"You don't go here anymore":

An Exploration of School Exclusion

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study bringing together lived experiences of school exclusion with a novel use of theory. The analysis deepens understanding of how school exclusion both represents and reproduces social inequalities.

Governments and other organisations have demonstrated concern about school exclusion and its links to poor outcomes and life chances, but the problem persists. In England, young people from marginalised groups are consistently over-represented in the school exclusion statistics. These young people are then more vulnerable to the poor outcomes associated with the loss of a school place and so school exclusion becomes both a symptom and a cause of wider social inequalities.

In this thesis, a composite theoretical framework is developed and applied. Data is collected through interviews with school-excluded young people aged 13 to 16 attending an East Midlands alternative provision. A thematic analysis examines their experiences of school, school exclusion and future plans. The seminal text, Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) is used as a counterpoint for analysis. Critical realist concepts of stratified ontology and the morphogenetic approach are used to critique the role of structure, culture and agency in school exclusion in England. This study takes the empirical lived experience of school exclusion but looks for explanation in the domain of the real.

Findings show that school exclusion arises from a complex interplay of structure, culture and agency. Neoliberal school systems, based on individualism, measurable outcomes and linking school to work seem to hold little relevance for the young people in this study. Neoconservative behaviour policies further weaken the ability of schools to be inclusive, meet needs or to inspire young people from

marginalised groups to engage in education. Instead, this thesis calls for a school system based on education for liberation and human flourishing.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

School exclusion is both a symptom and a cause of wider social inequalities. Despite numerous government reports and interventions (see, for example, Education Select Committee 2018; Children's Commissioner's Office 2019; Timpson 2019), the problem of school exclusion remains. Exclusion from school is linked to numerous poor outcomes in education, employment and other indicators of disadvantage (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019). School exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a) also show consistently that young people from marginalised groups, including certain ethnic groups, those who are entitled to free school meals, identified as having special educational needs and the care experienced are more likely than their peers to be excluded from school. In this way, school exclusion both represents and reproduces marginalisation.

This chapter outlines the problem of school exclusion and my reasons for choosing this research topic.

The chapter gives an overview of government concerns about school exclusion, as seen, for example, in the Timpson Review (Timpson 2019) and Education Select Committee (Education Select Committee 2018) reports. Alongside this, the trends in national school exclusion figures (Department for Education 2023a) are explored. This shows that young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school.

An explanation is given of what is meant by marginalisation, and the choice of language used. Also defined are the terms neoliberalism and neoconservatism as threads that will appear throughout the thesis.

Why I wanted to research school exclusion

As a teacher for many years in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Special School for students with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, I have had a professional interest in school exclusion for much of my career. Prior to teaching in a PRU, I had been a teacher in a mainstream school and had experienced the difficulties of trying to manage and engage large classes, with a packed classroom and a packed curriculum. I also had little awareness at that time of what happened to those students who were not coping, or were not seen as manageable - students tended to disappear from the class, to be picked up by 'behaviour support' or removed to spend time in 'the unit'.

Alongside making the move to Alternative Provision (AP), I was also working as a youth worker, where the conversations with young people and the aims and objectives of the work were often in sharp contrast to work in schools. The youth service ethos focussed more on making relationships and empowering young people, supporting them to make positive decisions and giving them opportunities to explore and to grow. This seemed sometimes at odds with the demands on teachers to push through syllabus content, to assess and record progress. Being a teacher in AP seemed to fall between these two different approaches: there was some (growing) pressure to demonstrate levels of progress and meet external standards, but the pace of learning was slowed down and personalised. Groups were small enough to allow AP staff to make positive relationships with students that might help them to engage in education.

All of my students in the PRU had either been officially permanently excluded from school, or were there by arrangement with, for example, their previous school or the Local Authority. Interestingly, although they were sharing the same school, facilities and even

classes, students had not arrived by the same mechanisms. Many parents seemed to be under the impression that not having a formal permanent exclusion would have benefits for their child in the long run, and yet the mainstream school no longer took any part in, and little responsibility for, their education. Mainstream schools were reluctant to take back students who had been attending the PRU, with each year group being increasingly less likely than the last to be 'reintegrated' back into mainstream school. Any receiving school would be responsible for results and the risks were generally seen to outweigh the rewards.

It was also noticeable that most of the students in the PRU had some characteristics in common. They were mostly male; mostly from the most deprived areas of the city, often even from the same few streets or estates; many had experienced poverty and family adversity such as parental illness, family members in prison and bereavements such as loss of a parent or sibling. Black and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) students were over-represented in the PRU compared to their small numbers in the city. Certain families became 'PRU families' with all of the siblings in a family at some point being educated in AP.

I became interested in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) after noticing that many of my students arrived lacking basic academic skills or struggling to meet the demands even of a PRU classroom. I took a course in teaching students with dyslexia, then continued to qualify as a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). In learning how the SEND system was managed, I saw that many young people were excluded for behavioural reasons before their SEND were adequately assessed or provided for.

Noticing the trends in my PRU classroom over the years, I wondered why mainstream schools had so often been unable to meet the needs of the students. Reflecting on what I knew of teaching in a mainstream school, I knew that there was often little opportunity to

take the time to really get to know students, to adapt the learning for their needs or to make those trusting relationships that young people rely on when things at home are difficult. Every PRU cohort had young people who were angry about their treatment in mainstream school, and others who were keen to return there. There were always some young people who were relieved to have got away from the pressures of mainstream school and were glad of the opportunities that the PRU offered them to work in ways that better suited them. Being in the PRU gave me the privilege of being in a position to win the trust of some of the most vulnerable or volatile students, to help them get back into education.

I am very proud of the work that I and my colleagues did at the PRU and in AP more broadly, but I also saw the damage done by school exclusion. I started to ask why we had a school system that systematically removes a section of the community every year, why we had to seemingly choose between wellbeing and relationships or output and levels of progress. Education policy in England espouses commitments to education for all, and for all to have the opportunity to reach their potential (Department for Education 2022b), but in reality, every year young people are removed from classrooms and from schools and face very real risks of having education judged as poor, with unqualified staff and less access to a broad range of subjects and qualifications (Timpson 2019). The impact of this segregated schooling is long lasting, with worrying statistics suggesting links with poorer health, being a victim or perpetrator of crime, being NEET and other limiting factors (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Education Select Committee 2018; Timpson 2019).

It has been my privilege to be part of the lives of many young people excluded from school, and this research seeks to hear more of their stories, to share with a wider audience, but also to ask why they were not able to have the education that is promised to all young people.

Researcher positionality

As outlined above, I approached this research with knowledge and experience of, and views on school exclusion. As a former trade unionist and a political activist, I hope to not only add to a body of knowledge but also to contribute to change. Given this context, I must acknowledge my positionality as a researcher.

I do not approach this research from a neutral position, but with a belief that education can be liberating and so that school exclusion potentially denies young people this opportunity. To deny my subjectivity would be, as Friere remarked, "naïve and simplistic" (Freire 1996, p.32). Instead, I draw on this background in order to adopt an emancipatory research paradigm (Humphries, Mertens and Truman 1999). I am not a neutral bystander, but undertake this project with a hope that deeper understanding can lead to improved outcomes for school-excluded young people.

Whilst I acknowledge my positionality, I have taken care to be open to ideas and alternative perspectives, and to draw on evidence from literature and my own data to reach conclusions (for examples, see Carlile 2012; Malcolm 2015). I utilise my previous experience as a teacher in the sector as a strength in supporting me to understand both the education system and the experiences of young people who have been excluded from school.

What is school exclusion?

Exclusion from school is a legal disciplinary tool in English schools, which should be used as a 'last resort' (Department for Education 2022d). Although affecting only a small proportion of the whole school population (Department for Education 2023a), exclusion from

school can have far reaching consequences for the individual. Despite several reports and policy developments (see, for example, Cole 2015; Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Education Select Committee 2018; Cole, et al. 2019; Children's Commissioner's Office 2019; Timpson 2019), problems relating to school exclusion have proved to be stubborn and enduring.

Official exclusions include fixed term and permanent exclusions. Fixed term exclusion is for a set period of days, up to a maximum of 45 days per school year (Department for Education 2022d). The student remains on the roll of, and the responsibility of their school. Whilst recognising the potential links between fixed term and permanent exclusions (Thomson 2023), this study focuses on permanent exclusions. There has been some concern about and public acknowledgement of the practice 'off-rolling' (Timpson 2019), a sometimes illegal practice of removing students from the school roll "when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil" (Ofsted 2019b). However, off-rolling is outside the scope of this study.

An official permanent exclusion removes a student from their education placement and from the school roll. Responsibility for their education reverts to the local authority or passes on to a new school or placement. Often, young people who have been permanently excluded from school then attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or alternative provision (AP) (Department for Education 2013). Schools may also directly commission places in AP without a formal exclusion. Some young people who have not been officially excluded from school, but who attend only AP and so are considered to be "functionally excluded" (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017, p.7). In considering experiences of school exclusion, this thesis includes young people both officially and functionally excluded from school.

School exclusion as a social problem

School exclusion continues to both represent and reproduce social inequalities. The statistics remain predictable every year and show that young people from certain groups who may be seen as marginalised – recipients of free school meals (FSM), Gypsy/Roma/Travellers (GRT) and students racialised as black, care experienced (sometimes known as looked after children or LAC) and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) – are proportionately over-represented in the school exclusion tallies, whilst poor white boys make up the largest overall group (Department for Education 2023a). Being excluded from school is an indicator for limited life chances, including likelihood of being 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET), involvement with crime and suffering poor health (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019). So, school exclusion becomes part of a cycle of marginalisation.

Despite much public and professional concern, including a recent Education Select Committee report (Education Select Committee 2018) and government review (Timpson 2019), the number of young people excluded from schools continued to rise each year pre-Covid (Department for Education 2023a). The pattern of school exclusion remains consistent, with certain marginalised groups over-represented in the data. Regardless of this tendency, much public debate about school exclusion is often framed in individualistic terms. There is a focus on poor behaviour (Department for Education 2022a), troubled families (Loft 2020) and Broken Britain (Thorp and Kennedy 2010). This discourse does little to explain why certain groups of people are more likely to be excluded than others.

School exclusion and marginalised groups

School exclusion overwhelmingly affects young people who "already face significant challenges in their lives" (Timpson 2019, p.33) and as such represents "one of the most concrete manifestations of marginalisation" (Menzies and Baars 2021, p. xii). These challenges can be seen in a range of factors, for example, we see a similar profile, in terms of ethnicity, SEND and LAC, of people who are more likely to go to prison (Prison Reform Trust 2022; Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012), to become unemployed (Gov.UK 2022; Powell 2021) or to be inadequately housed (Miller, et al. 2021; Rogaly, Elliott and Baxter 2021). School exclusion is one aspect of this circular process of marginalisation, arising from and deepening social inequalities.

Marginalisation may be conceptualised as a process, of "becoming peripheral" (Trudeau and McMorran 2011, p.438), or as a perception of becoming so (Messiou 2012). Thus, school exclusion can be seen to be both a product and a cause of marginalisation. However, there is a need for caution in characterising groups as marginalised, as this risks assuming a homogeneity of experience across that group, and exclusion from an idealised normality (Mowat 2015). For example, there is a wide variety of reasons why someone might have the designation of SEND and a wide variety of experiences within this group (Department for Education 2022c; Ofsted 2021). Grouping all people with SEND together as one group may overlook this diversity and also feeds into a deficit model of disability whereby people are judged to not belong the able-bodied idealised normality (Love and Beneke 2021). However, choosing not to recognise SEND as a defining characteristic would then not allow us to see that people identified in this way are disproportionately represented in school

exclusion statistics and that is the reason for focusing on marginalisation in this thesis.

Alternative words such as 'disadvantaged' (Macleod, et al. 2015) and 'vulnerable' (Cabinet Office and Department for Education 2022) which are also commonly used, carry similar tensions, allowing people with policy-making power to "define and dismiss" (Ahmad, et al. 2020, p. 1482) others. In contrast, early proponents of the concept of marginalisation saw it as a means of "challenging privilege and disempowerment" (Howitt 1993, p.3). I intend such words to mean that people "become vulnerable because of their circumstances" due to "structural factors or influences" (Aldridge 2014, p.113), thus placing the focus on societal rather than individual deficits. Thus, whilst recognising that using such categorisation may be problematic, this approach is used to identify and to challenge structural inequalities in the school system.

School exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a) consistently demonstrate that there are certain characteristics which make students more at risk of being excluded from school. This is reflected in wider society with these same groups often disadvantaged in other areas of life. Whilst acknowledging the complexities and limitations of the language, for this study it is useful to conceptualise people sharing those characteristics – certain ethnic groups, those identified as having SEND or qualifying for FSM, and care-experienced or LAC - as being marginalised groups. In researching lived experiences of school exclusion, this thesis adds nuance and depth to an understanding of the relationship between marginalisation and school exclusion.

Neoliberalism and neoconservatism

This thesis brings together lived experience of school exclusion with an analysis of wider social factors. Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are both key elements of this analysis and so are briefly introduced here. The following literature review examines the influence of neoliberalism in the development of the English education system and of neoconservatism in current approaches to school discipline. A central argument of this thesis is to make links between neoliberalism, neoconservatism and the perpetuation of social inequalities through school exclusion.

Following Thomson, neoliberalism is used here to mean "practices in which politics are dominated by economics, where tropes of effectiveness and efficiency are dominant" (Thomson 2020, p.29). There are many threads of continuity in neoliberal education policy since the 1980s. Fragmentation and control, the blaming and pathologising of those from marginalised groups and a reliance on market forces to solve social ills are considered to be elements of neoliberalism and are examined in more detail in the literature review (chapter 2). It must also be acknowledged that there is also a growth in neoconservatism, described by Prendergast, Hill and Jones (2017) as the twin of neoliberalism. They identify neoconservatism by five key characteristics:

1. Control of curricula
2. Control of pedagogy
3. Control of students, including through debt and fear of unemployment
4. Control of teachers and professors
5. Brute force and security within schools

Much of this control is exerted through centralised decision making, surveillance and performance management, both for education

professionals and for students. All five of these characteristics can be seen in the current English school system.

Callinicos (2023) designates the current era as "The New Age of Catastrophe": following the spread of neoliberalism, a period of social, economic and environmental crises opens the way for neoconservatism and then for the far-right. Giroux has written extensively about the path (in education, in the USA and in society more broadly) from neoliberal marketisation to neoconservative policies of zero tolerance and securitisation (see for example Giroux 2003; Giroux 2008; Giroux 2020; Giroux 2022). He argues that this movement has served to criminalise young people through the school system, denying them an education and deskilling education professionals, as education is used as a means to control and manipulate a population rather than to inspire or to liberate. This suggests that the debates in education at the moment, such as over SEND, standards and school exclusion, need to be placed in a wider political context as a struggle for ideas and the principles of education for human flourishing.

Research questions

This thesis will address the following research questions:

How do young people experience school exclusion?

> **1) How do school-excluded young people narrate their journey to school exclusion?**

> **2) How do school-excluded young people reflect on their experience of school and school exclusion, post-exclusion?**

3) How is the experience of school exclusion shaped by the marginalised identity of the young person?

4) Were there factors (key moments, types of support) that could have avoided exclusion from school?

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is based on a small-scale qualitative study of experiences of school and school exclusion and is presented in the following way:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the problem of school exclusion and my reasons for choosing this research topic.

The chapter takes an overview of government concerns about school exclusion, as seen, for example, in the Timpson Review (Timpson 2019) and Education Select Committee (Education Select Committee 2018) reports. Alongside this, the trends in national school exclusion figures (Department for Education 2023a) are described and explored. This shows that young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school.

An explanation is given of what is meant by marginalisation, and the choice of language used. Also defined are the terms neoliberalism and neoconservatism as threads that will appear throughout the thesis.

The research questions are introduced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter has three parts: a review of the literature focusing on education policy, a review of the literature focusing on experiences of school exclusion, and a theoretical framework.

Literature relating to education policy in England since 1988 is presented both chronologically and thematically. Each era of policy development is characterised by certain policy discourses, beginning with the centralised control and free market fragmentation introduced by the Education Reform Act (1988) and ending with the aborted Opportunity for All (Department for Education 2022b) white paper. This section reviews the development of education policy with particular reference to school exclusion and marginalisation.

