This includes what they chose to share about the pupils who have experienced school exclusion. Power is shared through the discourses people share, with more privileged people having more influence (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Therefore, I was mindful that I was interviewing those who may be considered to have privilege about those who are less privileged.

2.6 Summary

This chapter aimed to provide a bridge between chapters one and three. I have sought to describe my research journey. This included the development of the research question from the research topic, and the philosophical underpinnings of this. Some of the ethical considerations have also been discussed. Chapter three will outline the empirical research.

Chapter three: How do educational professionals, within one Local Authority, report the experience of supporting inclusion in secondary settings to reduce school exclusion?

Abstract

Aim: This empirical research aimed to develop an understanding of educational professionals' experiences of supporting schools and pupils to be inclusive and to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions. The research was undertaken in one Local Authority (LA) in the North of England.

Rationale: The number of pupils permanently excluded from school continues to increase within England (Department for Education, 2023c). Headteachers are the key to decisions about whether to execute a permanent exclusion (Department for Education, 2023b), whilst LA Managers and Educational Psychologists (EPs) play a role in supporting schools when pupils may be excluded from school. This research provides further insights into the experiences and perspectives of professionals who support in this area.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with headteachers, service managers and EPs in the LA. The data was analysed through reflexive thematic analysis to develop an understanding of the professionals' experiences of how they have supported inclusion to reduce school exclusions.

Limitations: Limitations of this study included that it was completed in one LA and is based on the participants experiences. Therefore, generalisability is not claimed within this research.

Conclusions: Key themes from the research suggest that within the professionals' experiences developing safe school cultures, holistic family support, understanding and responding to the pupils and equitable LA processes contribute to inclusion of pupils who might otherwise be excluded from school.

Key words: school, exclusion, experience, educational psychology, headteacher, suspension

This paper has been prepared for publication within the European Journal of Special Needs Education.

3.1 Introduction

This section considers some of the relevant background literature relating to suspensions and permanent exclusions from school. These will be referred to as school exclusions throughout this paper unless specifically identified. The current context of school exclusions is discussed in this section, including some consideration of the experiences of those involved in exclusions. The rationale for the empirical study is then presented.

3.1.1 School exclusions

This section will briefly outline the definitions of permanent exclusions and suspensions. Permanent exclusion is when a young person is no longer allowed to attend a school (Department for Education, 2023b). Suspension is the term used by the Department for Education to describe the exclusion of a pupil from school for a period of up to five days (Department for Education, 2023b). Pupils who receive multiple suspensions are more likely to go on to receive a permanent exclusion (Joseph & Crenna-Jennings, 2024). The decision to exclude can only be made by the headteacher (Department for Education, 2023b). This should only occur once other opportunities for support have been exhausted. This includes the use of inclusive practices to support the pupil in their mainstream setting. Inclusive practice refers to the policies and interventions in school that will help to reduce exclusions (Cole et al., 2019).

Although this research focuses on exclusions in terms of suspensions and permanent exclusions, there are other forms of less formal exclusions, such as off-rolling, persistent absence and unofficial school moves (Black, 2022; Martin-Denham, 2021). The data is not collected as systematically for these forms of exclusions, meaning it is not clear the total number of pupils, who are in some form or other, excluded. There are suggestions of considerable underestimations of official records due to the various forms of illegal exclusions taking place (Daniels et al., 2022; Gazeley et al., 2015; Power & Taylor, 2020).

3.1.2 Context of school exclusions in England

Since the update to the statutory school exclusion guidance in 2017 (Department for Education, 2023b) and the introduction of the Behaviour and Discipline in school guidance in 2013, since updated (Department for Education, 2024) there has been a change in political discourse (Thompson et al., 2021). It is suggested that increases in the marketisation of schools, publication of league tables and emphasis on inspections means that schools are now more selective about the pupils they enrol, or keep on roll (Slee, 2013). Since this

research by Slee (2013) there have been further increases of academisation which is suggested to promote marketisation in the education system (Thompson, 2020).

Over the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a decrease in permanent exclusions and suspensions in English secondary schools with little change for primary schools (Black, 2022). Following the initial return to school, it appeared these numbers were still lower than pre-pandemic numbers, possibly suggesting something had changed to reduce school exclusions. However, this has now begun to increase again but has not yet reached pre-pandemic rates (Department for Education, 2023c).

3.1.3 Experiences of school exclusions

School exclusion is a consequence of disadvantage and gives rise to inequalities both social and economic (Power & Taylor, 2020). It is well documented that there are over-represented groups within the school exclusion data (Graham et al., 2019; Malcolm, 2018; Timpson, 2019). Exclusion from school is associated with a range of negative long-term outcomes, such as poorer academic outcomes (Joseph & Crenna-Jennings, 2024), becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) (Timpson, 2019) and mental health difficulties (Parker et al., 2015). Throughout the exclusion process, pupils have been found to develop a sense of mistrust and feelings of rejection from their mainstream schools (Caslin, 2021). Pupils described the immediate impact following school exclusion, to include social exclusion, with pupils developing a sense of isolation from their peers (Murphy, 2022).

Some pupils have described exclusion as ineffective in changing behaviours, considering the time away from school as an opportunity to relax (Murphy, 2022). However, other pupils experienced frustration at missing school (Caslin, 2021). When exploring pupils' experiences of what may have prevented their permanent exclusion, many children shared they would have benefited from more in class support (Martin-Denham, 2020). However, in the same research, caregivers considered flexibility in response to pupil behaviour as beneficial. Pupils recognised there were differences in approaches which may have impacted their exclusion journey (Farouk, 2017). For example, pupils recognised changes to their behaviour when they were expected to conform to systems rather than when they were encouraged to question and be critical.

However, there appears to be differing experiences for those working in school. Teaching staff in one study believed exclusion may offer additional support for the pupil (Feingold & Rowley, 2022) whilst other staff considered exclusion as necessary due to some pupils not

being able to succeed in mainstream schools (Caslin, 2021). Secondary school headteachers within research by Martin-Denham (2021), suggested that exclusionary practices were necessary to prevent negative behaviours. There appear to be differences in how pupils view their experiences of exclusions, compared to the experiences of staff supporting these pupils.

3.1.4 Secondary schools

There are differences in exclusion rates across primary and secondary schools with the highest occurrence of permanent exclusions happening over Years 9 and 10 (Malcolm, 2018). There are some possible suggestions that these relate to the culture differences between primary and secondary schools, with primary schools considered to use a more caring approach (Farouk, 2017). However, other literature considers whether it is related to the attendance or behaviour of the pupils in the different school stages (Graham et al., 2019).