The second section of the literature review is based on literature from research which collects the views of young people who have been or are at risk of being excluded from school, their parents and education professionals. Themes are taken from the literature which help to explore the experiences of school exclusion, enabling a contrast between mainstream school and alternative provision and an exploration of attitudes towards behaviour in school. The role of young people and their families in the exclusion process is considered, and linked with the perpetuation of social inequalities through school exclusion. In particular, the interaction of SEND, family adversity and socio-economic disadvantage are highlighted as factors in school exclusion.

The third part of the literature review introduces the theoretical framework for this thesis. It offers an overview of some critical realist concepts including a stratified ontology (Bhaskar 2008) and the morphogenetic approach (Archer 1995), and applies them to researching school exclusion. Analysis also draws on the seminal book, Learning to Labour (Willis 1977), as explained in this section.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter gives a reminder of the research questions and outlines the methodological approach to research. A description is given of the process of gaining access to a fieldwork setting and special

consideration is given to how to conduct research with vulnerable young people. Critical realism is again utilised to guide the research design and in a thematic analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion part 1, Marginalisation and blame in school exclusion

Findings and discussion are presented in five themes over two chapters. The first of these chapters introduces the five themes and then offers an analysis of theme 1: Individual blame and theme 2: Marginalised groups. Analysis draws on the interview data and centres the voices of the young people in this study. Concepts from critical realism and Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) are used to offer a critical perspective.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion part 2, Who needs school? Disengagement, hostility and future plans

This second chapter of findings and discussion explores theme 3: Disengagement from school, theme 4: Hostility to school and theme 5: Future plans. Again, concepts from critical realism and Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) are used to critique the views and experiences of the young people in this study.

Chapter 6: A novel use of theory to understand school exclusion

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is revisited. Critical realist concepts including a stratified ontology and the morphogenetic approach are used to give a theory-led critique of the findings.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The concluding chapter gives answers to the research questions and outlines the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis. Limitations of this research and possibilities for further study are suggested.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review will examine the relationship between school exclusion and marginalisation. The chapter is comprised of three parts. Firstly, a review of the literature relating to school exclusion, education policy-making and reform in England. Secondly, literature relating to experiences of school exclusion is reviewed. Particular focus is given to studies which centre on the voices of school-excluded young people, their teachers and parents. Literature relating to schooling in England is predominately used for both of these sections of the literature review. Thirdly, the theoretical framework for this thesis is presented and explained. Concepts from critical realism are used and the seminal text, Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) is used as a counterpoint for analysis.

Education policy-making in England, 1988 to 2023

This review of literature is framed by significant moments in policy-making in England, beginning with the Education Reform Act (1988). The social and political context of education policy is described and considered in relation to marginalisation and school exclusion.

Centralised control, free market fragmentation and school reform

Regarded by some as the 'path to privatisation' (Walford 1990), the Education Reform Act (1988) (ERA) signalled the most comprehensive redesign of the English school system since 1944. Some welcomed the reforms as an opportunity to drive attainment through diversity of school type and data-driven competition (Wilkins

2015). Meanwhile, a belief in the reforming abilities of market forces was driving policy internationally at a time when the post-war belief in the state was waning (Fuller and Stevenson 2019). Kenneth Baker, the ERA's architect, has acknowledged that he was motivated by the political goals of weakening local authorities and the teaching unions, rather than a concern for good quality education (see Davies 2000). Indeed, the marketising of the school system ranks number one in Lupton and Hayes' (2021) great mistakes in education policy, having failed to either raise attainment or to address inequalities in school experiences and outcomes, such as those reflected in the school exclusion figures (Department for Education 2023a).

The ERA established a framework for the removal of state schools from local authority control. This began a systematic fragmentation of control and ownership of state schools that removed schools from local democratic accountability and at the same time centralised many decision-making powers (Monahan 2005). This duality of market-based fragmentation and centralised control are key pillars of the neoliberal project still pursued today, for example the establishment of multi-academy trusts (MATs) as documented by Kulz (2021), whereby large business-like organisations oversee several schools, but away from any local democratic control. Through this process, schools and policies are less open to public scrutiny and debate (Thomson 2020). And as the school system becomes more fragmented, the responsibility for young people with the most complex needs becomes multifarious and diffuse.

Whitty (1989) remarks on the apparent paradox of simultaneous centralisation and fragmentation. The ERA brought in market forces where there had previously been "detailed regulation and planning" (Whitty 1989, p.330) locally and nationally, and yet imposed a centrally designed national curriculum where there had previously been very little oversight. This centralisation was seen by some as

intended to quash the left-wing, egalitarian and anti-racist tendencies of the teaching profession (Ball and Troyna 1989; Whitty 1989; Walford 1990; Perera 2020). Conversely, there had been support amongst teachers for a curriculum to which all children would be entitled (Tomlinson 2005) as a way to alleviate some of the inequalities persistent in educational outcomes. However, the level of centralisation and "political interference" (Tomlinson 2005, p.61) would create challenges of their own.

Whereas some education reforms are short lived, the national curriculum and the adoption of key stages as educational landmarks have endured relatively unchanged (Fisher 2008), offering some stability in an ever-changing policy environment. However, there was little evidence to support the rhetoric of raising standards through top-down directives (Campbell and Kyriakides 2000). Instead, centralising control eroded the autonomy of teachers and schools to respond creatively to the needs of the communities they served (Thomson and Hall 2008; Lupton and Hayes 2021) and the introduction of national curriculum testing undermined the validity of teacher assessment (Stobart 2001). Whilst some saw the national curriculum as offering a common understanding that would improve links between mainstream and special schools (Selfe, et al. 2020), there were also concerns that the curriculum would be narrowed in ways that could jeopardise the progress made on SEND provision in the previous decade (Heward and Lloyd-Smith 1990). Despite these reservations, reforms were pushed through and the ERA would set the tone for a "longer term strategy to change the whole system of education" (Tomlinson 2005, p.48) still in progress today.

Reviewing the 1988 education policy changes, Tomlinson (1994) criticised the pace of change, with little consultation, leading to confusion and reversals, and the politicisation of education policy. Every part of the school system was "subject to scrutiny, criticism

and legislation" (Tomlinson 1994, p.1) with changes being, as Tomlinson predicted, difficult to undo. This signalled a change not only in resources and curriculum, "but also the principles and values underlying the education system" (Tomlinson 1994, p.1). The reforms helped to shift focus in education to measurable outcomes and to make schooling a commodity with parents and students as consumers. Competition for resources, rather than improving education for all has instead served to "sustain or exacerbate social and educational disadvantage" (Done and Murphy 2018, p.147) as is reflected in the school exclusion figures (Department for Education 2023a).

The ERA marked the direction of travel and the adoption of neoliberal policies. Ball (1990) explains that parental choice was one element of the competition between schools that was intended to improve standards. The system of funding following the student introduced a proxy cash exchange as school budgets then depended on attracting sufficient numbers of students: parents become customers, schools act as businesses and student outcomes the product for sale (Ball 1990). The reforms also attempted to shift power from the producers to the consumers of education (Rolph 2023), eroding the status of education professionals. Marketisation required schools to promote themselves in ways that would attract parents, but also compounded the difficulties of those schools seen as less desirable. Similarly, the marketised school system left some students as 'unsaleable goods' (Blyth and Milner 1996), seen as an expense and a liability in the competition for parental choice and league table success. The undesirability of certain students acts as an incentive to schools to exclude those seen as problematic.

The requirement to compete for business with other schools pressurises school leaders to prioritise performance and outcomes over fairness or inclusion (Lupton and Hayes 2021). This would lead

to some schools promoting and others playing down their SEND expertise (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz 1994; O'Brien 2016) and efforts to keep official exclusions low but behaviour management high (Lupton and Hayes 2021). As some schools successfully attracted socially mobile and educationally motivated students, others were caught in a spiral of falling numbers, falling budgets and failing reputations (Tomlinson 2005). Indeed, a stated intention of the policy was to push under-performing schools to close (Davies 2000) and students attending those schools were merely victims of the process, or even seen as paying the price of their parents' poor decision-making (Whitty 1989; Reay and Ball 1997). Consequently, offering parental choice deepened social inequalities (Tomlinson 2005; Prendergast, Hill and Jones 2017), with those from marginalised groups becoming further disenfranchised.

Parental choice has been shown to consistently favour middle-class families, and the so-called failing schools become concentrated in lower income urban areas (Lupton and Hayes 2021). Reay (2001) remarks on the power of the middle class, not only to choose and manage schools, but also to have their values and expectations reflected in the education system. This would become especially important in the race to attract high achieving students in sufficient numbers as schools sought to appeal to socially mobile parents (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz 1994). This is an important point when considering questions of school belonging (Allen, et al. 2018) and the motivation of young people from marginalised groups to participate in mainstream education. The increased focus on parental choice would also drive a greater demand for data by which to compare schools, a demand partially met through standardised testing, league tables and inspections (Wilson and Piebalga 2008; Allen and Burgess 2011). As I go on to argue, this means that schools are under increasing pressure

to demonstrate performance at the expense of inclusion, particularly for students from marginalised groups.

Scrutiny and Accountability

Representing both the centralising of standards in schools, and the emphasis on parental choice in the school marketplace, a new approach to school inspection made schools more easily comparable. The introduction of Ofsted inspections across all state schools (Education (Schools) Act 1992) was intended to shape policy and practice in schools and has also changed school culture (Jeffrey and Woods 2005). The establishment of a national framework for inspection, rigorously enforced, would perhaps become the most powerful and enduring example of centralisation in the English school system. However, the freedom to innovate and the level of scrutiny were unevenly distributed (Thomson, Lingard and Wrigley 2012), generally favouring those schools in already advantaged positions.

Schools have adapted to the expectation that they could be inspected and so prepare accordingly. There is advice on preparing for Ofsted inspection by organisations as diverse as resource sharing website Twinkl (2023), the National Governance Association (2023) and private training providers (Dragonfly Training 2023; Excellence in Learning 2023). More than putting on a show during inspection, the need for schools to meet Ofsted standards permeates through and comes to shape everyday practice (Clapham 2015). Wrigley (2004) critiqued the new language of 'school effectiveness' that seeks to quantify the quality of schools by a matrix of desirable outcomes. He argued this shifted the conversation about schools away from school improvement as a bottom-up process that uses qualitative methods to problematise educational outcomes (Wrigley 2004). Consequently,

the input and professionalism of teachers is weakened as priorities are set externally. Whilst officially a neutral body, Ofsted represents a neoliberal evaluation of education, with schools as "auditable commodities" (Clapham 2015, p.621), rather than communities striving for human flourishing through education. This shift in purpose comes to shape the ethos and values of a school, which can be so important in the engagement of and relationships with students from marginalised groups (Warin 2017).

The technocratic and managerialist approach of Ofsted, came from a set of values that were "markedly opposed to those of a majority of primary school teachers" (Jeffrey and Woods 2005, p.57), who generally preferred a more child-centred approach (Woods and Jeffrey 1998). The "terrors of performativity" (Ball 2003) accompanying this focus on scrutiny and accountability mechanisms creates a kind of "pedagogical impoverishment" (Thomson, Lingard and Wrigley 2012, p.6) as lessons are delivered by a de-professionalised workforce subject to high levels of prescription and low levels of autonomy (Reay 2022). Young people facing challenges in school are the most immediately affected by reduced opportunities for schools to be child-centred and responsive to need. Furthermore, a "surveillance culture" (Allen and Sims 2018, p.40) in schools adds unnecessary workload and stress, changing the ethos of schools and causing teachers to leave the profession. Recently, the issue has been in the news after the tragic death of a primary school headteacher linked to the stress of Ofsted judgements (Adams 2023). In this way, the systems of accountability come to dominate the educational offer in schools, potentially to the detriment of staff, students (especially those with more complex needs) and the wider school community.

Despite its reshaping of school culture and the role of the teacher, the Ofsted regime reportedly "provides little benefit to the pupils, parents

and staff at the vast majority of schools" (NAHT Accountability Commission 2018, p.4). indeed, Schools Minister Nick Gibb stated to a House of Commons inquiry "I do not think Ofsted is there for school improvement" (UK Parliament 2023) but instead is a "diagnostic tool". Ongoing pressure from the public and education professionals led the Education Select Committee to launch an inquiry into the effectiveness of Ofsted (UK Parliament 2023). Simpson describes the Ofsted report for a school in a former mining village as a "de-contextualised discourse of deficit" (Simpson 2021, p.25) that focused on markers of disadvantage and overlooked any value in the community. Consistently, schools in less deprived areas are more likely to have been judged as good or better by Ofsted (Thomson 2022a), showing that their purportedly neutral judgements are still influenced by the material conditions in the community served by the school. This inspection regime then plays a role in maintaining schools as a site of reproduction of social inequalities, such as reflected in the school exclusion statistics.

Despite numerous reports and policy interventions, there is still "virtually no change in the 'disadvantage gap'" (Farquharson, McNally and Tahir 2022, p.2) whereby young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be considered to be under-performing (Andrews, Robinson and Hutchinson 2017), or to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). The focus on performance acts as an incentive to 'game the system' through off-rolling and exclusion (Done and Knowler 2022) as well as directing attention and resources away from building inclusive practices. Nevertheless, there have been serious concerns expressed within government, particularly by the Education Select Committee (2018), about the problems associated with school exclusion. There followed some attempts to both reduce exclusions and to improve the educational opportunities for those excluded from school, but within the context

of neoliberal reforms. In practice, inspection regimes and performative measures continue to contribute to the exclusion from school of young people from marginalised groups. The ongoing use of school exclusion called for reform of the processes of exclusion and the provision of education for school-excluded students.

Pupil Referral Units and Official Exclusions

Alongside curriculum and inspection, a further outcome of centralisation in the education system was the formalising and recording of school exclusions and the introduction of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The 1989 Elton report on school discipline had shown a patchwork of provision for those permanently excluded and "the most difficult pupils" (Department of Education and Science 1989, p.152), including on and off-site units. The report praised the skill of teachers in the units, but suggested they were restricted by low status and limited resources and predicted difficulties for these small units with complying with the national curriculum. Some policy developments following this, such as the Education Act (1996), sought to address the issues raised by creating a more uniform and transparent system.

Government policy regarding school exclusion began to shift in the 1990s. A series of education department circulars (Department for Education 1994) throughout 1994 developed the idea of the pupil referral unit (PRU), in order to make out-of-school provision statutory. This was eventually formalised in the Education Act (1996). This Act made local authorities responsible for the education of young people who were excluded from school, on a full or part time basis. This was further developed in the Education Act (2002) , which made more specific the duties and responsibilities around school exclusion and setting limits for the number of days of fixed term exclusion.

The centralisation of school exclusion guidance aimed to offer a more coherent and equitable approach across England, although local and regional variations in exclusion rates persist (Department for Education 2023a). A more consistent method of monitoring school exclusions was welcome as the previous National Exclusions Reporting System had been "woefully inadequate" (Fisher 2008, p.284). Formalising the process and recording of school exclusions also offered comparable data to feed into target driven accountability mechanisms and may be considered during an inspection (Ofsted 2024).

The data allowed comparison and highlighted the patterns in school exclusion, for example the consistently increased exclusion rates for certain marginalised groups (Department for Education 2023a). Using official exclusion records enabled researchers in Cheshire (Social Finance 2020) to identify that the highest excluding schools in the area were also those schools in the most deprived areas and with the highest proportion of students with additional needs, with the intention of taking action to address the imbalance. Similarly, Demie (2021) was able to do in depth analysis of school exclusion statistics over a decade which showed over-representation of certain ethnic groups. However, nationally, this recording of data has not led directly to successful policy changes to address the highlighted inequalities, despite a number of high-profile government and research reports (see for example Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Education Select Committee 2018; Timpson 2019; Partridge, et al. 2020).

These changes in the reporting of and provision for school exclusion came at a time of much change in the public sector, with a change of government in 1997 promising a 'new politics' (The Labour Party 1997).

Individualising responsibility

The election of a 'New Labour' government in 1997 ushered in a number of initiatives including the establishment of a Social Exclusion Unit and a Cabinet Committee for Children and Young People, giving government attention and funds to social justice and developmental projects (Reed 2003; Parton 2006). Famously, incoming prime minister Tony Blair stated his three main priorities as education, education, education (Blair 1996). There was considerable optimism amongst education professionals and researchers at the election outcome: Garner (2013) described the New Labour era as a time of enlightenment on EBD, social justice and positive behaviour management. Working Tax credits were introduced which supported low income working families and early intervention was supported through the use of Sure Start centres, to be located in the most disadvantaged communities (Glass 1999). There was a renewed policy interest in issues of social justice and equality, but also a deliberate linking of social exclusion interventions with private finance and educational attainment with economic growth (Cole 1998).

Despite an "exaggerated sense of excitement and expectation" (Kavanagh 2007, p.3) with the first Labour government in almost a generation, there were points of continuity with the Conservative and New Labour policy directions. Tomlinson (2005) notes that the Blair government retained the rhetoric of raising standards, failing schools, parental choice, league tables and marketised competition between schools. New Labour initiatives served to further the centralisation of control established with the ERA (Fisher 2008). Rolph (2023) identifies this as a moment that neoliberalism could have been rolled back, but instead was embedded into education policy. There was a stated commitment to greater social mobility, but alongside this there was also promotion of rhetoric about anti-social behaviour, aimed

particularly at the young and marginalised (Brown 2013) and a demonisation of sections of the working class (Jones 2011). Parsons (2005) describes the New Labour policy agenda as offering a mixture of support and punishment for marginalised groups. Every Child Matters reflected this trend, with both new support and castigation for children from marginalised groups.

Every Child Matters (Department for Education and Skills 2003) was a policy statement published in response to the case of Victoria Climbie and the subsequent inquiry (Laming 2003) which had found fault in the lack of communication and cooperation between different public services. The aim of reducing the risk of serious harm for children was soon broadened to reducing the "numbers of children who experience educational failure, engage in offending or anti-social behaviour, suffer from ill health, or become teenage parents." (Department for Education and Skills 2003, p.5). Safeguarding concerns were "driven by assumptions and probabilities and dressed up in the language of biological inheritance, family pathology and class-based stereotypes." (Roche and Tucker 2007, p.215), furthering social divisions. Thus, New Labour engaged in a separation between deserving and undeserving poor, blaming the anti-social behaviour of a few individuals for the social ills of communities (Morrison 2019), a discourse echoed in explanations of school exclusion.

Every Child Matters followed the report 'Schools Achieving Success' (Department for Education and Skills 2001) and subsequent Education Act (2002). In the report, there is concern expressed about school exclusion, but this is positioned primarily as a potential "downward spiral towards criminality and social exclusion" (Department for Education and Skills 2001, p.27). In this way, moves to reduce school exclusion are not from a concern for the excluded, but about "diverting the unwanted behaviour" (Parsons 2005, p.188). Reducing school exclusion was to be attempted through increased

behaviour management, investment in PRUs, police 'truancy sweeps' and a greater focus on the responsibilities of parents (Department for Education and Skills 2001). Parents were at the same time to be in partnership with schools, whilst also being under threat of Parenting Orders, especially when "the parent's rather than the child's behaviour is the problem" (Department for Education and Skills 2001, p.26). The policy tone at this time was to focus on modifying offending behaviour through early intervention.

Comparing school exclusion with the judicial system, Parsons (2005) argued that both were based on the 'will to punish' rather than on a consideration of causes or consequences. This leads to a policy focus on fixing individual behaviour, removed from the context of causation or vulnerability – a process of "demonising and pathologising" (Parsons 2005, p.195) that places blame back on the individual. Similarly, those identified through the SEND system as having 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (EBD) tended to be punished and removed from the classroom as a result of this label, rather than supported or accommodated (Jull 2008). Headteachers were faced with a difficult balance, with strengthened imperatives for inclusion alongside increased accountability for outcomes (Selfe, et al. 2020). Thus, policies designed to offer systems of support also carried judgements that promoted individual responsibility and shifted explanations from the structural to the personal. Introducing these ambitious social reforms with measurable outcomes led to a culture of target driven behaviour (Rolph 2023). Social change, accountability and performance by targets and pathologising of the marginalised were all aspects of the New Labour era which continued up to and after the change of government in 2010.

Austerity and troubled families

The formation of a coalition government in 2010 marked a change in approach to public services. A policy of 'austerity' saw major cuts to public services which would impact most directly on those who were already the most vulnerable, heightening the class divide (Perera 2020). Funding cuts were presented as a "virtuous necessity" (Clarke and Newman 2012, p.303), but were a policy choice that degraded public services in ways that some experienced as punitive, disempowering and dehumanising (Snoussi and Mompelat 2019). Parker et al. (2016) identified that "cuts in CAMHS [children and adolescent mental health services] and voluntary sector mental health provisions may have compromised the support of such vulnerable children" (p.148). Policy focus was shifting from provision of services to pathologising those in need of support.

Cuts to public funding for services were accompanied by a renewed focus on social problems such as 'troubled families' (Gregg 2017; Lambert 2019; Loft 2020) and 'Broken Britain' (Thorp and Kennedy 2010). Skeggs and Loveday (2012) describe the pathologising rhetoric of dysfunctional families, ASB and dependence as part of a "strategy of moral governance" (p.476). Whilst they link this with a neoliberal desire to quantify the value of people, it also shows a sympathy with neoconservative values which would enter the public dialogue (Rolph 2023). Services were stripped back to focus less on support in favour of surveillance and enforcement (Snoussi and Mompelat 2019). Youth work was increasingly focused on delivering measurable outcomes, at the same time as suffering considerable cuts to funding (Mason 2015). Schools were often left trying to fill the gaps left by cutbacks (Done and Murphy 2018). A Runnymede Trust report (Snoussi and Mompelat 2019) described a cycle of disengagement from public services by people feeling overpowered or

shut out by bureaucratic processes. Those groups being blamed and marginalised in the public realm mirrored those more likely to be excluded from school: certain ethnic groups, care experienced, those with SEND and from low-income families (Department for Education 2023a). In this way, school exclusion comes to both signify and perpetuate wider social inequalities.

Austerity brought a rolling back of the role of the state (Clarke and Newman 2012), but there were policy continuities. For example, the neoliberal marketisation of schools set out in 1988 had continued to be strengthened under the labour government: greater regulation of schools, increased emphasis on performance by outcome and 'parental choice' and the opening of school management to the private market. The Education Act (2011) further enshrined these developments, following the Academies Act (2010) which committed to taking more schools out of local authority control in the guise of academies and blocked local democratic processes which may slow down progress towards this target (Gillard 2015). In their review of SEND policy, Selfe et al. (2020) found that the continuance of a market-driven school system led schools to be reluctant to spend their budget on those students who needed more support. Meanwhile, the profusion of new types of schools caused confusion over who had responsibility for what, with ultimate responsibility for SEND and those excluded from school lying with cash strapped local authorities which had increasingly little control over schools (Selfe, et al. 2020). Thus, the neoliberal process of both fragmentation and centralisation continued to impact most on those from marginalised groups who in turn were more likely to be excluded from school.

Berry (2012) noted that whilst Michael Gove, as Minister for Education, spoke of freeing teachers to manage behaviour, there was little effort to engage teachers in discussing pedagogy, curriculum or what it means to be a teacher. In fact, Gove made a point of

alienating teachers as a profession, memorably referring to them, local authorities, unions and academics as 'the Blob' – a potential block to his reforming plans (Gillard 2015). The political priorities for schools were to continue to push for greater accountability measures and remove more schools from local authority control. Alongside this, the professional status of teachers was deliberately undermined and the curriculum was to be used to promote neoconservative ideas such as 'British Values' (Department for Education 2014) and an Anglo-centric version of history (Burn 2015). The political drive to reform undermined the teaching profession and the capacity for schools to build inclusive practice, creating a greater role for alternative provision (AP).

By 2011 there was increasing interest in AP and the education minister ordered a review of the quality of provision in the sector (Taylor 2012). AP includes Pupil Referral Units and other education settings used as an alternative to mainstream school. AP offered not only a place for those already excluded from school but was also used by schools who were able to "direct a pupil off-site" (Department for Education 2013, p.9) to improve their behaviour, with a view to avoiding official exclusions. Taylor (2012) found that whilst some areas were making good use of high quality AP, others were using it to "dump" (p.6) unwanted students whose behaviour was deemed to be challenging.

The Timpson review (2019) recommended greater investment in AP in order to maximise the benefits of early intervention in avoiding exclusions, but also to raise standards in AP. However, Perera (2020) is very sceptical about the motivation for calls to increase the amount of AP and for greater use of academies in the sector, asking "how much will the market for the marginalised be worth?" (p.31). This reflects the view that AP is a new area for the neoliberal project in a growing and unregulated market (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014;

Malcolm 2020) which serves some of our most marginalised young people.

Recording of AP use has improved, but there are still no official records of how many APs there are in the country or who attends them (Thomson 2022b). The expansion of the sector at a time of more generalised cuts means that many young people's needs are no longer being met in mainstream schools (Thomson 2022b). Timpson (2019) found that young people in AP "typically have levels of need that mainstream schools feel unable to cater for" (Timpson 2019, p.25) and were often placed in AP at a time of crisis with little information or planning. Whilst many young people enjoy attending AP, and often prefer it to mainstream school (McGregor and Mills 2012; Hart 2013; Malcolm 2020), there are concerns that AP allows mainstream schools to continue to fail their most challenging and vulnerable students (Farrell, et al. 2017) and helps to reduce but also to mask the total number of exclusions from school.

Education systems, like all public policy areas, develop unevenly and in contested and contradictory ways (Archer 1979). This is well illustrated by the greater desire for inclusion and provision for SEND (see, for example Department for Education 2015) which continued to be developed, even in the context of austerity cuts and behaviour management targets.

Inclusion and exclusion

A new code of practice (CoP) (Department for Education 2015) made major changes to the identification and management of SEND. The Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) replaced the old 'statement of need' and introduced four new primary areas of need. The previous category of 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (EBD) was

replaced by 'social, emotional and mental health needs' (SEMH) which did move away from value laden language but was also seen by some as a cynical attempt to reduce the numbers of young people meeting a threshold for support (Norwich and Eaton 2015; Martin-Denham 2021). The CoP worked alongside the Equalities Act (GOV.UK 2015), which already made disability a protected characteristic. However, Social Finance (2020) found that there are perverse incentives in the school funding system to exclude students who have SEND, as allocated funding for SEND rarely covers the real costs of additional support whereas after exclusion, the financial responsibility reverts to the local authority. Austerity robbed the reforms of some of the potential, raising expectations but not the resources to meet need (Selfe, et al. 2020) and adding to a conflict of priorities for education professionals (Thompson, Tawell and Daniels 2021). Regardless of the layers of legislative protection, students with SEND continue to be more at risk of exclusion from school than their peers (Department for Education 2023a).

Despite the reforms to SEND provision, students with SEND are more likely to be sent home to 'cool off' or when there are no staff to support them (Ofsted/CQC 2017); be placed on part-time timetables and to experience isolation rooms (Office of the Children's Commissioner 2019a). They are disproportionally represented amongst those who leave the education system prematurely (Hunter 2019) and more likely to be encouraged to move schools, and be subject to off-rolling (Ofsted 2019). Having SEND is also an indicator for exclusion from school, being consistently over-represented in the school exclusion statistics.

"The permanent exclusion rate for pupils with an EHC plan is 0.13, and for pupils with SEN support is 0.25, compared to 0.05 for those without SEN" (Department for Education 2023a). The distinction between those with an EHCP and those identified as SEND without an

EHCP adds further nuance to the picture. Black, GRT and poor and care-experienced students are more likely to be identified at school level as having SEND (Department for Education 2018b). In contrast, navigating the SEND system, to get a referral, a diagnosis or a support plan (and so go *beyond* school level support) requires a level of engagement that makes middle class parents more able to get the recognition that they seek for their child (Nevill, Savage and Forsey 2022). Even in areas of deprivation, the families who are least disadvantaged have more access to the resources available (Hutchinson 2021). Thus, the processes by which SEND is identified are not neutral or evenly applied and the groups more likely to be identified as having SEND align with the groups which are more vulnerable to exclusion from school: those with low incomes and from certain ethnic groups.

Pursuing a formal diagnosis can be beneficial but demanding for parents (see Keenan, et al. 2010; Broomhead 2013) and the need to push for support without being seen as a difficult parent is described by Scorgie (2015) as a paradoxical dilemma*.* These challenges can lead to poorer parents feeling helpless and unable to "challenge institutional authority" (Chatzitheochari and Butler-Rees 2022, p.9) which may culminate in their withdrawal from the SEND system. Fisher's (2008) observation that the school exclusion process worked more quickly and autonomously than the SEND system remains apt today as Timpson (2019) found evidence of headteachers using school exclusion as a tool to access assessment and other SEND support. For this reason, some parents welcome their child's exclusion from school (Parker, et al. 2016) whilst others experience blame and guilt that hinders the home-school relationship (Broomhead 2013). These difficulties in the SEND system have an impact on the relationships between students with SEND, their

families and the school and perhaps help to explain, at least in part, why those with SEND are more vulnerable to school exclusion.

School culture and individual teachers are central to how students with SEND are both identified and supported. Despite the change of language and categorisation brought in with the 2015 code of practice, the link with 'externalising behaviour' in the classroom remains (Jull 2008; Norwich and Eaton 2015). This leads to young people being noticed for their behaviour before their needs, and the continued prevalence of a medical model seeks to fix the individual rather than adapt the classroom (Caslin 2021). There is little training or support for teachers in how to recognise or respond to SEMH needs (Nash, Schlösser and Scarr 2015) and this is the SEND category most at risk of exclusion (Thomson 2023). Teachers are more likely to report classroom behaviour as indicating ADHD and other neurological disorders when the student is from certain ethnic groups or a low-income home (Black 2019; Demie 2021; Wexler, et al. 2022). At the same time, categories of SEND which are seen as controllable (those more related to behaviour such as ADHD) also draw more stigma and judgement, with people more likely to respond with anger than with support (Broomhead 2019). In this way, behaviour in school (predominately of those from marginalised groups) is simultaneously pathologised and stigmatised, leading to the possibility of exclusion rather than support.

Teacher attitudes are central to creating an inclusive classroom and, when asked, teachers generally express aspirations to do so (Boyle, Topping and Jindal-Snape 2013; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka 2014). However, they have reservations about how they might include a young person with SEND in their own class (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert 2011), especially those identified as having EBD/SEMH or who have previously been excluded from school (Scanlon, McEnteggart and Barnes-Holmes 2020). Teachers express concern

about their own abilities, access to the necessary resources and how they may be judged or supported (Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka 2014; Scanlon, McEnteggart and Barnes-Holmes 2020). This leads to a gap between teacher aspirations and their everyday practice. The required focus on outcomes, making schools 'exam factories' (Hutchings 2015) detracts from schools as communities, to the extent of even "creating or exacerbating the difficulties which children may experience" (Mowat 2014, p.158). This lack of teacher confidence or skill, combined with the neoliberal schooling culture which emphasises measurable outcomes and the role of the individual further entrenches barriers to inclusion (Reay 2022).

Perverse incentives to exclude those identified as having SEND are not only financial. The pressure on schools to maintain academic achievement is experienced by education professionals as in conflict with the need to be inclusive (Thompson, Tawell and Daniels 2021). This leads Reay (2022) to dismiss the current emphasis on inclusion as "primarily babble" (p.10) which has little impact in reality on school practice. The disparities in the ways that SEND is identified represents both "structural discrimination" through policy and "interactional discrimination" (Chatzitheochari and Butler-Rees 2022, p.3) in the classroom. The continued underfunding of SEND in particular and schooling more generally led many of the aspirations of the CoP to be missed. Changes in government and the impact of Covid led, in 2023, to a stocktaking of current education policy and a review of the SEND reforms of 2015, as discussed in later in this chapter. In the meantime, there was increased focus on 'behaviour management' strategies and strengthening the rights of headteachers to exclude (Thompson, Tawell and Daniels 2021).