3.2.5 Rationale

This research aimed to gain understanding of how schools might be more inclusive and, thereby, reduce the rate of exclusion. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) in Chapter 1 supported the context for this empirical research. The findings suggested there are interventions that may support the reduction of school exclusions in education settings. The current research sought to offer a qualitative exploration into the experiences of professionals who may be included in the exclusion process. This included three key stakeholders' views: LA Children's Directorate managerial staff (working across inclusion, SEND and virtual school teams), Educational Psychologists (EPs) and Headteachers. This research seeks to offer an understanding of professionals' experiences in supporting inclusion, to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions within secondary schools. The term support is considered in the broadest sense. There are no limitations to the type of support given (e.g. interventions, academic, social or emotional).

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Research context

Participants were recruited from one Local Authority (LA) in the North of England. EPs were recruited by advertising within the LA, via email and attendance within the team meeting. From this, four EPs were recruited. One EP participated in a pilot interview whilst three were interviewed as part of the dataset.

LA managers were all heads of services within the Children and Education Directorate. These were recruited via email invitations. Five staff members were invited based on their role title and involvement in providing advice and support to schools regarding pupils requiring additional support. Three agreed to interview. They held management roles across services or teams that were involved in providing advice and support to schools within the SEND and Inclusion Services, including for pupils who may experience suspensions and permanent exclusion.

Headteachers were recruited by advertising the research within LA meetings, including the fair access panel where all secondary school headteachers (18 in total) within the LA are expected to attend to discuss movement of pupils between schools in cases such as exclusion and managed moves. Six headteachers were emailed directly based on their contact information being available online, with four agreeing to participate. From this, one interview was arranged. Another two headteachers were contacted via X, an online social media platform, from this one replied and an interview arranged.

In total, three EPs, three LA managers and two headteachers were interviewed. The interviews were designed to capture varied accounts of experiences and future hopes of supporting pupils across various levels, such as individual and systemic.

3.3.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by Newcastle University Ethics Committee. The research complies with British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2021a; 2021b). Verbal and written consent was gained from the participants. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 2) and were offered the opportunity to ask questions at the start of the interview and again at the end. To ensure anonymity and appropriate data management all transcriptions and data analysis were completed by me. Data was stored on secure university software and audio recordings were deleted following completion of data analysis.

3.3.3 Generation of narratives

Narrative theory provided the theoretical framework that guided my approach. Narrative theory is influenced by Bruner (1986) who considered humans give meaning to their lives by organising experiences of events as narratives over time. These narratives are self-constructed, adapted by others and shaped by culture. For Bruner (1986), narrative allows for the exploration of meaning within the context which shapes a person's reality and sense

of identity. Each person has multiple positions and the discourses around these positions may impact a person's values and identity (Monk et al., 1997).

Narratives were generated through narrative conversations. Each participant took part in one narrative discussion that ranged between 30 minutes and 50 minutes in length. The initial pre-prepared question was the same for LA managers and EPs with some slight word changing for headteachers to be relevant to their role as shown below:

LA managers and EPs: *Can you tell me about your experiences of supporting secondary schools to be inclusive with the aims of reducing suspensions and permanent exclusions?*

Headteachers: *Can you tell me your experiences of supporting inclusion with the aim of reducing suspensions and permanent exclusions?*

There were no subsequent structured questions. The discussions and narratives were co-constructed between me and the participant. This approach is informed by principles used in narrative therapy (Morgan, 2000). It was proposed by Bateson (2000) that learning occurs through 'news of difference' in which to acquire new knowledge a person must engage in a comparison of one set of events and another. Therefore, within this research, there is an element of my own learning within the data as I ask questions based on the narratives shared within the interviews. Discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were used in the analysis.

3.3.4 Data analysis

Data were analysed using a process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). RTA offers opportunities to develop, analyse and interpret patterns across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Each group of participants was coded separately, then themed together. All data sets were viewed as equally valid and important. Table 5 presents the phases of analysis which were informed by Braun and Clarke (2022a). This approach acknowledges the active role of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The theoretical flexibility of RTA meant that it allowed for further exploration of my own philosophical underpinnings whilst completing the research.

Table 5: Phases of Reflective Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

| Phase | Process | Description of the process |
|---------|----------------------------------|--|
| Phase 1 | Familiarisation with the dataset | <p>In this phase, I read and re-read the transcribed data to become immersed with its content. I made notes on my observations and used 10 questions identified by Braun and Clark to support my reflection and familiarisation in relation to each data item and the entire dataset (See Appendix 4). Alongside this, I developed hand drawn mind maps of the key aspects of each dataset to highlight my initial thoughts.</p> |
| Phase 2 | Coding | <p>This phase involved generating codes. These captured features of the text which may be relevant to address the research question. I used electronic and hard copies at this phase. The change between the two medias prompted reflections and new interpretations. This phase was completed twice for each dataset to encourage reflexivity.</p> |
| Phase 3 | Generating initial themes | <p>I examined the codes and collated data to begin to develop patterns of meaning. At this point, I returned to the dataset to ensure the codes and themes appeared representative of the transcribed data. This was an iterative process where the initial themes evolved based upon my return to the dataset. It was at this point I recognised the three groupings had patterns of similar themes, so I collated the three groups (EPs, LA managers and headteachers) as one.</p> |
| Phase 4 | Developing and reviewing themes | <p>This phase involved checking the themes against the coded data and the entire dataset to ensure they tell a story representative of the data and address the research question. Once I returned to the whole dataset, I believed my themes to be representative based on my interpretations. This also included generating a thematic map of the analysis.</p> |

| Phase | Process | Description of the process |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Phase 5 | Refining, defining and naming themes | During this phase, I developed a description of each theme and considered the 'story' of each. This also included generating clear definitions and names for each theme. At this point I realised two themes were similar, so I returned to Phase 4 to consider how these could be collapsed to one theme. |
| Phase 6 | Writing up | The final phase involved weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts. This was then contextualised in relation to existing literature. |

Although this process is designed in phases, an iterative approach is taken. Phases one to five were an inductive process, as I developed and refined to the best representation of my own interpretation from the dataset. As a researcher, I acknowledge that I bring my own experiences, knowledge, values and bias which may influence my interpretation and generation of codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Therefore, I was conscious to return to the data repeatedly to ensure it was my interpretation based on participants' data.

To summarise, this section has explained the method used within this piece of research. The next section will consider the themes I have interpreted within the dataset.