Behaviour management

DfE guidance on behaviour, Creating a Culture (Bennett 2017) was written by 'behaviour tsar' Tom Bennett who has become influential in government policy-making circles and amongst practicing teachers, despite a 'reductive' approach which largely overlooks questions of curriculum or the emotional state of learners (Parker and Levinson 2018). Bennett makes claims to a scientific approach to classroom management, relying on experiments and meta-analysis with seemingly little critical awareness, "without theory, or indeed anything more than a superficial sequential hypothesis" (Wrigley and McCusker 2019, p.117). In this way, Bennett is positioned as an expert whilst also rejecting the value of academic research and amplifying neoconservative views on behaviour in schools.

Bennett proposes that teachers can learn and enact the right skills to achieve compliance and that some pupils will never be manageable and need to be removed (Bennett 2017). This approach has been criticised as one which "divides children into the conformist 'well/can cope' sheep and the nonconformist 'sick/need specialist support' goats" (Parker and Levinson 2018, p.876). Such advice can be adopted by those seeking to address the difficulties of disruption caused by poor behaviour in schools without any need to question the current school systems. Emphasis is shifted from the structural inequalities of the school system to a focus on classroom routines and expectations, alongside more places to send those who do not respond to this behaviourist approach (Parker and Levinson 2018). This desire to 'fix' the young people who do not fit permeates through to AP, where behaviourist reward and sanction systems seek to retrain young people (Thomson and Pennacchia 2016) before they are put back into an unchanged mainstream school environment (Levinson and Thompson 2016). As the debates about appropriate

behaviour management and the use of specialist provisions continue, so too do the trends in highest levels of school exclusion being amongst marginalised groups.

2023: Opportunity for All?

The Opportunity for All (Department for Education 2022b) education white paper was published in 2022, but in a change that represents the chaos of the UK government at this time, the planned Schools Bill was dropped after considerable opposition and dilution (Weale 2022). Instead, elements of the original white paper have been retained as ambitions for the Department for Education, with varying degrees of success (Dickens 2023). Opportunity for All focuses primarily on raising attainment, measured by GCSE grades and meeting 'expected standards' for primary schools (Department for Education 2022b). In a searing critique of the current English education system, Reay (2022) suggests that a preoccupation with results has pushed out concerns for happiness and wellbeing, collectivity and collaboration. However, Opportunity for All (Department for Education 2022b) does at least acknowledge the need to improve the wellbeing of teachers.

Commitments to provide "an excellent teacher for every child" (Department for Education 2022b, p.8) were accompanied by plans for increased teacher training and an improved starting salary for teachers. In reality, however, teachers continue to leave the profession in large numbers (Department for Education 2023c) and the school year 2022/23 was disrupted by long running industrial action by teachers over pay and conditions (Department for Education 2023b). Pupil behaviour is often cited as an important factor in both dissuading people from becoming teachers and their reasons for leaving the profession (Allen, Burgess and Mayo 2018;

Perryman and Calvert 2020; Department for Education 2019b), an issue more pertinent in a time of teacher recruitment and retention crisis (Department for Education 2019b). As an attempt to address teacher safety and wellbeing concerns, the focus on arming teachers with more disciplinary powers such as the right to search students (Department for Education 2010) arguably furthers the notion that individual students are to be feared, punished or removed and leaves teachers feeling embattled and unable to teach (Allen and Sims 2018).

Opportunity for All (Department for Education 2022b) also expressed a commitment to better behaviour and higher attendance. This seems to have been intended to be achieved largely through increased use of monitoring data, leading to an increasing 'datafication' of children which Bradbury (2019) links to surveillance and control which, in turn, changes the nature and practice of schooling. Giroux (2020) describes the changing role of the teacher as "reduced to either technicians or security guards, or both" (p.10) as the focus shifts from teaching and learning to managing behaviour. In a recent report by the Oxford Exclusion Group, teachers reported that they found the advice to schools on disciplinary powers such as use of reasonable force, detentions, searches and isolation rooms overshadowed the "brief mention of the need for good behaviour policies, ethos, mutual respect and identifying and addressing hidden needs" (Thompson, Tawell and Daniels 2021, p.7). This prioritisation of punishment over support would contribute to an increased use of school exclusion, in particular for those students from marginalised groups whose support needs may have been overlooked.

Ofsted announced that they would be increasing their focus on behaviour in forthcoming inspections (Owston 2023). The inspection framework claims to draw on "research and inspection evidence" (Ofsted 2024) but the related research commentary (Ofsted 2019a)

cites often outdated research and overlooks the bulk of the work done in education research, relying heavily on Tom Bennett's views as its evidence base. Linking behaviour to the inspection regime also heightens potential feelings of conflict between inclusion and performance. Thompson, Tawell and Daniels (2021) identify three main conflicts for teachers when looking at school exclusion: inclusion versus exclusion, performance versus meeting need, and funding constraints and spending trade-offs. This illustrates the difficult balance for teachers and schools seeking to be more inclusive without compromising standards or risking public criticism.

The focus on individual behaviour occurs in the context of frequent moral panics about young people and poor behaviour in schools (Smith 2010). Attacks on young people include having a "feral lack of discipline" (Daily Mail Comment 2019) or being a lazy and entitled "snowflake generation" (Harris 2017). Successive Education Secretaries have taken a stand on issues such as school uniform (Northen 2011) and mobile phones (Ellis 2020), redolent of the New York 'broken windows' concept that dealing with minor crimes helps to prevent serious crime (Barton and Petty 2004). There has been a move towards so called 'zero tolerance' or 'no excuses' behaviour policies, with the use of isolation rooms, silent corridors, policing of language, posture and manners (Staufenberg 2018; Cushing 2021; Condliffe 2023). Often these strict rules are imposed on staff as well as students, as they are expected to lead by example (Cushing 2021). In an ethnography based in an academy school, Kulz (2017) details the tyranny of school leaders, where shouting and public humiliation of pupils is encouraged and school staff are watched to ensure that they are following the rules. Kulz's analysis is that such schools are located in deprived areas where the young people are considered to need harsh discipline to compensate for the poor opportunities provided within their pathologised families and

communities. In this way, harsh discipline in schools becomes primarily focused on those marginalised groups most at risk of exclusion from school.

Debate about the usefulness or desirability of stricter schools and harsher sanctions continues in the public arena and within the education profession (for example, Carr 2018; Bennett 2018; Burns 2021; The Economist 2023) but the focus on individual behaviour serves to distract from broader structural inequalities in the school system and instead leads to a school system that "prioritises discipline, control and individual excellence over creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and teamwork" (Reay 2022, p.13). For those students who cannot or will not comply, exclusion from school becomes almost inevitable.

To complement the policy document Opportunity for All, a wide-ranging review of SEND and AP was also announced, culminating in an improvement plan, Right Support, Right Place, Right Time (2023). SEND organisations have generally welcomed the review and subsequent plan, although with some trepidation about whether suggestions will be implemented, and in a timely manner (NASEN 2023; Special Needs Jungle 2023). Suggestions in the review include increased digitisation of the SEND system, a more uniform and integrated SEND and AP offer to avoid regional variations and a new qualification for SEND leaders. The review revisits several previously made commitments and recommendations which have yet to be acted upon, and this, added to the disruption in the UK government (Whittaker 2022) and approaching general election leads to cynicism about whether much will change in the short term.

Perera (2020) sees the proposed investment in AP as developing a new market in education and warns that increasing capacity in AP increases the numbers of young people educated away from schools, which, given the likely demographic, signifies a loss of entitlement to

mainstream education for certain marginalised groups. The SEND review does little to alleviate what is widely recognised as a crisis in SEND provision (NEU 2021; Jayanetti 2023; SEND Community Alliance 2023) and so the knock-on effects of increased rates of school exclusion amongst those with SEND persists. Increasing numbers of young people with SEND are being educated in AP (Thomson 2021) and Zarraga (2023), Director of Schools North East, warned that AP in the region was already over-subscribed and not able to "solve all of mainstream's problems" by acting as specialist SEND placements. Indeed, the bringing together of AP and SEND in the government review clearly indicates an intention to strengthen the link between the two. Thus, policy developments seem to be accepting, if not condoning, the continued higher levels of exclusion from school for those with SEND.

The scarcity of resources and continued emphasis on personal responsibility requires parents (mostly mothers) to advocate for their children in ways that prioritise the middle class and help to reproduce social inequalities (Nevill, Savage and Forsey 2022). The SEND review found that "parents and carers with access to financial and social resources are often better placed to navigate the system and secure support for their child" (Department for Education 2022c, p.10) The trend continues that young people from marginalised groups, those from certain ethnic groups, the care-experienced, claimants of FSM and those with SEND continue to leave school with the fewest and lowest GCSE grades (GOV.UK 2023), be educated away from mainstream schools in AP (Thomson 2021) and to be disproportionately at risk of exclusion from school (Department for Education 2023a).

Plans for education expressed by successive governments often display conflicts between inclusion and performance (Thompson, Tawell and Daniels 2021), aspiration and limited resources (Social

Finance 2020), and demonstrate the ways in which, as Archer (1979) observed, policy is developed through a push and pull of competing demands. Many education advisers seek a compromise position, advocating for a more sensitive approach where individual difference and varying levels of need are acknowledged. For example, the Improving Behaviour in Schools Guidance Report (Education Endowment Foundation 2019) offers suggestions for teachers on possible causes of disruptive behaviour, ways to proactively manage that, and suggests also that teaching 'behaviour for learning' will improve overall classroom behaviour. This chimes with much of the advice offered to teachers (see for example Capel, Leask and Younie 2016; Education Endowment Foundation 2019; Pollard and Wyse 2023), with some going further to address trauma (Bombèr 2007) and attachment (Parker and Levinson 2018). Whilst these approaches may help to create more inclusive or calmer classrooms, they retain a focus on the individual which leaves the school system, and the inequalities it serves to reproduce, largely unchallenged. Reay (2022) suggests that the problems in education are too big to be fixed by teachers themselves, and argues instead for more fundamental systemic change. The solution lies "[b]eyond debating how disadvantaged groups compete for scarce resources, we must look at how unequal power relations shape scarcity in the first place" (Snoussi and Mompelat 2019, p.9).

Alternatives to school exclusion

Having explored the social and policy difficulties associated with school exclusion and literature on experiences of school exclusion, this section offers an overview of possible alternatives to school exclusion.

A strong theme across the literature reviewed is the importance of relationships in education. Respectful relationships that show young people that they are cared for are powerful in creating the sense of belonging that has been found to be important for school success (Allen, et al. 2018). Belonging is often cultivated through the use of nurture groups, an intervention devised in the 1960s by Marjorie Boxall in response to behaviour arising from poverty and social disadvantage (Boxall and Lucas 2010; Nurture 2023). Based on attachment theory, the groups create a secure, homelike environment and through this address behaviour and learning needs. However, a drawback of the nurture group approach is that it can remain separate from the wider school community. Separation can lead to "value clashes" (Warin and Hibbin 2016, p.35) both for staff and students as they move between provisions with different expectations and levels of support.

There is a similar potential conflict when internal inclusion units are used on the site of, but separate from, the mainstream school (Gillies and Robinson 2012). Whilst often welcomed by students as a haven from mainstream classes, such units are frequently stigmatised, described as a "sin bin" or "zoo" (Gillies and Robinson 2012, p.159) by school staff. Indeed, there is even some hostility shown towards staff who work in inclusion units (Gillies and Robinson 2012) or who advocate for marginalised young people in school (Murphy 2022). This further underlines the need for relational and child-centred approaches to be whole-school and not only offered as alternatives to the mainstream.

Warin (2017) argues for a whole school ethos of care and puts particular emphasis on the role of school leaders in creating such a culture. A successful example of this is Carr Manor Community School (2024) where every member of the school – staff and student - belongs to a coaching group that meet regularly every week. This

values-led approach encourages nurturing relationships to both support and motivate learners, despite being in an area of social disadvantage. Although against the trend of a neoliberal school system with neoconservative behaviour management policies, encouraging school staff to think about and demonstrate 'professional love' (Grimmer 2021; Sellars and Imig 2021; Heffernan and Mills 2023; Johnston and Nolty 2023) may also be fruitful. The cultivation of respectful and caring relationships, rooted in communities can be a powerful tool in addressing under-engagement and marginalisation.

Freire (1996) describes the struggle for liberation as "an act of love" (Freire 1996, p.27) and identifies education as a key element of this struggle. Education in this sense is not prescribed or disconnected from the community of learners, but rooted in and coming from their needs and problems. As the young people most commonly excluded from school come from marginalised groups, a Freirean approach might look for solutions arising from the lived experiences of those communities. However, the concept of education for liberation is somewhat in conflict with the English neoliberal school system, based on performative measures of attainment and propped up by neoconservative behaviour policies.

Ball has articulated clearly a position on the neoliberal marketisation of education which makes education a product and requires schools to compete for business, concluding that "the modern school is an intolerable institution" (Ball and Collet-Sabé 2022, p.1). Educationalists including Giroux (e.g. 2003; 2008; 2020), Reay (e.g. 2001; 2017; 2022), Thomson (e.g. 2008; 2014; 2020), Tomlinson (e.g. 1988; 2005; 2022), Wrigley (e.g. 2003; 2011; 2018) and others have spent careers similarly critiquing the current school system as unfair, unequal and reproducing the structural inequalities in wider society. However, Wrigley proposed that "another School is Possible" (Wrigley 2006) and offered a more positive vision:

The relentless drive for higher test scores matters far less than caring and creative learners, a sense of justice, a world at peace, our common welfare and the future of the planet and all its people." (Wrigley 2006, p.115).

Lived experience of school exclusion in the literature

In this section, I review the literature on school exclusion, with a particular emphasis on experiences of young people who have been excluded from school. This includes research within the fields of education and psychology which platform the voices of young people, including those at risk of exclusion, attending AP and PRUs, identified as having SEND or belonging to other marginalised groups. Across the literature, those studies which sought the views and experiences of young people, plus some which included parents' and school staff views were prioritised.

Comparing AP and mainstream school

Findings across several studies have been consistent in identifying barriers and enablers for young people in school. Hart (2013), Michael and Frederickson (2013), and Levinson and Thompson (2016) all interviewed young people in PRUs and made comparisons between mainstream school and AP. The studies identified that there had been increased interest in AP and concerns about the quality of education they offer, but little research that gathered the views of the young people in AP.

The settings of these studies varied – Levinson and Thompson (2016) were in a PRU in rural Devon, Michael and Frederickson (2013) interviewed teenagers at PRUs in two local authorities. In contrast, Hart (2013) was based in a primary setting, with participants aged 9-13 years. However, the profile of the young people was similar: mostly male, identified as having SEND or mental health issues, having experiences of economic deprivation and family adversity such as domestic violence, social care involvement and homelessness. This

profile is reflected in the national school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a), except that some of the ethnic groups over-represented in the exclusion figures were not fully represented in the research participants.

Michael and Frederickson (2013) and Hart (2013) looked more explicitly at protective factors or enablers and barriers in mainstream schools and PRUs, Levinson and Thompson (2016) also explored this, but from an educational, rather than psychological, perspective. All three of these studies identified protective factors or enablers in AP including a sense of belonging and positive relationships, the smaller scale of AP that allows for more individual attention and a personalised curriculum, and a more holistic approach that makes the young people feel valued or cared for. In contrast, mainstream schools were often described as being too large, having a lack of staff understanding about behaviour and perceived unfair treatment. This sense of unfairness, in part due to harsh discipline and a too-rapid escalation through consequences, was "an important factor in negative relationships with teachers" (Michael and Frederickson 2013, p.415). The building of trusting, respectful relationships between young people and their teachers was a key message across all three studies, and seen as key to helping young people to address their behaviour.

Taking responsibility

Young people valued the way that behaviour was managed in AP in ways that showed understanding and did not stigmatise or escalate to exclusion (Levinson and Thompson 2016). In contrast, they described feeling in mainstream school that once teachers had identified them as struggling or as troublemakers, they were not helped, were

treated unfairly compared to their peers and they were expected to fail (Hart 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016; Caslin 2021). Murphy (2022) interviewed young people aged 6-16 attending PRUs who had been excluded from school and who also reported feeling that they were identified at school as being "a bad kid" (Murphy 2022, p.50). This sense of hostility from teachers in turn had a negative impact on the student relationship with school. Some young people worried that this negative labelling would reduce their prospects in the job market longer term (Michael and Frederickson 2013; Murphy 2022). Whilst seeing some labels as useful for accessing further support, parents interviewed by Parker et al. (2016) and by Martin-Denham (2022) described their children as being labelled as 'naughty' from a young age and then treated accordingly. Mainstream school seems to have little capacity for considering the impact on young people of carrying these labels.

Pomeroy (2000) spent time with and interviewed young people in Behaviour Support centres in the 1990s. Focusing on acceptance and resistance, Pomeroy (2000) noted that whilst some young people had regrets about school and concerns about their future opportunities, some also expressed relief or indifference at being out of school, or a sense of injustice at how they had been treated. It was acknowledged that for some young people, the focus on the failings of teachers was "sometimes at the expense of taking responsibility for their own behaviour" (Pomeroy 2000, p.52). However, young people in both Levinson and Thompson (2016) and Michael and Frederickson (2013) did acknowledge the role of their own behaviour in their difficulties at school. Some admitted to poor behaviour stemming from a "complete lack of respect for teachers" (Levinson and Thompson 2016, p.38) which they contrasted with how they felt about PRU staff.

The disruptive behaviour of others was often identified as a barrier to learning in mainstream school, although some suggested that others

being disruptive in class encouraged their own poor behaviour as it was an opportunity to "have a laugh" (Michael and Frederickson 2013, p.414) – something very important to 'the lads' in Learning to Labour (Willis 1977). Despite this, some young people in these studies looked to themselves as enablers in their own success. Hart (2013) identified within-child protective factors, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and having a secure base as well as highlighting the importance of families and communities as sources of resilience. Attending AP was seen as a way to build these inner reserves, which potentially makes the young person better able to cope when returning to mainstream school.

Reintegration

A challenge to successful reintegration identified by Hart (2013) was the negative views of mainstream school held by many of the PRU students, heightened by comparisons with a more positive experience in the PRU. Levinson and Thompson (2016) also discuss the 'window of opportunity' to reintegrate students back into mainstream school before they become too settled in PRU and prefer to stay there. In this way, AP is seen as a reprieve from the pressures of mainstream school, but is also shaped by the need to prepare young people for a return to school. Hart (2013) identified a further challenge for PRU staff who, as well as giving the care and support typical of AP, were also aware of the need to continue to be enough like school to support reintegration. PRU staff expressed concerns about unrealistic expectations that the PRU would 'fix' the young people and that the school therefore did not need to change.

Levinson and Thompson (2016) identify a paradox in that when a young person responds well to the support given in a PRU, and

makes changes to their behaviour, they are then deemed ready for reintegration back into mainstream school. Unlike the excluded young person, the school has not been changed through the exclusion process as very little of this process addresses the culture and routines of the school as a factor. Instead, "the onus for change can be placed on the pupils rather than on mainstream practices" (Mills and Thomson 2018, p.39). Thus, a return to mainstream school present many of the same challenges as led to the initial exclusion.

Changes needed are not small and individualised but, argues Caslin (2021), involve changing the ethos of the school. Without this, Mills and Thomson found that "short-term gains made in the alternative provision were rapidly lost" (Mills and Thomson 2018, p.39) - ongoing support requires both the student and the school to change. Because of this, Levinson and Thompson (2016) question whether reintegration should be the goal of PRUs. Without mainstream schools developing a deeper understanding of behaviour, and adapting their own practices, reintegration to mainstream can be a fragile process.

Understanding behaviour

There is sometimes a conflict between young people wanting friendly teachers who respond to each situation in context and wanting strict sanctions always evenly applied (Pomeroy 2000; Office of the Children's Commissioner 2012). However there was also a distinction between clear boundaries and expectations within a positive behaviour management strategy, which are considered to be helpful, and authoritarian approaches which lead to a sense of injustice and sometimes then to disengagement or a deliberate violation of rules (Michael and Frederickson 2013). Some of the young people in the studies cited responded to challenges at school by embracing an

identity of "rebels" (Levinson and Thompson 2016, p.35) and "bad boys" (Johnston and Bradford 2019, p.1555). In a study of young peoples' experiences of managed moves (used as an alternative to exclusion), Jones remarked that compliant behaviour becomes for some a "currency" (2020, p.84) which can be used to gain a place in a preferred school. Such approaches can make behaviour management transactional rather than relational. The literature reflects the complexity of finding disciplinary systems that the whole community can feel is meaningful, equitable and clear.

Approaches to managing behaviour vary from school to school. A wide-ranging report for the Children's Commissioner which interviewed almost 2,000 school students found that spending time in an on-site unit (separate from but still a part of a mainstream school, as an alternative to exclusion) was seen as helpful by some. This was especially so when the unit maintained a connection with the wider school through the curriculum and quality teaching and support. However, some school units were described as a "punishment suite" (Office of the Children's Commissioner 2012, p.115) using rigid discipline with the aim of forcing behaviour change. This reflects a neoconservative element to recent school policy-making that encourages teachers to focus on behaviour more than on context or need.

Nash, Schlosser and Scarr (2015) used postal questionnaires to teachers in mainstream schools (over 100 schools initially) to explore their views on disruptive behaviour. They found that most of the teachers questioned held the view that young people were largely in control of their behaviour, making disruptive behaviour a choice. "The logic of this thinking, therefore, is that pupils need to be disciplined in order to learn the consequences of their undesirable behaviour" (Nash, Schlösser and Scarr 2015, p.173). Jones (2020) and Caslin (2021) used life grids to research lived experience of school

exclusion. They describe young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) feeling that at school they are positioned as a "culprit rather than a victim" (Caslin 2021p.123). Whilst the notion of being victims may also be problematic, this demonstrates an awareness amongst young people that they are regarded as at odds with the school ethos and routines. The school response is directed at sanctioning or managing behaviour rather than addressing underlying causes.

Parker et al. (2016) interviewed parents of children who had been or were at risk of exclusion from school. Many of the parents in this study felt that schools did not recognise the underlying causes of disruptive behaviour even though their children had a wide range of SEND that affected their ability to cope in school including mental health issues, autism, ADHD, hearing, speech and language difficulties, physical illness and dyslexia. Whilst several of the children had no formal diagnosis and so were in a "state of limbo; bouncing between services, just under thresholds for diagnosis or support" (Parker, et al. 2016, p.143). Others found that having a diagnosis was not the gateway to support that they had hoped and their children were still disciplined rather than supported in school.

Murphy (2022) also highlights the profile of his participants as having experienced difficulties due to SEND, abuse and bullying and yet there is a lack of understanding about how this is communicated through their behaviour. Both the young people themselves and their teachers tend not to link their behaviour to their emotional or learning needs. Murphy (2022) notes that this onus on behaviour rather than needs is systemic in school exclusion as the process requires the offending behaviour of the excluded student to be listed as a reason, with no parallel requirement to consider the role of the school or the unmet needs of the student. In this way, schools "non-consciously support the national government to maintain symbolic

power by removing social disadvantage from reports on exclusions" (Murphy 2022, p.53). The focus on individual choices and behaviour allows little acknowledgement of the role of school in reproducing inequalities.

Rather than seeing disruptive behaviour as communicating unmet needs and "driven by underlying fear and anxiety (however well-disguised)" (Nash, Schlösser and Scarr 2015, p.170), there are concerns that "children's behaviour is medicalised, constrained, amended and ultimately punished for being different" (Caslin 2021, p.118). The PRU-based studies outlined earlier (Hart 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016; Murphy 2022) all highlighted problems in the way that mainstream schools responded to behaviour, citing a lack of understanding and harsh systems of discipline and yet there continues to be a reluctance to address this. Instead, as outlined previously, many schools are now introducing more rigid 'zero tolerance' behaviour expectations which furthers the push for uniformity.

SEND and school exclusion

Potential conflicts between behaviour management and inclusion (Parker and Levinson 2018) are particularly heightened for those students with SEND – one of the marginalised groups consistently most at risk of school exclusion (Department for Education 2023a). This raises questions about the suitability and inclusivity of mainstream schools as they currently operate.

Porter and Ingram (2021) used a questionnaire sent to four schools in a local authority to investigate barriers and protective factors in school for girls with SEND. They found that having friends in school was an important protective factor for young people, helping with

feelings of safety and belonging. The young people in the study also identified having quiet places in school and time between lessons to re-set, as well as having engaging lessons with enthusiastic teachers as helpful. Some barriers to success in mainstream school were the noise and busyness of schools, with people pushing in corridors, being mean or rude to each other and disruptive in lessons.

Porter and Ingram (2021) reported that some teachers talk too fast or get annoyed when asked for help, and, worryingly, that some teachers "unwittingly contribute to the marginalisation of particular pupils through their negative comments, and legitimising criticisms and insults made by peers" (Porter and Ingram 2021, p.13). These teacher responses added to a sense amongst girls with SEND of not fitting in or not being able to be themselves in school. A perceived stigma around SEND was found to be a key factor in disengagement from education by Johnston and Bradford (2019) and Murphy (2022). Bullying was linked by Murphy (2022) to being seen to struggle academically and young were people reluctant to acknowledge their own needs or ask for or accept help. The young people in Johnston and Bradford's (2019) study were also bullied, made visible by attendance at an AP, and they went to lengths to distance themselves from disability labels.

Murphy (2022) also noted that a number of young people with ADHD had the need to move around or for other stimulation which was not permitted in the classroom and this then affected their learning and behaviour. Caslin takes disability, and SEBD in particular as a focus and argues for a social model that sees these young people as "disabled by the way they are responded to within the education system that has been socially constructed" (2021, p.117). A disability discourse based on "normative assumptions" (Johnston and Bradford 2019, p.1550) about development and ability have shaped education policy and practice in ways that can distract from the systemic

barriers faced by young people with SEND. School exclusion processes continue to focus on offending behaviour and not on the learning or support needs of students.

Within the SEND category, those identified as having SEMH (previously SEBD) are the most at risk of exclusion from school (Thomson 2023). There are concerns that the label itself attracts negative attitudes and sanctions in school, in fact Jull (2008) described it as "the special educational need justifying school exclusion". Such concerns remain, with Caslin (2021) also highlighting the potential for teachers who are not equipped to understand or meet the complex needs of young people with SEMH needs instead using the label as a means to move them on from mainstream school. Caslin (2021) points to the continued presence of deficit models of understanding, where behaviour is seen as not fitting the school, rather than looking at how the school environment may have contributed to the behaviour. True inclusion, we are reminded by Michael and Frederickson (2013) means that the school adapts to the needs of the students, and not only that diverse students are supported to adapt to school routines.

Whilst teachers endorse the principles of inclusion, they express concerns about how to manage this in practice (Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka 2014; Scanlon, McEnteggart and Barnes-Holmes 2020; Caslin 2021). A report for the Children's Commissioner (2012) found a lack of training and expertise in SEND amongst school staff to be a contributing factor in school exclusions. Paradoxically, Parker et al. also showed that exclusion from school could heighten the level of need identified and so become a "gateway to services, a trigger for action or an opportunity for a fresh start" (2016, p.138). This point was reiterated in a more recent study looking at policy enactment in school exclusions, where school leaders admitted to unofficially sometimes viewing school exclusion as a way to move "up the ladder"

(Tawell 2023, p.15) towards accessing specialist support. Martin-Denham also found that "children often must be in crisis and experience school exclusions to secure assessments of needs" (2022, p.138). Thus, the incapacity of mainstream schools to identify and meet additional needs becomes part of cycle where behaviour incidents and exclusion become steps towards getting adequate support.

Martin-Denham (2022) interviewed parents of autistic children, with a specific focus on the SEND process and school exclusion. The theographs created show the inter-relationship between the SEND process, identifying needs, support or lack of it in school and exclusion from school. They show that the onus had been on parents to report concerns and to seek support for their child and that sometimes health and education professionals had dismissed parent concerns. There were tensions between the availability of provision, resources and expertise in schools, and the (often unmet) needs of the students. Martin-Denham's analysis also allowed the identification of key moments in the participants' journey through school and the SEND process.

Key moments in the school journey

Martin-Denham (2022) found that some infant schools had been more able than later key stages to create the collaborative relationships with parents which had led to better support for students with SEND. For some young people, primary school had offered a refuge from the difficulties at home in ways that secondary school did not (Levinson and Thompson 2016). Jones (2020) also noted that teacher and peer support were more forthcoming in primary school and difficulties in school tended to heighten in early secondary years. Farouk (2017) suggests that rules and expectations

are applied more rigidly and impersonally in secondary school. As the likelihood of being excluded from school rises with age (Department for Education 2023a) this perception of greater support earlier in the school system may be a significant factor. Transitions were also challenging, as students move from infants to junior school (Martin-Denham 2022), primary to secondary (Levinson and Thompson 2016), and school to school in managed moves (Jones 2020) or reintegration from AP to mainstream school (Hart 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016). Those students experiencing multiple school moves due to exclusions are of course then more vulnerable to the difficulties brought by transitions.

Some young people in this literature had been able to identify key moments in their journey to school exclusion. Often events outside of school led to behaviour incidents in school, for example bereavement and family volatility (Levinson and Thompson 2016). Farouk also reported this link between home and family concerns and behaviour at school, but comments that for some, these kinds of difficulties did not relate to specific moments in time, but were "a constant and therefore unremarkable backdrop to their time at school" (Farouk 2017, p.20). In this way, marginalisation is an ongoing factor in the lives of young people which affects their school experiences but does not necessarily directly lead to key moments.

Although Caslin (2021) focused on 'critical moments', the picture emerged of an ongoing cycle where incidents would lead to disciplinary sanctions which may, in turn, lead to the young person being feeling rejected and resentful and disengaged from school. This was also the view of Parker et al. (2016) who describe a "relentless turbulent struggle" where exclusion from school is a "crisis point during a fluctuating level of difficulties" (p.137). This suggests that key moments and turning points in school may happen as part of a more continuous process of behaviour incidents, disciplinary

sanctions, support being provided or unavailable, referrals for assessment, AP and other specialist help, feelings of belonging or disengagement, labelling and unfairness which eventually culminate in exclusion from school.

Voice and decision making

The importance of being (and feeling) listened to is highlighted across the data. Supporting young people to understand and to speak about their own needs is recommended by Murphy (2022), who noted that both teachers and students often did not make the links between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and behaviour and so did not ask for the help that they needed. A lack of empathy or understanding damages relationships and heightens conflicts. Caslin (2021) asked young people what would happen if a behaviour incident occurred in school, and they responded that they would not be asked for their account or would not be believed. Young people in Michael and Frederickson's (2013) study "expressed the frustration they feel when teachers do not listen to them or take their opinions into consideration" (p.417). Timpson (2019) also highlights the sense of injustice that is provoked when the exclusion process does not gather the views of the young person, or consider the specific context of behaviour incidents. Rather than active agents in the process of exclusion, often young people felt more like "some 'object' to be moved on" (Levinson and Thompson 2016, p.35). Overall, there is a picture of young people in school not feeling listened to, cared for or included in discussion or decision-making.

McCluskey (2014) took an overview of three UK studies across AP, mainstream and special schools to consider the topic of discipline in schools. A key finding was that youth voice was minimal in education and "young people remain largely on the outside of decision making"

(McCluskey 2014, p.3) on matters of discipline. Mechanisms for gathering student voice such as school councils tended to be tokenistic and not generally engaged in reviewing school discipline. Meanwhile, those experiencing disciplinary processes such as exclusion from school tended to be vague or confused about the decisions made about their education, becoming more detached and less consulted the more exclusions they had. This was further complicated for those young people in the care system as decisions about their education and care became intertwined.

The Children's Commissioner (2012) reported that young people have no right to be represented in permanent exclusion process, but can be consulted. Instead, the report suggests that schools tended to talk to (inform) rather than consult young people, who felt that they had no voice in the proceedings and that the decision to exclude was already made. Furthermore, as young people and their parents did not know the law, they were likely to perceive that schools could do as they choose. A review of school exclusions for legal organisation JUSTICE (De Friend 2019) concluded that there was a lack of information for young people and parents or it was inaccessible and alienating in its language. Schools were also found to have an inconsistent understanding of the law on school exclusions and so there were flaws at every stage of the process and missed opportunities to avoid exclusions.