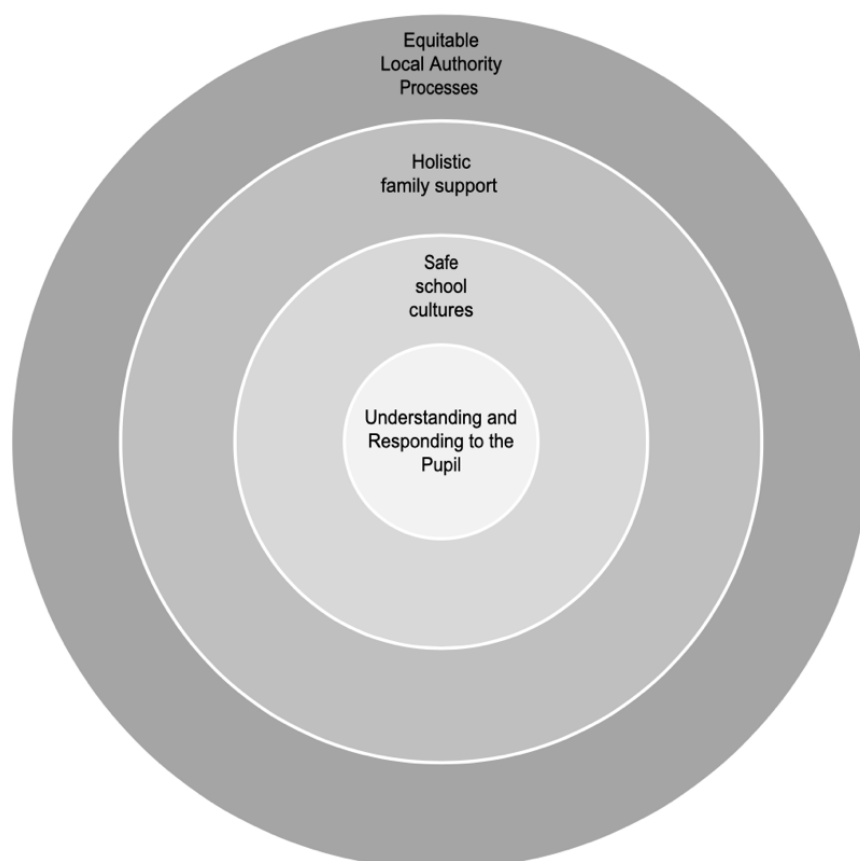
3.4 Analysis and discussion

Initially, I considered generating themes within the three separate participant groups to recognise similarities and differences amongst the professional groups. However, when some initial themes were explored, it appeared that these were similar across the groupings. Therefore, following discussions with my supervisors I grouped the participants together to create one shared understanding of the ideas linked to the research question. This analysis recognises the commonalities across the different professional groups.

This section will outline the themes explored across the EP, LA manager and headteachers' data. There were four themes identified within this piece of research as portrayed in

Figure 4.

Figure 4: Participants experiences of supporting inclusion to reduce school exclusion.



3.4.1 Understanding and responding to the pupil

The relationship between school staff and pupils is a well-researched topic area (Anyon et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2019; Ruttledge, 2022). Within this research, participants across all professional groups recognised that building relationships with pupils is important in supporting them to feel included in the school environment. This included establishing a pupil's interest and knowing them as highlighted by LA Manager 1:

Staff will just shout on a walkie talkie for a child to be removed. That's easier than actually finding out what makes that child tick, a bit of personal stuff about them and building a relationship with them.

The relationships between school staff and pupils has been suggested to support a pupil's belonging in the setting, which in turn encourages positive attitudes, behaviour and engagement (Graham et al., 2019). Participants spoke of staff getting to know about pupils' interests outside the school setting and sharing pieces of personal information to build those relationships. This links with previous literature as teachers speak of the importance of being relatable and pupils feeling genuinely cared for (Dean & Gibbs, 2023).

By getting to know the pupil, participants understood that teachers could be more able to identify the purpose of the behaviour and respond to this appropriately as demonstrated by LA Manager 3:

You're dealing invariable with children whose needs have not been identified or not identified early enough or mis-identified.

Formal data suggests that the likelihood of being excluded is associated with unmet special educational need (SEN) or disability (Joseph & Crenna-Jennings, 2024). There may sometimes be failures in looking for underlying causes of the behaviour demonstrated (Graham et al., 2019) which is recognised in this research. Although, Feingold and Rowley (2022) suggest there are various reasons a pupil may present with behaviours that result in permanent exclusions, sometimes there are reasons that are not identified or clearly understood. Participants across all three groups recognised that staff may sometimes respond to the presenting behaviour, rather than considering the reasons for the behaviour. In conversations with pupils previously excluded from school, it was highlighted that many experienced learning needs, traumatic events and/ or bullying, prior to the events resulting in exclusion (Murphy, 2022). In the experiences of some participants such as EP 2, it was implied these needs are not always clear at the time of behaviour being presented:

All my years being an EP, I have not met one young person, not one, that threw a chair at someone because they fancied doing it. There is always something behind it.

In the data, EPs and LA Service managers suggested the behaviour was often perceived by school staff as being a decision or choice the pupil had made rather than a response to a situation or underlying need. Within literature, pupils further explained that teachers misunderstood these behaviours resulting in their belief that the teacher disliked them (Murphy, 2022). This was echoed in research exploring parental view of exclusions (Parker et al., 2016). In this research, participants considered how an individual approach needed to be taken when responding to pupils. Headteacher 2 recognised that in their experience it was important to respond to the individual child based on what they need rather than using consistent approaches for all:

Equality is not fair, because we're all different. So we've focused very much on equity. And if we get equity right, you strive for equality, but we focus on equity, we treat everyone differently. We treat adults differently. We treat our schools differently to each other. We treat our kids differently to each other because our kids all need different things because they are all different.

This links with the literature as participants discussed that through building positive relationships with young people, teachers can develop an awareness of how to respond to them (Dean & Gibbs, 2023). It is considered that some schools currently aim for equality for pupils. However, it is reflected that those schools that consider how to respond to pupils based on their individual needs, taking a more equitable approach to support are more inclusive. Many teachers aim to be fair when applying school rules or consequences, yet this can inadvertently exacerbate behaviours, particularly for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Emerson, 2016). The pressures experienced in the results focused curriculum means there is an emphasis on teaching in a particular style (Kulz, 2019). They suggest that by reducing curriculum pressures, pupils would be able to be taught in ways that meet their needs, resulting in less behaviours that may end in exclusion (Kulz, 2019). The participants in this research considered support should be provided to pupils based on their individual differences and needs, which are understood by learning about the pupil.

3.4.2 Creating safe school cultures

This theme focused on participants experiencing aspects of the school environment that supported pupils and staff to feel a sense of physical and psychological safety. Within a literature review, Graham et al. (2019) highlighted four aspects of whole school systems and culture that might influence the rate of exclusion. Linked to this research, these included a strong pastoral support system to address pupils' learning and emotional needs, having a whole school approach that staff can follow to support pupils who may be excluded, a co-ordinated behaviour policy to manage behaviour and a whole school approach to minimise bullying. Whole school approaches were considered important to all participants to support the sense of safety and belonging in school as exemplified by Headteacher 2:

We have a pastoral system, I guess it's a team, a teamwork approach to school culture... The group stays together for the five years that they're at school... so they're like a sort of family. Basically, it's like a family at school, in school.