Several studies found that parents also felt largely disenfranchised and stigmatised by the school exclusion processes. Although some parents recognised the crucial role they had played in navigating the school and SEND systems, Parker et al. (2016) found that parents' ability to act as advocate for their child varied, often linked to other struggles that the parents are also dealing with. Timpson also illustrated the two-way nature of the home-school relationship, with parents often feeling unsupported or uninvolved, whilst some schools

reported that despite making every effort to engage with parents, some parents were resistant to engaging with the school. Some parents were distrustful of school and other services and the Childrens' Commissioner (2012) noted that some parents may have had their own difficulties in school, possibly even at the same school, which then affected how able they felt to engage with services.

Broomhead (2014) detailed ways in which parents of young people identified as having behavioural difficulties were blamed (by themselves and professionals) for their child's difficulties, more than in comparison to other areas of SEND. This served to make home-school relationships fragile as they were "suffused with notions of blame and guilt" (Broomhead 2013, p.19). Class added an additional layer to this relationship, as professionals were more likely to identify parents who were, for example, unemployed, claiming benefits or living in social housing as ineffective parents repeating the mistakes of previous generations of parents (Broomhead 2014). This led to a perceived "clash of two worlds" (Broomhead 2014, p.142) between working class parents and educational professionals.

Marginalisation

Young people from marginalised groups are consistently more likely to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). Research into lived experience of school exclusion is useful in articulating the impact of being excluded from school and how young people feel about it. This section of the literature review considers how marginalisation is reflected in these accounts of school exclusion.

Pomeroy (2000) draws attention to the dominant discourse in schools advantaging white middle and upper class students. "Students recognise this systemic bias being directed against them but do not

identify it as such" (Pomeroy 2000, p.133). Young people may feel pushed out or unfairly treated, but do not articulate this in terms of identity or wider inequalities. In investigating the inclusion of pupil voice in school disciplinary systems, McCluskey (2014) concludes that school systems invest "the term 'marginalised' with new meaning" (McCluskey 2014, p.6) as those in the most difficult circumstances are the most removed from the processes of decision making "about fundamentally important decisions in their own lives" (McCluskey 2014, p.6). Marginalisation, then, is a key factor in the causes and outcomes of school exclusion, but is often not recognised as such.

The Children's Commissioner (Office of the Children's Commissioner 2012) identified a reluctance from schools to talk about race, with many instead claiming to be 'colourblind'. Consequently, identity tends not to be considered as a factor when the decision is made to exclude from school and so the systemic patterns of marginalisation reflected in the national school exclusion numbers (Department for Education 2023a) are overlooked. When Cheshire, a low excluding local authority, examined their exclusion figures (Social Finance 2020) they found that they also followed the national trend for young people from marginalised groups to be more likely than their peers to be excluded from school. This suggests that it would be of benefit for local authorities and schools to be mindful of the profile of their students who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from school. Such a process would make more explicit the links between marginalisation and behaviour (Murphy 2022) and the discriminatory nature of the English school system.

Discrimination is not restricted to mainstream schools. Johnston and Bradford (2019) undertook research in an AP based in an FE college. They conducted observations, interviews and focus groups with students in years 10 and 11, with particular focus on a peer group known as "the bad boys". The AP setting was found to be isolating for

the disabled males in attendance. The AP provided vocational training which offered an alternative for school-excluded young people but continued to "evoke a neoliberal logic" (Johnston and Bradford 2019, p.1551) based on developing a work-ready self. The expectations about the capacity of the young people in this AP to adapt to their new learning situation, access support and remodel themselves as future workers did not take account of the nature of their disabilities. Furthermore, the siting of the AP within an FE college made the students especially visible to but separate from the rest of the college students in ways that stigmatised and reinforced their difference. A failure to recognise the nature of their SEND was a barrier to engagement for the 'bad boys' in this AP.

In their research with girls identified as having SEND, Porter and Ingram (2021) listed a number of elements of mainstream school that the young people had identified as challenging for them. Porter and Ingram (2021) concluded that teachers' negative attitudes towards young people with SEND furthered their marginalisation. As young people struggle with the environment and expectations of school, they become subject to disciplinary processes, leading to consistently higher risk of school exclusion for those with SEND (Department for Education 2023a). There is an intersectionality in the marginalisation of young people with SEND. Young people from certain ethnic and lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be identified as having SEND (Department for Education 2018b), but are also less likely to successfully navigate the SEND system to get the level of support needed (Nevill, Savage and Forsey 2022). Multiple factors combine to contribute to the continued trend of greater risk of school exclusion for those from marginalised groups.

Farouk (2017) pays particular attention to the traumatic family experiences of school-excluded young people, including bereavement and domestic violence. Whilst such experiences are not unique to

those from disadvantaged communities, the cumulative effects of risk factors which may also include the effects of poverty and deprivation make these early life experiences more significant (McKinney 2014; Department for Education 2018a). When young people with multiple risk factors find school to be challenging, lacking in support or even hostile and punishing, they may "gain their sense of self-worth in early adolescence by belonging to an anti-establishment peer group culture" (Farouk 2017, p.22). The consequences of joining such groups may then have far-reaching effects as the young person moves from school to work, as it did for 'the lads' in Learning to Labour (Willis 1977). A cycle of disadvantage and rejection by and of school both arises from and deepens marginalisation.

It must be considered whether marginalisation is merely an unintended consequence of policy decisions. Caslin describes the political priorities of the conservative government as "the reinvigoration of traditionalism and a 'high stakes' testing regime" (Caslin 2021 p.119), and links this to greater disengagement of those who struggle academically or with conforming to school rules. Those who do not conform are subject to punitive disciplinary measures and so school exclusion may be seen in the context of a wider neoliberal and neoconservative political direction. McCluskey (2014) sees the silencing of young people in disciplinary procedures as collusion with the populist view of young people as a social problem. As young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school, this silencing further compounds their marginalised position. Misunderstanding or failing to recognise how disadvantage influences behaviour in school may be framed as a "regulatory function within the school system" (Murphy 2022, p.52), as schooling is used to maintain social norms and reproduce structural inequalities.

Several of the studies showed that young people felt that they had been negatively labelled at school and this had led to unfair

treatment and poorer support in school (Hart 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016; Caslin 2021; Murphy 2022). However, a fuller analysis of where these attitudes and labels came from, or their relationship with identities such as race and class, and how these identities interact with school structures was often lacking from the literature. All of the studies cited offer useful insight into the experiences, stories and feelings of young people who have been excluded from school. This thesis adds to this body of research and give a platform to more voices of school-excluded young people. In addition, an analysis using the following theoretical framework will locate these personal stories within the social context that makes school exclusion both a symbol and a product of marginalisation and structural inequalities.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework acts as a "scholarly foundation" (Kivunja 2018, p.47) from which to analyse research data. The framework offers a consistency in underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions and guides the research design. This theoretical framework is a composite of concepts from critical realism and Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) as outlined below.

Critical realism and school exclusion

Critical realism provides a useful lens to explore school exclusion. Originating from the ideas of Bhaskar (2008) and further developed by Archer (1979) and others (Collier 1994; Porpora 1998; Elder-Vass 2010; Gorski 2013), critical realism is a philosophy with an assiduous approach to understanding ontology and the interaction of structure, agency and culture in creating and maintaining the social world (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020). Through "explanatory critique" (Bhaskar 1998, p.xvii), critical realism strives to provide the tools not only to analyse but to change social institutions (Collier 1998) and wider society. This research is motivated by the injustices inherent in school exclusion and a desire to contribute to change and is therefore aligned with the emancipatory aims of critical realism.

Bhaskar referred to the "holy trinity of critical realism" (2016, p.6) as ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationalism; each of these terms will be examined briefly below.

Ontological realism

Ontological realism is based on an assertion that there is a social reality that exists beyond and independently of our human experience (Porpora 2015). Critical realism applies some of the assumptions of natural sciences to social sciences: it is proposed that, just as in nature, there are forces in society which we may not be able to see or measure, but nonetheless which have an impact on human life (Bhaskar and Lawson 1998) . For example, social class, marginalisation, racism and discrimination are all social realities, as reflected in the school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a). Whilst these are difficult to conceptualise or quantify, they continue to exert influence on the social world. Bhaskar also remarks that "social reality is material" (2017, p.38). For example, marginalisation is a sociological concept, and yet belonging to a marginalised group has a material effect on life chances, including in health, housing, employment and school exclusion.

Epistemological relativism

Having committed to a realist ontology, critical realists also accept that our understandings of that are "a conceptualised reality" (Bhaskar 2017, p.38) and so our descriptions of society are always informed by theory. In this way, explanations of the social world are rooted in their historical context: they change as we gain new knowledge (Collier 1994).

Our inability to fully know or describe reality does not reduce its influence on shaping society. Knowledge is "a social product" (Bhaskar 2008, p.21) reflecting the fashions, beliefs and information available at the time. Whilst we might agree that our knowledge of

the world is gained via human senses and understood through theories and concepts, "what is known exists and acts independently of those descriptions" (Bhaskar 2009, p.66). Furthermore, the contextual nature of our knowledge does not mean that "there is nothing ontologically objective to be known" (Porpora 2015, p.16). In this way, epistemological relativism complements a realist ontology, and requires a critical rationality.

Judgemental rationalism

Also termed as "critical rationality" (Bukowska 2021, p.2), judgemental rationalism is used in order to both interrogate evidence and to theorise about likely or feasible explanations for the social phenomena under investigation. Social researchers are engaged not only in gathering and analysing data, but also in a "rational deliberation over rival theories" (Groff 2004, p.21). Further, Bhaskar suggests that this deliberation must be done with "reflexivity and ethical (moral, social and political) responsibility" (2009, p.17). This process supposes that there is an objective reality of which we seek an accurate description and so refutes the notion that "all beliefs are equally valid" (Bhaskar 2009, p.49).

Bhaskar suggests that these three elements are necessarily linked: "epistemic relativism is as necessary for judgemental rationality as ontological realism is for epistemic relativity" (2009, p.49). Taken together, the critical realist position is that there are social realities which are independent of being known, that our understanding of those realities are based on an incomplete and contextual knowledge, and that we must therefore apply a critical judgment to arrive at conclusions.

In this thesis, I take a realist position and by applying judgemental rationality seek to offer explanations that incorporate both the empirical, lived experience of school-excluded young people and the structural inequalities inherent in the school exclusion statistics.

Structure, culture and agency

The concepts of structure, culture and agency are central to the work of Archer, and more broadly to critical realism. They are terms that will be referred to throughout this thesis. In this section, I will set out what is meant, for the purposes of this analysis, by structure, culture and agency.

Structure

Social structure is described by Porpora as "relational, material conditions that stand ontologically apart from both behavioural interaction and culture" (2015, p.104). For example, terms used in this thesis such as inequality and marginalisation are relational – they imply a comparison with other groups or with an assumed standard. Inequality and marginalisation suggest "social positions" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020, p.55) which serve to shape access to services and material goods, and which can be termed structural, in contrast to factors relating to behaviour, personal choice or cultural values.

Archer suggests that we are "involuntarily situated" as structures "impinge upon us without our compliance, consent or complicity" (Archer 2000, p.262). This is not to mean that structures are all powerful, deterministic forces, but that they are inescapably part of

the social world. We take positions in social structures that are not always of our choosing, and the options we have for taking action are then shaped by the material and relational resources available.

One of the marginalised groups more likely to be excluded from school is those students who claim free school meals. In order to claim free school meals, a family must demonstrate that they have an income below a certain threshold, and the provision of free school meals is an acknowledgment that the family is living below the accepted standard – a relational measure. In addition, living in a low-income family has implications for the young person that are not conceptual or relational but practical and material. It could mean lack of access to sufficient food, clothing and other goods, to adequate housing and to social opportunities. These factors are all aspects of that same structural position. They all combine to have an effect on the quality of life for that young person.

Although social structures are "products of – and only exist through – human activities" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020, p.54), they are treated in this analysis as distinct from culture. Social structures may shape the level of access to, and the nature of cultural experiences available to people. Structures also interact with culture in an ongoing and reciprocal relationship, by which each may influence and effect change in the other.

Culture

Archer describes culture as "intelligibilia" (Archer 1996, p.xviii). In contrast to social structures, culture comes from the mind, not private thoughts but those aspects which are social in nature (Porpora 2015). This includes "values, stereotypes, morals, and taken-for-granted assumptions" (Porpora 2015, p.163) as well as

more easily recognisable cultural products such as "stories, myths, works of art" (Porpora 2015, p.162). Applied to schools, the curriculum, the content of textbooks, as well as approaches to pedagogy and attitudes to SEND might all be considered to be elements of culture.

A critical realist analysis treats cultural structures as mirroring social structures. This allows an analysis of both structure and culture as social factors which shape and have influence on each other, which requires them to be conceptualised as ontologically separate but continually interacting with each other (Porpora 2015). In this way, it may be seen that the structures of the education system are also shaped by and have influence upon the culture in school, and cultural expectations of school.

Archer rejected what she termed the "Myth of Cultural Integration" (Archer 1996, p.2), which supposes that culture is one homogenous phenomena, generic and coherent. Archer argued against a definition of culture as "a community of shared meanings" (Archer 1996, p.4), which in turn suggests cultural patterns and uniformity of action. This meant that explanations of cultural change had always to come from outside of culture, as mechanisms for change within culture were lacking.

Instead, Archer proposed a more complex and dynamic understanding of culture. This framed culture in more structural terms, and separated "the logical consistency of culture … Cultural System integration" (Archer 1996, p.6) from "causal cohesion … termed Socio-Cultural integration" (Archer 1996, p.6). More simply, this distinguishes "between 'parts' and 'people' in the cultural domain" (Archer 1996, p.xix). The process of cultural conditioning includes "activation" (Archer 2007, p.64) of cultural ideas in a person's own reflexive inner conversations. Thus, cultural conditioning, like the structural, is not a deterministic pre-

programming, but a dynamic interplay in which agency mediates the impact of structure and culture.

This separation of structure, culture and agency allows a recognition of the ways that, for example an elite may impose culture that is accepted under duress or resisted by others in the population. In the case of schools, this model helps to explain ways in which school culture that is largely pervasive may also be rejected or subverted by some students and teachers. For example, a school culture based on punishment and blame may be subverted by a teacher who instead builds supportive relationships, or rejected by a student who refuses to attend detention. Others in the school may broadly accept and live by the disciplinary system, without being fully committed to it.

Social structures may serve to constrain or enable the access that different people have to cultural ideas and experiences. In turn, culture helps to equip people with the tools to understand their own situation and to imagine what their possible responses are. As such, culture is not seen as deterministic in leading to predictable responses, but as a crucial element in the ways that people may interpret events or shape their response to them. In critical realism, structure and culture pre-exist, and give the context for, human agency.

Agency

Whilst the starting point for this thesis was the structural inequalities inherent in school exclusion, the lived experiences of school-excluded young people are at the heart of it. My opposition to school exclusion comes from a belief in "the special value and inviolable dignity of the human person" (Porpora 2015, p.131). As such, the narratives of the young people in this research reflect, in part, their agentic role in the

processes of school exclusion. This agency is, however, always enacted within the boundaries – the "constraints and enablements" (Archer 2016a, p.5) – created by the structural and cultural context of social action.

Archer wrote extensively about agency and reflexivity (see Archer 2000; Archer 2007). The problematic phrase "normal members of society" (Archer 2007, p.62) is used, whereas I prefer to adopt a human rights model (Lawson and Beckett 2021). In this way, all people, including the young and those with SEND should be regarded as having personhood and therefore their own sets of wants and needs, even if not expressed in conventional ways.

When discussing agency, the focus is on "intentional action" (Porpora 2015, p.138). Archer describes agents as being "agents of something" (Archer 2000, p.262), as their actions have effect on social and cultural structures within which they live and act. Thus agency in this sense is social and intentional. Agency is what you do not who you are, although they are of course inextricably linked.