Such systems are agreed by school leaders and actioned by staff embedding inclusion into the school ethos (Cole et al., 2019). The use of whole school approaches is suggested to

take a reflective and proactive approach to developing a positive environment and ethos across school rather than taking a reactive response to an individual pupil (Ruttledge, 2022). Within this research, the idea of embedding practice and approaches that include all staff members, including governors was considered best practice. The literature highlights how such whole school approaches support all pupils, thus promoting inclusive values that permeate policy and filter into classroom practice (Coleman, 2015). LA Manager 2 likened the systems to a *culture*, which suggests that in their experiences, the support goes beyond policies and procedures:

Let's change our culture. You've actually got to change the culture of staff rooms, schools and through offering supervision which I think schools absolutely one million percent need.

LA Manager 2 appears to suggest that the support goes beyond what is seen in the classroom and relates to staff's values, language and experiences. This was relevant across other participants' experiences. Research by Daniels et al. (2023) proposed that professionals may know there are concerns about a pupil's behaviour, but it is unclear the extent the school culture exacerbates or reduces behaviours. These findings were echoed by parents, who considered that the ethos of the school, such as routine, disciplinary approach and focus of outcomes impacted how well their child was supported (Parker et al., 2016). In this research, participants across all groups identified staff wellbeing and resilience as all supporting in developing a positive school culture.

Most participants acknowledged the pressures and expectations placed on staff and the impact this has on staff wellbeing, resulting in a negative impact for the pupils they support. In the literature, these pressures are described as the focus on academic achievement and league tables (Kulz, 2019), poor staffing and retention rates (Thompson et al., 2021), and reduced funding and resources (Thompson, 2020). The school ethos is considered a factor as to how staff and pupils are supported during times of stress (Ruttledge, 2022). Thus implying that staff wellbeing and school ethos are interlinked, suggesting that if staff wellbeing is low, school ethos may be less supportive. LA Manager 2 recognises this when considering how staff are supported to support themselves:

... it is being totally aware of the pressures that are in schools and knowing if you are a stressed adult, because your role brings stresses. You cannot sooth and support a child who's stressed because you bring your own stress into that. A dysregulated adult can't regulate a dysregulated child.

Professionals across all groups spoke about the need to support staff wellbeing, with reasons for this relating to increasing staff retention and offering consistency for pupils. The

literature suggests there are more teachers leaving the profession than being recruited (Thompson et al., 2021). Links have previously been suggested that teachers who are experiencing low levels of well-being are more likely to request the exclusion of a pupil (Silver & Zinsser, 2020). However, this is the request for exclusion, not the actual exclusion rates. All participants spoke about the pressure of time, including within the curriculum and in terms of having time to reflect on what has happened in the classroom.

Participants shared their experiences that staff who feel empowered and equipped with skills or knowledge have more autonomy to support pupils as exemplified by EP 2:

I think for one, the settings that don't have as many exclusions or suspensions allow the practitioners to use that professional opinion when supporting children around the behaviour. Not having someone breathing down their neck saying, why haven't you excluded him, he threw a chair at you?

This may be referred to as teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy rates have previously linked with exclusion rates (Dean & Gibbs, 2023; Gibbs & Powell, 2012). It is suggested efficacy beliefs exist when people believe they know what to do to achieve a certain outcome. Subsequently, if staff believe they can manage behaviour effectively, incidence of perceived difficult behaviour may decline and consequently there may be lower rates of exclusion. However, literature suggests staff believe they are unable to manage behaviours leading to exclusions due to the lack of funding and resources of services that provide specialist knowledge and training (Feingold & Rowley, 2022). Therefore, the participants in this research highlight experiences of staff feeling low sense of well-being and self-efficacy which may link to how they view their abilities to support pupils who may be excluded.

3.4.3 Holistic family support

Participants' narratives included stories where schools, parents and professionals were able to engage, build relationships and focus on the best interests of the pupil. The experiences in this research suggested there are instances of when this has worked positively but they also described this as a hope for the future. EP 3 recognised that parents do not always feel heard:

Take time to maintain those relationships and that engagement to see that they all want the best for the child and the parents are being listened to, because I think lots of times they might feel like they're banging their head against a bit of a brick wall.

As suggested by Todd (2007), inclusion cannot be considered without collaboration with pupils and their parents. The importance of parent to school relationships has been discussed multiple times within the literature (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Murphy, 2022; Parker et al., 2016). However, Gazeley (2012) suggests that schools dictate the relationship that is held between the parents and schools. EPs and LA managers recognised the role that external professionals can take in supporting the facilitation of meetings that include parents, schools and other professionals. All professional groups considered the importance of parents being involved in these conversations, but it may be that headteachers did not place as much emphasis on the emotional support for parents compared to the other groups. Having external facilitation was considered a positive as there may be situations where parents are blamed for the pupils' behaviour that could result in exclusion (Gazeley, 2012; Macleod et al., 2013; Parker et al., 2016). This was recognised by Headteacher 1 who places the emphasis on the family, rather than the school:

There should be some intensive, intensive work done with those families and the families need to understand that they are liable as well. Not, it's the school making the decision. They're liable.

Parents and schools as a collaboration was discussed by most of the participants across the professional groupings, but in their experiences, this did not always happen due to a variety of factors. Similarly, the literature suggests blame is often linked to the lack of communication of expectations and requirements for each party (Parker et al., 2016). In research by Macleod et al. (2013), parents were acknowledged to have their child's best interests at heart, but they may not be able to provide what their child needs, including advocacy, because of their own needs and circumstances. These needs may relate to other wider situations which result in pupils being underprivileged, such as living in poverty, previous traumatic events or parental mental health (Cole et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2016). All participants spoke about their experiences of providing support focusing on the whole family, not just the child as demonstrated by EP 1:

We don't really like to medicalise people you know, other than ASD and ADHD pathways, why is there not a trauma and attachment pathway? And via that the whole family are supported... we can start a piece of work that wraps around the whole family and school.

Support for families was suggested to come in a range of forms, including practical support, being a listening ear or advocate. The journey towards and implications of school exclusion has a significant impact on family life (Feingold & Rowley, 2022). Parents described difficulties of not being able to work, due to their child not being in school (Macleod et al., 2013) which results in financial difficulties (Parker et al., 2016). As discussed by the

participants in this research, families require practical support wider than education as highlighted by LA Manager 1:

If a parents got for instance, they've got debt issues, and they can't buy school uniform for the child, they would go to the hub and what the hub would do is they would help them look at their finances. They might signpost them to a charity where they can get help for school uniforms. But what they'll also do is they'll help the parents look at the whole finances, so that they're not just addressing the school uniform issue. They're helping the parents look at other things.

Participants experiences spoke of how this support also needed to be in an accessible manner. This included support as described by LA Manager 1, such as hubs, as being available in the community for all families to access. Parents having the opportunity to access support and knowing what support is available was also a prominent theme within the research as recognised by Headteacher 1:

If [parents] never accessed help, they don't know what is available. Now if they did know what was available, I don't know how we would meet the demand then.

There are differences in parents' understanding of the support that is available post exclusion (Macleod et al., 2013). The lack of knowledge available for all parents can make decisions linked to a pupil's education more difficult (McNerney et al., 2015). Some of these explanations place the fault within the families for not having specific knowledge or skills. Professionals in the research by McNerney et al. (2015) believed the structures were there to support parents to do so, but parents were not always equipped to access this support. The LA is required to provide a Local Offer sharing information of resources available and services that provide impartial support for parents. Riddell and Weedon (2016) suggested half of parents within their case studies were not aware of the Local Offer or did not find the information supportive.

The narratives which form this theme, focused largely on the participants experiences of what has happened on occasions and what they would like to see more of. This supports Hornby and Blackwell (2018) in the idea there is a gap between the reality and the rhetoric of parental involvement with education.

3.4.4 Equitable Local Authority processes

It has been suggested that substantial changes have taken place in the past 10 years with how LAs support schools due to academisation (Greany, 2022). Some of these changes

were recognised by participants, including the structuring of LAs to offer support and challenge to schools as demonstrated by LA Manager 3:

The Local Authority should be thinking about how does it position teams around schools in a coherent way which supports clear identification of what is happening.

Participants across all professional groupings suggested there was not enough capacity across a range of LA services to support or challenge the systems in place. Closure and cuts to support services mean that services such as behaviour support and educational psychology are still available but not in the capacity they were previously (Kulz, 2019; Thompson et al., 2021). Since the introduction of trading services within LAs, support beyond the statutory requirements has reduced, and there has been longer wait times for access to support services (Thompson et al., 2021). This is particularly the case when considering EP support. This was highlighted by participants within this research, but did not appear to resonate enough across all three groups to be considered a theme. Furthermore, participants also expressed in their experiences, the importance of the multi-agency approach with each person taking their role as highlighted by LA Manager 2:

One of the main things perhaps that we have to do is we try to get everybody around the table. It's not always possible.

As discussed, due to cuts there may not always be professionals available in a timely manner, making it difficult to have the appropriate services to support proactively. Adding to this, professionals require an understanding and respect for the primary concern of each agency's role (Thompson et al., 2021). This further links back to the LA having the appropriate services and structures to offer support and challenge. Due to these cuts, participants appeared to link this as overarching the other themes within the research. For example, without the services available the opportunities to collaborate, make plans and offer systemic and individualised support is not available for families, staff and the pupils. Therefore, participants considered that the current systems in place were not supporting inclusion in school.

Participants shared that in their experiences, the process and panels which schools must use to access support, could be clearer and fairer. This view was across all groups, including those working with and on the panels discussed. Headteacher 1 explained their view of inclusion panel. Within this panel, pupils who require further support, due to presenting with behaviours which may result in a permanent exclusion, are discussed as to whether they can access Alternative Provisions (APs), managed moves or additional funding:

Inclusion panel is not worth the paper it is written on because the bar changes, so you've got two kids up against inclusion panel and it's the same criteria. Well, we'll have that one. You, yours can't get through and that's a massive problem.

Since the increase of academisations, there have been changes with how schools can access and contribute to these panels. One identified reason is that schools are able to opt out of attending LA panels (Thompson et al., 2021), whilst the proliferation of multi-academy trusts mean that it may be more difficult to place pupils previously excluded (Kulz, 2019). Therefore, there is a lack of consistency and opportunities for pupils to receive support across schools. Headteachers expressed frustrations at these approaches as they believed extra pressures were placed on some schools but not others due to perceived resources or reputations. These issues identified are said to contribute to the breakdown of school and LA relationships (Thompson et al., 2021) which was very much felt within this research. Furthermore, within the literature, it is suggested that parents and staff in school feel unsupported by the LA when requesting support for pupils prior to a permanent exclusion (Feingold & Rowley, 2022).

Participants spoke about the lack of alternatives available to permanent exclusion. For some, this referred to the need to call a permanent exclusion to receive the support from the LA as shared by Headteacher 2:

... we have to call a permanent exclusion, even though it's not going to get to a permanent exclusion, in order to get the support that kid needs. I wish we didn't have to do that.

This is echoed in the findings by Parker et al. (2016) as parents considered an exclusion to open opportunities for more support, a point of action to be taken or a clean slate for their child. Other participants spoke about situations where support available has been exhausted or a criminal incident had occurred as demonstrated by EP 2:

... and what are they supposed to do if it's not permanent exclusion? At the moment, I definitely don't agree with it but then what is their current alternative.

APs are often considered when looking at alternatives to permanent exclusions (Malcolm, 2018; Martin-Denham, 2021). Within this research, APs were mentioned on multiple occasions with varying views of both positive and negative experiences. Within the literature, these are highlighted by adults as being a positive experience, whilst pupils shared the mixed experiences (Feingold & Rowley, 2022). Many other forms of exclusions that take place are deregulated, such as when pupils attend off site education, are missing education or are electively home educated (Parsons, 2018).

3.5 Implications for educationalists and educational psychologists

The key anticipated intention of this research is to inform and improve policy and practice for schools, EPs and Local Authority teams, concerning the support offered for pupils who may be excluded from school. This research has implications of how LA managers, schools and EPs can reflect upon the support available for pupils who have been or may be excluded. The findings may provide a starting point for developing practice, particularly for EPs who support across individual, school and organisational levels.

Implications at a LA level

Each theme appears to be impacted by another theme. Therefore, it is considered that a top-down approach may be viewed when looking at the implications of this research. It is considered that the overarching systems, in this research the LA, impact on the other systems and eventually the pupils. LAs were suggested to require more equitable support and challenge. Due to funding constraints, many services have been cut or lost (Daniels et al., 2022). This may link to the breakdown of school to LA relationships. Therefore, it may be beneficial for LAs to consider how they re-build this relationship through transparency and considering the equitability of the process schools are asked to engage with to receive support. Furthermore, LAs play a role in the support offered to parents. Accessible support for the family was highlighted and it may be worth considering whether the support that is offered to families, via the Local Offer, is easily accessible and whether families are aware of this.

Implications for educational psychologists

Supporting inclusion of pupils whose educational placement is at risk has been described as a key role for EPs (Turner & Gulliford, 2020). This research has outlined some areas where EPs have previously supported and may support further. The research has also highlighted the need for schools to support staff wellbeing. One suggested way is to offer training for staff about wellbeing and self-care strategies (Silver & Zinsser, 2020). EPs are trained in a range of skills and strategies that may be beneficial to support staff wellbeing, including consultation groups such as Solution Circles (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996), and the use of staff supervision.