Through internal conversation, people are able to identify their "ultimate concerns" (Archer 2007, p.64) and make decisions about how they will respond to their social situation. The pursual of these ultimate concerns may suggest a rational and strategic plan, but the notion of the "homo economicus" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020, p.52) who acts only and narrowly in their own economic interest is rejected. It is recognised that people may choose or feel compelled at times to act against their own material interests. This demonstrates the importance of human agency in understanding society, not as something static or following social laws, but instead as complex and dynamic.

In parallel to the constraints and enablements represented by social structures, cultural structures can also serve to open up possibilities

for agency, or to shape what we feel to be the right course of action. The structural and cultural conditions in which we live help to shape "what we project as possible, attainable and even desirable." (Archer 2000, p.262). Again, there is a complex interplay between structure, culture and agency. It is also useful to consider the different ways in which agency is enacted, using the concept of primary and corporate agency.

Primary and Corporate Agency

Archer distinguishes between agency and actors and between primary and corporate agents. Archer suggests that we are all from birth primary agents, as we all occupy roles in the socio-cultural system in which we live (Archer 2000). There is a distinction then between this and being an actor, by which people occupy a role whose "accompanying social identity is expressive of who they are as persons in society" (Archer 2000, p.261), that is, we move from having agency to taking action.

As primary agents, people involuntarily belong to certain social groups which denote privilege or lack of it (Archer 2000). This privilege, social position and access to material and cultural resources are all factors in the opportunities primary agents have for taking action. Whilst acting alone, primary agents have little efficacy in bringing about social change. However, it is acknowledged that there can be "powerful but unintended aggregate effects" (Archer 2000, p.266) from the combined actions of those people in similar contexts who then take similar action. For example, whilst school students who are regarded as disruptive may not be part of an organised group, there may be responses to their aggregate actions such as a move towards greater use of disciplinary sanctions. Thus, the actions of the

school students are uncoordinated but may still lead to changes in school cultures or systems.

In contrast, corporate agents come together with shared aims which they are able to communicate and organise around. Corporate agents, in grouping together, have access to new emergent powers that they lacked as primary agents, which leads to greater opportunities to influence social change. This could include parent groups, education academics, government ministers and teacher organisations. The limitations or opportunities offered by the structural and cultural boundaries, as previously mentioned, remain, but are more ably negotiated by an organised group working for a shared aim. Despite this, Archer reminds us that "the outcome and the result is rarely what anyone seeks" (Archer 2003, p.356). The push and pull of pressures from competing corporate agents (and the aggregate effects of primary agents) makes social change irregular and multi-layered.

In this research, I sought to learn about the stories and perspectives of young people who have been excluded from school. In the analysis, I consider the different causal mechanisms arising from structure, culture and agency in order to offer an explanation of school exclusion. To support this analysis, I use some concepts from critical realism.

Drawing on critical realism

As a relatively young philosophy, critical realism is "not a once and for all established doctrine" and there is "a continuous process of clarifying what critical realism is (not)" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020, p.135). This theoretical framework is most closely related to the first phase or "original critical realism" (Gorski 2013, p.660). It

draws primarily on two concepts, that of a stratified ontology (Bhaskar 2009), and Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach. The following sections of this chapter describe these two aspects of critical realist thinking and outline how these ideas can be used in an analysis of school exclusion.

Stratified Ontology: the real, the actual and the empirical

Stratified ontology is a key concept in critical realism, by which an objective reality is stratified into three 'domains': real, actual, and empirical (Bhaskar 2008). Although conceptualised as strata, it might be more usefully visualised as nested domains, each within the other, as shown in figure 1 below.

Domain of the 'empirical'

perceptions, experiences, observations

Domain of the 'actual'

events (observed and unobserved)

Domain of the 'real'

structures and mechanisms that generate events
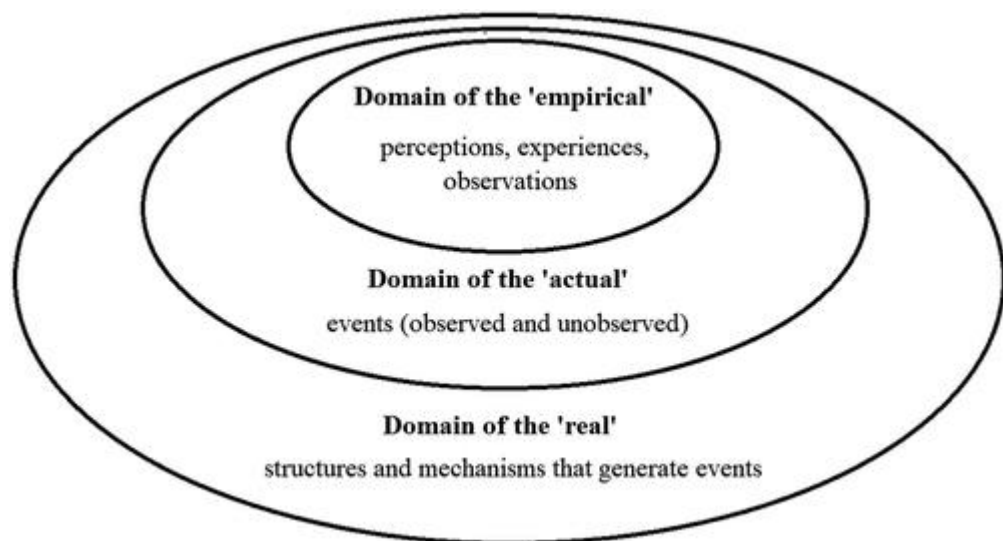
Figure 1: Critical realist model of stratified reality (from Hoddy 2019, p.113, permission to reproduce granted by Taylor & Francis)

The *real* encompasses the other domains as well as "structures and mechanisms that are not directly observable" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020, p.30) but which have the potential to cause events in the real and the actual (Bhaskar 2017). This includes "the possibility that powers may exist unexercised" (Sayer 2000, p.12) and so what

is real is not restricted to what *has* happened, but also what is possible. Whilst, for example, racism may not come into play in every event or phenomena, it does not cease to be real.

The next strata or domain is the *actual*, which "consists of not only experiences and observations but also events and phenomena" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020, p.29). It also includes "concrete things"(Bhaskar 2009, p.143) and "the patterns of events" (Bhaskar 2009, p.169). In this sense, the official school exclusion statistics may be seen as part of the actual domain – they are a visible and measurable outcome of structures and mechanisms in the real domain. This combines with the empirical in what, without the real domain is described as a flat ontology (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020). Measuring the number of school exclusions provides only a partial picture without an investigation of causes and consequences. This thesis seeks to offer explanations of school exclusion which encompass lived experience, actual events or patterns of events, and a consideration of possible structural and cultural mechanisms which exist in the real domain.

The *empirical* domain is concerned with human experiences, observations made via the senses (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2020). Recognising the importance of our own feelings and interpretations, which feed our "internal conversation" (Archer 2007, p.2), the inclusion of the empirical adds the human aspect to a sociological understanding of the world. Awareness of the empirical domain allows research to address questions of human agency, as people interpret and react to the situations in which they find themselves. This helps to begin to explain why some young people are excluded from school and not others from a similar demographic, and the different ways in which young people might respond to their school experiences.

In this research, it was important to me to learn about the feelings and narratives of young people who have experienced exclusion from

school. This empirical data is used alongside official school exclusion statistics which may be considered to belong to the actual domain. Using a critical rationality, these data enable a theorising about the unseen structures of social inequality in the real domain. In this way, I draw on the concept of a stratified ontology to understand and challenge the inequalities inherent in school exclusion.

Clarity about ontology is important for critical realists. Outlining the different domains of reality allows for theorising about not only the observable and measurable, or the lived experience, but also about the unseen causal mechanisms which create and perpetuate inequalities. Identifying these mechanisms offers greater opportunity to challenge or change them. Alongside this, the morphogenetic approach offers a model of social change, which enables us to conceptualise how societal and cultural structures are reproduced or transformed through social activity.

The morphogenetic approach

The morphogenetic approach is a social change model which was developed by Archer as a response to a tendency in sociology at the time to take polarised positions on the importance of structure and agency. Archer argues that a focus solely on structure leads to a mechanistic view of society, so called "downwards conflation" (Archer 1995, p.57), in which the views and actions of people have little impact on the kind of social world they live in. On the other hand, to prioritise agency leads to "upwards conflation" (Archer 1995, p.42) where there is little acknowledgement of the social conditions in which people make decisions and take an understanding of situations from.

Instead, the morphogenetic approach suggests that social life is created by a constant interplay of structure and agency (Archer 2016a). This approach was further developed to include the largely "overshadowed" (Archer 1996, p.ix) influence of culture.

Applying a morphogenetic approach to school exclusion enables an analysis in which people respond agentically to the social contexts that they are living in (and which pre-existed their current situation). This includes school systems, inequalities, and other structural and cultural factors which combine to result in the over-representation of marginalised groups in the school exclusion statistics. Using morphogenetic ideas can help to show how school-excluded young people may make sense of and formulate their responses to social and cultural structures which offer both possibilities and constraints. In this way, young people, educational professionals and policy-makers may all contribute to the challenging or reproduction of those social and cultural structures.

Change over time

The element of time is important in this approach, to allow for the differing roles of structure, culture and agency at different points in processes of social change or maintenance (Archer 1995). In this model, Archer (1979) argues that social structures must precede action: people live and act within structures that are not of their own design, which they may then seek to change or maintain. In turn, structures are elaborated or changed (morphogenesis) or reproduced/maintained (morphostasis) by those actions, thus beginning a new morphogenetic cycle. The sequence can be shown in as in figure 2 below, where T1-4 show different and overlapping

points in time. The end point, T4 becomes the new T1 for the following cycle.

$$\underset{\text{T1}}{\text{'}\underline{\hspace{2cm}\text{Structure}\hspace{2cm}}\text{'}}$$

$$\underset{\text{T2}}{\text{'}\underline{\hspace{2cm}\text{Action}\hspace{2cm}}\text{'}}\underset{\text{T3}}{}$$

$$\underset{}{\text{'}\underline{\hspace{1cm}\text{Structural Elaboration}\hspace{1cm}}\text{'}}\underset{\text{T4}}{}$$
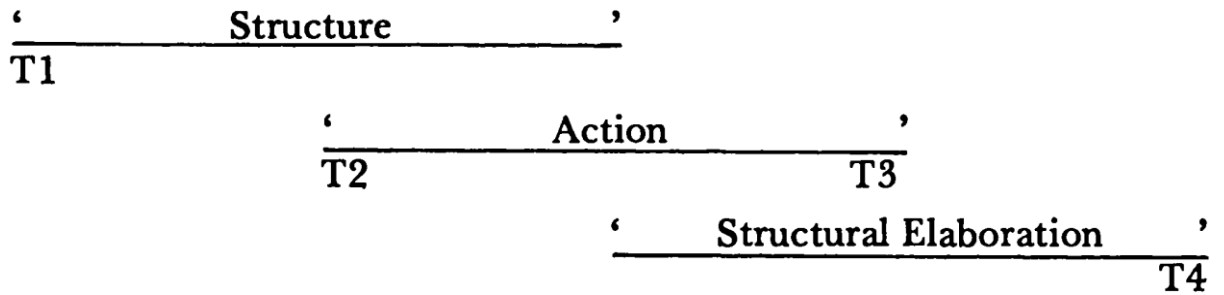
Figure 2: Morphogenetic model (Archer 1995, p.76, reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press)

A similar model then represents the processes by which culture contributes to social change. The diagram below (figure 3) shows the combination of structural and cultural morphogenetic cycles. The model demonstrates that structure and culture exert their own influences on society and each other. Structural influences are mediated by the actions of people and go on to elaborate or reproduce future structural and cultural mechanisms.
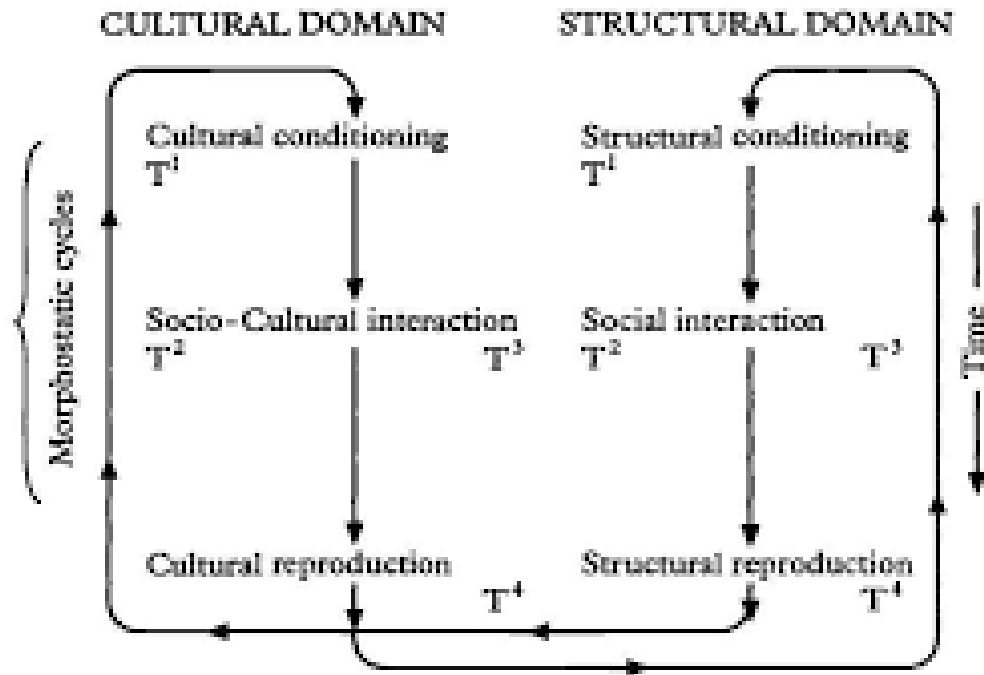
Figure 3: The structural and cultural configurations reproducing morphostatic cycles in society (Archer 1995, p.309, reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press)

In this way, it can be seen that schools are governed by both structural and cultural constraints and expectations. Similarly, the people within a school, students and staff, bring with them the material realities of their own lives and their own cultural values. The interplay of structure, culture and agency produces outcomes as varied as a love of learning, academic achievement, rejection of school, inclusion and exclusion. Whilst there are many potential responses in each classroom scenario, the application of morphogenetic ideas helps to highlight the cycles by which social change happens and how consequences of actions may result in a strengthening or challenging of social and cultural structures. It offers a conceptual framework for analysing the links between interpersonal interaction and wider social structures.

The morphogenetic cycle

For Archer's analysis of education systems, the morphogenetic cycle covers a considerable historical era: Cycle I is prior to the creation of state education systems, Cycle II covers the lifetime of those systems, up until the globalisation of education systems in the 1990s, which Archer suggests can be considered as Cycle III (Archer 2016b, p.47). For this thesis, the concept of the morphogenetic cycle is used for analysis on a much smaller scale. I propose that a similar model of change can be used to consider, for example, the changes in the English school system with regard to the use of exclusion since the 1990s, and on a smaller scale again, to understand the processes by which schools - which in this case become the structure in question - are shaped by the actions of the people who populate them and legislate for them. In this way, the principle of an interplay of structure, culture and agency over time is applied to smaller elements of the education system over shorter time periods.

Previous structures have causal power in the present

In her early work, Archer (1979) applied the morphogenetic approach to an analysis of the development of state education systems in England and France, using it to consider the contrasting ways in which these systems were developed. This approach requires consideration of the pre-existing social structures and conditions in which any new structure is developed. For example, in the beginnings of the French and English education systems, the role of the church was important in both countries but differed in its nature and thus in the influence that it had. Whilst a state education system inevitably shifted power away from the Church (which had previously been the

main provider of education), it was also shaped and influenced by the previous role of religious organisations. In this way, previous structures continue to exert causal powers in the present (Archer 2016b), educational policies and practices are shaped by what went before them. School systems and the processes by which students are excluded from school are inherited, even if later reformed, from previous administrations. Policy-makers, education professionals and students all act within the structures that pre-existed them.

The logic of the system

One outcome of taking a morphogenetic view of educational issues is that it demonstrates both the complexity of the development and maintenance of social structures, and the tensions that are central to these processes. Archer argues against "an inherent 'logic' of the system" (2016b, p.50). Instead, Archer (2016b) underlines the importance of social interaction to make changes happen, and warns against regarding structures as developing themselves, according to their own principles or to a generalised assumption of interests.