Implications for educationalists

Considering the above, schools take a role in supporting pupils at an individual level. Therefore, it may be beneficial for them to consider the culture and ethos of the school. This

links to the engagement with parents, including the well documented importance of school to parent relationships, especially in decision making (Caslin, 2021). This provides opportunities for staff to develop more understanding about the pupils' context whilst being in a position for signposting parents towards more practical support should they need it. A positive ethos benefits all children not just those who may be excluded (Ann Hatton, 2013). This is also key when building relationships with pupils, and not just getting to know them but responding to them by valuing their voice.

The implications relate to those who have participated within this research. However, as previously mentioned the themes influence each other. Wider than the LA, these systems are part of an education system. As mentioned, multiple times, cuts within this system have added pressures in all aspects mentioned across the themes. There has been a suggestion that when governments supply funding for effective support, school exclusion rates fall (Cole et al., 2019). Therefore, this research suggests that we do not only look at the implications within the systems encompassed in the research, but we look wider at the impact the education system has on the components highlighted.

3.6 Research Limitations

The chosen method (discussed in Chapter 2) allowed for consideration of experiences through detailed data collection and analysis. Due to the constraints of being a single researcher, with a limited time to complete the research, it was not possible to have a larger sample size. Also, qualitative data focusing on school exclusion is argued to lack generalisability due to the purposive nature of the sample (Graham et al., 2019). This research took place in one LA and was focused on the experiences of participants within that LA. Braun and Clarke (2022a) proposed with RTA the reader must determine the transferability of the research into their own context, based on what resonates with them. Therefore, this study does not make claims of generalisability, due to the focus on the interpretation of the unique experiences of the persons-in-context. Instead, the narratives of the participants and my interpretations have provided engagement with theory and led to tentative suggestions of approaches and practice that may support inclusion to reduce school exclusions.

3.7 Conclusion

This exploration has added to the growing amount of research that considers the experiences relating to school exclusions. Although from three different professional groupings, themes were interpreted together due to the similarities that arose. Professionals

suggested four key themes that support inclusion. These included understanding and responding to the pupil, creating safe school cultures, holistic family support and equitable LA processes. It was suggested that these are not consistent across the LA. Subsequent implications were detailed.

4. Chapter four: A reflective synthesis

This chapter offers a critical reflective synthesis of my experiences of conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and empirical piece of research. It will consider the learning gained and the impact as a scientist-practitioner Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and how I will carry this forward in my role as a qualified Educational Psychologist (EP). Implications for future research and wider practice are discussed.

4.1 Reflections on the research process

This section reflects on the process of completing this research and the implications for me in the future.

As part of the SLR process, I have learned skills in completing thorough reviews that include searching databases, selecting papers and conducting data analysis. I have developed skills in considering quality assessments of research papers to consider the relevance of findings (Gough, 2007). This included becoming more comfortable with the subjectivity of being a solo researcher.

Within this research process, I have learned the importance of being adaptable and trusting the process. As a person, I often like to complete processes in a linear manner where I know the next steps and have a planned time frame it will take for me to complete the task. Within this process, I have needed to become more comfortable with the iterative process and considering that I may need to return to previous steps before moving forward. This increased the sense of uncertainty. The iterative process of research provided me with the opportunity of understanding that the journey of research is as important as the end results. I found keeping a research journal throughout provided me with the opportunity for reflection and reflexivity. This has helped me to explore the aspects that I struggled with, including the tension of having a rich data set but only being able to include some aspects in the research.

At times, I became lost with my research question within the empirical research project. Willig (2013) recognises the importance of having a clear question and ensuring cohesion throughout. At times, I felt I had my rationale and my approach and once completed, a rich dataset, but I needed to consider my research question carefully to fully develop the cohesion I required. I was interested in the experiences of what worked, but at times, this became lost as I attempted to consider my philosophical underpinnings. At this point, I often returned to questioning can we know what definitively works? Therefore, I used reflection to

consider how I am not looking for a truth, instead I am exploring experiences within participants contexts.

4.2 The influence on my thinking

Reflexivity requires the researcher to look at their role, values and influence within the research (Willig, 2013). Including opportunities for reflexivity in the process is considered a way of achieving rigour within research (Braun & Clarke, 2022a) and is suggested to be key to producing good quality RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Within analysis, the researcher brings their philosophical assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Therefore, the researcher subjectivity is viewed within RTA as a resource for research (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Although, I do not think myself to be a neutral observer within the research, I still consider the importance of reflecting on my influence within the research. Therefore, I used reflexivity questions from Braun and Clarke (2022a) to acknowledge my assumptions prior to completing analysis (Appendix 4). This, along with supervision and journaling supported me with understanding my positionings.

Considering this, I believe I have developed my criticality skills by taking a curious approach to others' experiences and lens through which others view the world. Throughout the research process, the data has highlighted the systems wider than the individual and the impact they have on their lives. This has focused on policy and legislation at a national level. Biesta (2019) considered the relationship between school and society and raised the question of the purpose of education. Three aims are proposed: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. This may relate to the findings in this research of what we are expecting from support in place. Qualification relating to the skills and knowledge of staff. Socialisation linking to knowing and understanding the young person, building the relationship. Finally, subjectification linking to school staff having the autonomy to support the pupils. I wonder how the education systems in place support pupils and staff to live out these aims.

4.3 Implications

This section outlines the implications of completing this thesis for my practice, the participating LA and for possible future research.

4.3.1 On professional practice

During my time throughout the research project and prior, I have experienced schools wishing to consult about pupils who have previously received suspensions, or they are considering a permanent exclusion. It is important for EPs to remain up to date with research

to be able to apply this in practice (Gersch & Dhomhnaill, 2004). Therefore, within my practice, I have been able to draw upon the literature that I have engaged with to consult with schools. At an individual level, the findings will inform my consultations with schools and parents, through discussions and questions. For example, I am more aware of the legislation in place which means I feel more confident asking questions and challenging schools about this. At a school level, I am aware of possible themes of how pupils may be supported, such as systemic approaches including family support and encouraging the safe whole school ethos. In my understanding of this, I can support schools to reflect whether these strategies have been utilised and offer the support with applying these approaches.

In terms of research method, using narrative conversations allowed me to explore my own questioning skills and language following listening to the transcriptions. This added to the greater appreciation of how EPs use listening skills and specific questioning to support others to develop their views and explore their own experiences. By responding to what appeared valuable to the participant and where my own curiosity fell, the participants appeared to be genuinely engaged in the conversation. This resulted in them speaking with enthusiasm and at length. At times, it felt difficult to consider myself as a researcher in this context as I wished to engage in the conversation, join with sharing my views, especially when I strongly agreed or disagreed with a point being shared. However, I repeatedly reminded myself to continue to remain in my researcher role, whilst acknowledging which aspects of the data sparked these emotions and responses from myself. Therefore, when analysing the data, I was able to return to these and reflect how I may interpret these due to the emotions I felt within the interview. The use of a research journal and supervision allowed me to consider how my own values and emotions may impact my interpretation of the data. As I reflect upon how this links with practice, there are times I experience this within consultation. Therefore, it may be beneficial to consider how I use supervision for reflection of my own bias.

4.3.2 For the participating Local Authority

Harmsworth et al. (2000) suggested three different ways for effective dissemination of research. These included: for awareness, for understanding and for action. The dissemination of research is an important aspect of addressing the research problem and throughout the process. I have thought a lot about how I will share this research with influential figures in the LA in which the research took place. As Gersch and Dhomhnaill (2004) suggest, a core function of the EP role is 'applying research to real-life problems' (page 144). Exclusion rates continue to be a cause for concern in England (Duffy et al.,

2021). It is hoped that the findings from this research can offer opportunity for reflection of the processes currently in place and inform future policy at the LA Level.

The research will be shared with all headteachers at an upcoming headteacher meeting within the LA, to encourage a focus on the topic area and discussions as to generalisability of the themes across schools. This initially would focus on dissemination for awareness, with the aim of offering open discussion about whether these are shared experiences among their education setting. The research will also be shared with the head of the Children and Young People Directorate and other service managers. This aims to raise awareness, develop understanding and offer opportunities for action. Further research may be conducted in the LA if interest is generated once the findings have been shared. Furthermore, the research will be presented at the Educational Psychology Service Team Day. This will offer opportunities for EPs to discuss and share how they can support in some of the key ideas raised from this research.

4.3.3 For future research

This paper highlighted several potential gaps in the research that may be explored. Therefore, this section will detail the implications of this study on future research.

Chapter One highlighted a lack of research in UK secondary schools. However, I would also add that some of the studies in the SLR are over ten years old and there have since been changes in policies and practices in schools. Therefore, it may be beneficial for more exploration as to what interventions support reductions of school exclusions. As there appears to be a rise into schools buying into schemes, it may also be beneficial to conduct non-affiliated research around these projects to gain an understanding of the cost-benefit of these approaches.

In the empirical research, I took a view of using both suspensions and permanent exclusions as a topic of research. However, within the research in chapter one, there was not a clear distinction between suspensions and permanent exclusions. As mentioned, there are further types of school exclusions that take place. Therefore, it may be beneficial to explore the differences, if any, of experiences based on the specific exclusion types.

Within the empirical research, it would have been interesting to interview more roles within school. When talking with the headteachers, one mentioned how the inclusion manager may have a better understanding of the issues, whilst when in conversation with potential

participants they suggested the SENDCo may be more relevant. However, I continued with my decision as headteachers have the decision to suspend and exclude, yet it may be interesting to identify whether their views are different to those who may be more involved in the planning and monitoring of support or interventions.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the implications of carrying out this research on my practice and for future research. This journey has shaped me as a researcher and an EP. I have thoroughly enjoyed completing this piece of research and it has illuminated further potential research as I continue into the role of qualified EP. I aim to disseminate my findings more widely through presenting the research and possible publication, to contribute to the conversations of how exclusions and suspensions can be reduced or prevented across secondary schools in England.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Weight of Evidence supplementary questions

These supplementary questions are from an unpublished thesis (Briggs, 2019a).

| | Obsuth et al. (2017) | Rose et al. (2018) | Waters (2015) | Ewen and Topping (2012) | Rose et al (2015) |
|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| 1. Are there ethical concerns about the way the study was done? | Yes: Researchers aiming to gain funding to continue the project. Study was opt out, informed parental consent assumed. | Yes: Evaluation of the project in relation to previous funding. | Some: Researchers are linked to the development of the programme. | No | No |
| 2. Were students and/ or parents appropriately involved in the design or conduct of the study? | No | No | No | No | Somewhat: Respondents first answers used to shape the second questionnaire. |
| 3. Is there sufficient justification for why the study was done the way it was? | Yes: to develop a rigorous evidence base for studies which may reduce the incidence of school exclusions. | Yes: evaluation of the TI process and the impacts it had on school. | Yes: to evaluate the programme using pre and post-test measures. | Yes: to evaluate the programme comparing mainstream to the END setting. | Yes: to evaluate the use of emotion coaching strategies in an education setting. |

| | Obsuth et al. (2017) | Rose et al. (2018) | Waters (2015) | Ewen and Topping (2012) | Rose et al (2015) |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| 4. Was the choice of research design appropriate for addressing the research question(s) posed? | Yes: Quasi-experimental design. Treatment vs. control. Pre/ post measure tests. | Yes, to some extent: Evaluated headteachers views and compared rates. | Yes, to some extent: Quasi-experimental. Pre/post-test measures. No control measures. | Yes: Quasi-experiment. Pre/ post measures. | Yes, to some extent: Quasi-experiment, pre/ post measures. No control groups. |
| 5. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the repeatability or reliability of data collection methods or tools? | Yes, to some extent: The use of questionnaires and official data. No mention of the reliability of questionnaires. | Some: First author involved in all interviews. No explanation of how quantitative data was collected. | Yes, to some extent: use of established scales. Clear procedure. Unclear of interview questions or procedure. | Some: Not clear of the reliability of the questionnaire. Clear process of data collection shared. | Yes, to some extent: Explanation of the collection methods used but individual responses shaped the exit questionnaire making it difficult to replicate. |
| 6. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the validity or trustworthiness of data collection tools and methods? | Some: No clear explanation of how validity of the self-reported scales was established. Use of official data. | No: no formal way of establishing and no information addressing validity. | Some: Clear use of SDQ and NARA. Unclear how exclusions were measured. | Some: Validity not mentioned regarding questionnaire. Clear information of how the quantitative data is collected. | Yes: a principal components analysis was completed on the questionnaire. |
| 7. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the repeatability or reliability of data analysis? | Yes: use of multi-level analysis | No: No information of how the quantitative data was analysed. | No: No information of how qualitative analysis was undertaken, or the formal analysis used. | Yes, some: explanation of the coding, categorising and identifying themes analysis. No formal quantitative analysis. | Yes: use of t-tests, and chi- square analysis. Qualitative analysis using inductive coding. |

| | Obsuth et al. (2017) | Rose et al. (2018) | Waters (2015) | Ewen and Topping (2012) | Rose et al (2015) |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| 8. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the validity or trustworthiness of data analysis? | Yes: use of intraclass correlations and multilevel logistic level models used. | No: No information of how the quantitative data was collected. Very little formal analysis. | No: Very little formal analysis. | Some: No formal analysis of pre and post measures. Clear explanation of the qualitative data. | Yes: formal analysis used and use of SPSS. |
| 9. To what extent are the research design and methods employed able to rule out any other sources of error/ bias which would lead to alternative explanations for the findings of the study? | Yes, to some extent: logistic regression models completed to collect information of the attrition rates. Some comparison between schools unclear. Intervention not completed as expected in some cases. | Some: Data collected from across the schools. No control groups for a comparison. | No: No information how bias has been reduced or a control group to compare. | Some: Some information regarding attendance and views from parents, stakeholders and pupils to triangulate views which matched. | Some: Chi-square was used to break down the elements staff helped support. Triangulation of data but no control group. Data self-reported. |
| 10. How generalisable are the study results? | Low: the intervention was not fully followed i.e. home visits not conducted. High attrition rates. | Low: small sample size. No control group for comparisons. | Low: Small sample size. No control group for comparison. | Low: specific programme and context, not all details of which are shared. | Low: Relatively small sample size, lacking demographic data. |
| 11. In light of the above, do the reviewers differ from the authors over the findings or | No: the intervention did not decrease exclusions, but it may have contributed to | No: The descriptive statistics suggest some decrease. | No: there were some reductions in the exclusions, but as discussed, they may | No: appears to be a successful programme based on pupil, parent and stakeholders. | No: the intervention supported the reduction of exclusions and possible increase in |

| | Obsuth et al. (2017) | Rose et al. (2018) | Waters (2015) | Ewen and Topping (2012) | Rose et al (2015) |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| conclusions of the study? | the intervention not being fully followed. | | be through other factors. | | pro-social behaviours. |
| 12. Have sufficient attempts been made to justify the conclusions drawn from the findings, so that the conclusions are trustworthy? | Medium: May be other aspects for pupils at highest risk, need for implementation evaluation and short term. | Low: discussions around the inclusivity of TI rather than the impact it has in school. Highlights lack of parental partnership. | Medium: the use of emotional understanding in impacting a pupils' presentation of behaviour and using this to re-story. | Medium: the use of personalised programme added an element of ownership, supporting the YP in their learning. | Medium: Adults self-regulation increased and there was an increase in positive behaviours. |
| 13. Weight of evidence A | Low/ Medium | Low | Low | Medium | Low/ Medium |
| 14. Weight of evidence B | Medium | Low | Medium | Low/ Medium | Medium |
| 15. Weight of evidence C | Medium | Low/ Medium | Low/Medium | Medium | Medium |
| 16. Weight of evidence D: Overall weight of evidence | Medium | Low | Low/Medium | Medium | Medium |

Appendix 2: Information sheet.



Title of Study: How do educational professionals, in one Local Authority, report the experiences of supporting inclusion in secondary school settings to reduce school exclusions?

Invitation and Brief Summary

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you wish to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Take time to decide whether you would like to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without any penalty or loss of benefits.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the study is to develop an understanding of the views and experiences of promoting inclusion to support the reduction of suspensions and permanent exclusions from secondary schools. To do this, key stakeholders involved in supporting young people who may be excluded will be interviewed to discuss experiences of schools, local authorities and educational psychologists can support the reduction of exclusions.

This empirical research follows a systematic literature review previously untaken. The review explored the question: What are the effects of educational based interventions to decrease the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions in UK schools? From this, analysis took place to identify interventions. This mixed method systematic literature review identified that there is little literature in this area that identifies what reduces suspensions and permanent exclusions in the UK. There is a particular gap when considering the views of key stakeholders who make the decisions in schools and offer support to the local authority.

What does taking part involve?

Taking part will involve meeting with the researcher to conduct one 30–60-minute semi-structured interview. In this interview the researcher will ask about experiences of supporting the inclusion of young people to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions.

What information will be collected and who will have access to the information collected?

All semi-structured interviews will be audio-recorded. This will then be transcribed by the researcher. Any identifiable data to you, school, the LA or other people will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Once recordings have been transcribed, they will be destroyed, and the transcriptions will be stored on a Newcastle University, OneDrive account with two step authentications until the completion of the researcher's course. We will use your name and contact details (email address) to contact you about the research study.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study as you are identified as a key stakeholder in supporting pupils and schools to reduce the number of permanent exclusions. The key stakeholders include headteachers, senior leaders in school, members of the local authority and the educational psychology service.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Potential benefits of taking part in this research include the sharing of good practice to support young people at risk of exclusions in secondary schools. This may also benefit others in the future as a consequence of discovery through this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely for there to be risk or disadvantage in taking part in this research.

Has this study received ethical approval?

This study has received ethical approval from The Newcastle University Ethics Committee on 13/03/2023.

Who should I contact for further information relating to the research?

Gabrielle Bousfield, Trainee Educational Psychologist g.bousfield2@newcastle.ac.uk

Dave Lumsdon, First Research Supervisor david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk

Simon Gibbs, Second Research Supervisor simon.gibbs@newcastle.ac.uk

Who should I contact in order to file a complaint?

If you wish to raise a complaint on how your personal data is handled, you can contact the Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter: DPO Name, Contact Details

If you are not satisfied with their response you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):

<https://ico.org.uk/>

Appendix 3: Consent form

Title of Study: How do educational professionals, in one Local Authority, report the experiences of supporting inclusion in secondary school settings to reduce school exclusions?



Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research study. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form.

| Please initial box to confirm consent | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 17 th January 2023 (version 1) for the above study, I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and I have had any questions answered satisfactorily. | |
| 2. | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any data that I have provided up to that point will be omitted from the research. | |
| 3. | I consent to the processing of my personal information, such as my email address, for the purposes of this research study, as described in the information sheet dated 17 th January 2023 (version 1). | |
| 4. | I consent to my pseudonymised research data being stored and used by others for future research. | |
| 5. | I understand that my research data may be published as a report. | |
| 6. | I consent to the retention of my personal information (email address) for 52 weeks, for the purpose of being re- contacted regarding the research. | |
| 7. | I understand that my research data may be looked at by the researcher and supervisors where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. | |
| 8. | I consent to being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be stored on a Newcastle University OneDrive anonymously and destroyed immediately after transcription. They will be stored anonymously on password-protected software and used for research purposes only. | |
| 9. | I agree to take part in this research project. | |
| <i>Participant</i> _____ <i>Name of participant</i> <i>Signature</i> _____ <i>Date</i> | | |
| <i>Researcher</i> _____ <i>Name of researcher</i> <i>Signature</i> _____ <i>Date</i> | | |

Appendix 4: Familiarisation questions to support reflexivity.

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2022a) page 44-45.

To familiarise the with data:

1. What sort of assumptions are being made about permanent exclusion, suspensions and school support? Are there any assumptions being made about pupils, families and staff?
2. How are pupils, schools and professionals characterised?
3. What are the perceived purposes of permanent exclusions, suspensions and support?
4. What ideas about school exclusions are being drawn upon?
5. What are the claimed experiences? What makes these claims possible?
6. What are the assumptions of the world and are they drawing on any moral frameworks?

To prompt reflection:

7. What was familiar to me?
8. What was unfamiliar to me or surprising?
9. Why am I reacting to the data in this way?
10. What different ways could I make sense of this?