Archer uses the morphogenetic approach to show that education systems are a product of compromise. Nobody has the education system entirely of their own design: the education system is not "an ideal form of instruction as envisaged by a particular group" (Archer 1979, p.3), but the outcome of power struggles and tensions. When considering the current English education system, we see the pressures of budget constraints (Davies 2021) and political considerations (Hill, et al. 2016) as well as the influence of education professionals (Ball and Olmedo 2013), parents (Ball 2017), and the young people themselves (Hall 2017). These different forces can be seen in seemingly contradictory policies such as a simultaneous focus

on results and on inclusion (Done and Murphy 2018), or on SEND provision and austerity (Lehane 2017; Veck 2014). People have agency to take action and promote different priorities within a structure that pre-existed them, they may seek to challenge, elaborate or maintain what went before. There is a "sociological contingency" to what can be achieved (Archer 2016b, p.50).

Furthermore, Archer warns against a kind of "practical rationality" (Archer 2016b, p.52), whereby it is assumed that structures are thus because it is what is needed and what works. This reasoning not only then imbues structures (rather than people) with rationality and agency, but also does not allow for the unintended consequences of developments to be considered (Archer 2016b). An example of this explored by Archer is the continued growth of the state education system. A desire to offer a universal education and ensure equity of access and to close attainment gaps are still values attached to the English education system today (Department for Education 2022b). As the education system expands in attempts to achieve these goals, Archer (2016b) argues that the competitive advantage of having a basic education is lost: as the basic level of education is raised amongst the general population, entry requirements to work or to higher levels of education and training also rise. This is an unintended consequence of education system expansion, and, Archer argues, leads to further consequences such as changing the motivation of students who may begin to see a basic education less as a benefit, but more something to be "endured in order to avoid penalisation" (Archer 2016b, p.56) – an observation very pertinent to this thesis.

Critical realism and school exclusion

Successive governments have expressed a desire to reduce the volume of exclusions from school, or the impact on students of being excluded from school (Department for Education 2012; Reed 2003; Timpson 2019) and yet the problem remains. When trying to further understand the causes and effects of school exclusion, we must look both at the structures that we do see such as schools as institutions with rules and hierarchies, and the unseen forces such as the neoliberal marketisation of education (Giroux 2022). Acting within this context, we must also consider the perspectives and actions of those people involved.

This thesis takes inspiration from Archer's work to consider whether school exclusion is, in part, an unintended consequence of educational policies and practices, and the competing pressures and tensions which they arise from. A morphogenetic approach also allows an exploration of the experiences and motivation of those who have been excluded from school, alongside analysis of the structural and cultural conditions within which their schooling has been developed.

Rather than seeing school exclusion as a fixed phenomenon, with predictable causes and outcomes, a critical realist approach enables us to look at the multiple factors that combine to lead to an exclusion from school. This analysis brings together the social context, structural and cultural, with the understandings and actions of individuals. This includes the *real* structural inequalities around race, class, SEND, and gender, the *actual* structures of the school and classroom discipline as well as people's *empirical* experiences which motivate their actions.

The school exclusion figures show a consistent pattern of inequality and disadvantage (Department for Education 2023a), but within this, human actions shape outcomes and experiences. This thesis aims to bring together the perspectives of people on their lived experience of

school exclusion with an understanding of the causal mechanisms which create the conditions in which people produce and reproduce the structural inequalities of school exclusion.

This theoretical framework also draws on the 1970s book, Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) which will be further explored in the following section. A morphogenetic approach allows consideration of change over time, which is useful in contrasting the education and employment opportunities of Willis' 'lads' with those of today's school-excluded young people.

Introduction to Learning to Labour

'Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs' (Willis 1977) (known hereafter as Learning to Labour) is an ethnographic study of working class culture. Set in a 1970s industrial town in England named Hammertown, Learning to Labour follows a group of young men (known as 'the lads') through their final year of school and into work. In this book, Willis shows that 'the lads' are not passively travelling through the school system, but instead illustrates their "activity, creativity and human agency" (Willis 1977, p.3) in adopting a "working class counter-school culture" (Willis 1977, p.3). Whilst the language of critical realism is not used by Willis, Learning to Labour offers a case study in the interplay of structure, culture and agency that informs critical realist thinking.

'The lads' are active in resisting school and the attached expectations and instead valorise a masculine image of the working man. By doing this, 'the lads' "come to take a hand in their own damnation" (Willis 1977, p.3) as they are left with no options but to follow their fathers into the factories. Thinking in morphogenetic (Archer 2016a) terms, 'the lads' are conditioned by the school system, the industrial

landscape and the cultural values of their community which precede them. In response, 'the lads' act with agency, rejecting school conformity and choosing manual labour, but the result of their action is to elaborate or strengthen the working class counter-school culture and the class system of industrial capitalism.

Learning to Labour is used in this thesis as a tool for analysis. This is not a repeat of Willis' work, nor intended to replicate its findings. Instead, insights gained from Learning to Labour, in particular the creativity that young people can show in their rejection of school and the inadvertent reproduction of social structures, are drawn on for analysis of the experiences of today's school-excluded young people. Through the use of young people's stories, located in their cultural and structural contexts, it supports an analysis that considers connections between the empirical, the actual and the real domains. This section will describe Learning to Labour, including some criticisms of its limitations, and show how it will be used as part of the theoretical framework for this thesis.

Working class jobs

Learning to Labour begins by setting out its core problem: why do working class kids choose working class jobs? Without conscription or coercion, Willis observed that working class young people were choosing to take similar jobs to their parents, despite the low status, physical work and limited opportunities for advancement. In their rejection of school and of formal qualifications, these young people undertake a kind of "self-damnation" (Willis 1977, p.3) by which they also help to reproduce social norms for another generation. However, this rejection, argues Willis, is neither passive nor pessimistic, but experienced by 'the lads' as "true learning, affirmation, appropriation,

and as a form of resistance" (Willis 1977, p.3). 'The lads' act agentically, but within social and cultural structures that create both "constraints and enablements" (Archer 2016a, p.5). The interplay of structures such as the school and factory systems, the culture in both of those places, and the responses of 'the lads' as social agents are all essential elements of social change and reproduction.

Whilst 'the lads' pursue hedonistic goals, motivated by the group and having a laugh, Willis avoids individualistic explanations. Instead, he offers 'the lads' empirical experiences as only part of a wider consideration of the less visible mechanisms in the actual and the real domains (Bhaskar 2008). The behaviour of 'the lads' is rooted in a wider working class culture which values practical and manual work and rejects ideas of aspiration and social mobility. 'The lads' pursue their own "ultimate concerns" (Archer 2007, p.64) which seem to confound the idea of 'homo economicus': expectations that everyone will strive to gain higher level qualifications, jobs and incomes. Like many of their peers, 'the lads' are not seeking to leave the working class community they come from, but to become the next generation of working men there.

Although ultimately 'the lads' would find themselves trapped in factory work with few possibilities to pursue other lives or other work, during their school years this is the life they were actively seeking. Nonetheless, as Willis argues, by choosing manual jobs and adopting anti-school, sexist and racist ideas, 'the lads' serve to reproduce cultural norms and fulfil the needs of capitalist production. Drawing on the morphogenetic approach, it can be seen that the social structures that pre-exist 'the lads' shape what options are available to them, and also the kinds of lives they imagine for themselves. The manufacturing industry required workers who would take low status manual work, and 'the lads' willingly obliged.

The context for this thesis is an alternative provision in a former mining area in the East Midlands. The young people in this study have both grown up in a de-industrialised area and been excluded from school. Various reports on school exclusion have highlighted the link between school exclusion and unemployment (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Education Select Committee 2018; Timpson 2019) and so it might be assumed that the young people in this study would feel pessimistic about their futures. In conducting this research, I was interested to learn about the ambitions of school-excluded young people, and, in comparison with 'the lads', whether they see school as important in achieving these goals.

'The lads' at school

The development of a counter-school culture is central to the identity of 'the lads'. They are routinely rude and uncooperative towards school staff, avoiding attending lessons and refusing to work when they do attend. They demonstrate "a caged resentment which always stops just short of outright confrontation" (Willis 1977, p.12). Membership of the group is expressed through clothes, fighting, drinking and smoking. This is not a passive opting out of school, instead Willis describes their rejection of school as "creative and self-made forms of opposition and cultural style" (Willis 1977, p.52). Despite this active rejection of school, and the expectations it carries, paradoxically the end result of 'the lads' behaviour is to inadvertently contribute to the status quo as the industrial working class is reproduced.

Learning to Labour is set at a time of some 'progressive' education policies, and a change to the school leaving age. There are teachers in the school with "sincere liberal aims" (Willis 1977, p.84) and

greater attempts to offer a more relevant and diverse curriculum. In spite of this, Willis argues that these changes in policy did not lead to any fundamental change in pedagogy or to "any real shift in basic philosophies of education" (Willis 1977, p.178). This serves as an example of the way that the education system is "relationally contested" (Archer 1979, p.xxii) and thus develops unevenly over time. 'The lads' appear impervious to the direction of policy changes. They generally regard school as an irrelevance, summed up by one of 'the lads', Joey: "I don't think school does fucking anything to you… [after] you've learnt the basics" (Willis 1977, p.26). The supposed benefits of formal education are considered by 'the lads' to be minimal, despite the policy reforms.

'The lads' see little value in engaging with school and "not only reject but feel superior to" (Willis 1977, p.14) those conformist learners – nicknamed 'ear'oles' – who do invest themselves in doing well at school. This sense of superiority comes in part from a feeling that 'the lads' have seen through the myth of social mobility. The kinds of jobs besides labouring that might be open to 'the lads' and their peers are seen to "offer little but take a lot" (Willis 1977, p.126). Likewise, the sacrifices in personal freedom and opportunities to have fun that would be needed in order to gain qualifications are judged to be greater than the potential rewards. The need to compete with others with a more successful school and academic record means the benefits of having a few low-level qualifications "flatten out" (Archer 2016b, p.56). Again, it is underlined that 'the lads' are making an active (and maybe rational) choice to pursue, at least in the short term, a more hedonistic lifestyle.

This thesis concerns young people who have been excluded from school - a rejection of students by the school system. In this study, I seek to explore how school-excluded young people reflect on the value of school and what they may feel they have lost in this process.

One aspect of this is how they might see the relationship between school, work and the futures they imagine for themselves.

From school to work

When at school, 'the lads' routinely seek to undermine teachers and they pride themselves on doing as little work as possible. Willis highlights the link between school and the factory, and the 'cultural conditioning' (Archer 1996) that reproduces anti-authority attitudes. 'The lads' are told stories by their fathers about a culture of subversion in the factories, where there is also an 'us and them' divide between workers and bosses. These stories feed into 'the lads' own thoughts about the world and their place in it.

Willis argues that the antagonistic relationship between 'the lads' and school staff acts as good preparation for the factory floor, suggesting that this understanding of "prior authority relations" (Willis 1977, p.109) is transferred from school to work, as bosses replace teachers in the hierarchy. The hierarchical structures of both school and work pre-exist 'the lads', their peers and school staff. The morphogenetic model (Archer 2016a) suggests that people respond reflexively within the context of social and cultural structures. The disrespectful behaviour of 'the lads' towards their teachers seems to challenge the authority of the teacher, but at the same time reinforces the divisions between them. Thus, the actions of 'the lads' helps to strengthen the pre-existing hierarchies for another generation and school has prepared 'the lads' for the power dynamic in the workplace.

Refusing to engage in formal learning at school and making sport of defying school rules, 'the lads' also learned in school to go through the motions and not invest too much of themselves in each task. Instead, there is "an experiential separation of the inner self from

work" (Willis 1977, p.102) with little intrinsic value in the job. Work is not used by 'the lads' as a way to extend or develop themselves, which again reflects their experiences of school. There is an "assumption that all work is unpleasant" (Willis 1977, p.100) and job satisfaction is neither sought nor expected. Having a job is worthwhile for the money and the status as a working man that it provides, made bearable or even enjoyable by the social group on the factory floor, with practical jokes and "badinage" (Willis 1977, p.55). 'The lads' are active in rejecting the values first of school and then of the factory: they create their own social group and set of values in opposition to the mainstream. One aspect of this different set of values is the preference for manual work despite its physical demands and low status.

Manual work and mental work

Although 'mental work' is generally more valued in society, and thus brings higher rewards, the working class counter-school culture fosters a view of manual work as more desirable. There is a pride in being tough enough to cope with the demands of the factory floor, making manual labour seem heroic. For Willis, this valorisation of manual work is inextricably "associated with the social superiority of masculinity" (Willis 1977, p.148). Mental work is "regarded as effeminate" (Willis 1977, p.149), not real work or done by real men. 'The lads' take pride in their physicality and this maintains their view of themselves as superior to women (who are too weak to do their work) and the 'pen-pushers' and 'ear'oles' who conform at school. In this cycle, rejection of school, ideas of masculinity and the valorisation of manual labour all serve to reinforce each other. These values mean that 'the lads' do not have to be persuaded to enter the workforce at the lowest position in the hierarchy as they already

believe this to be the superior position and willingly seek it. Through social and cultural interaction, industrial class society is reproduced.

'The lads' are dismissive of the value of formal education and accept the separation of "those who are 'good with their hands' or 'good with their heads'" (Willis 1977, p.147). Willis suggests that the view that "practice is more important than theory" (Willis 1977, p.56) comes from and is perpetuated by working class culture, leading working class young people to overlook the value of knowledge and qualifications as a passport to greater opportunities. 'The lads' have "the omnipresent feeling that they know better" (Willis 1977, p.56): they feel they have seen through the myths around school and work. There is some awareness that even through conforming and hard work, only a few will be offered the opportunity to leave the factory floor. Making such sacrifices then comes to be seen as futile and fool-hardy. This "self-disqualification" (Willis 1977, p.148) maintains the supply of a willing workforce and so serves the needs of industrial capitalism at that time. In this morphogenetic cycle, the pre-existing structures of industrial capitalism are reproduced.

Although much of the heavy industry of the 1970s is now gone, "consequences inherited from the past" (Archer 1979, p.24) continue to have influence in the present and social attitudes can be slow to change. Ideas of manual work as superior may endure even in places where there is no longer a heavy industrial base. Young people from working class communities are over-represented in the school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a) and so this thesis will consider whether the working class counter-school culture described by Willis may resonate for some young people who are excluded from school.

'The lads' rejection of 'mental work' is an important aspect of their counter-school culture and shapes the choices they make for their own futures. At the same time, 'the lads' help to reinforce ideas of

masculinity and the value of manual labour that maintain social structures in industrial capitalism. Thus, the accidental reproduction of social norms is another important element of Learning to Labour.

Social Reproduction

Willis shows that 'the lads' rejection of school serves to benefit industrial capitalism as there was, at the time, a need for low-skilled factory workers. By rejecting formal education and valorising manual labour, 'the lads' left school with few options besides going to work in the factories. The sexist and racist views of 'the lads' also helped to perpetuate divisions between working class people that act as a barrier to organised workers acting together for better pay and conditions. Whilst 'the lads' appear to be very anti-establishment in their anti-social behaviour and refusal to engage in formal education, in effect they become a powerful force in the creation of the next generation of factory workers.

Although 'the lads' experience and recognise exploitation and injustice in their everyday lives, they do not have a unifying analysis of this that links it with other aspects of their lives or the capitalist system. Instead, individualised explanations make 'human nature' and personal shortcomings seemingly as important as any structural factors. Thus, a "degree of disenchantment with the prevailing system … can co-exist with a calm acceptance of the system and a belief that there is no systematic suppression of personal chances in life" (Willis 1977, p.165). 'The lads' recognise themselves as a group but lack a critique of the system and so rarely act as corporate agents (Archer 2000). They do not identify goals for social change or attempt to bring this about and so inadvertently help to maintain the status quo.

School exclusion disproportionately affects young people from marginalised groups, both demonstrating and deepening social inequalities. In this thesis, drawing on Willis' analysis, I will consider the explanations of school-excluded young people for their own exclusion from school, and how they place their own experiences into the wider social context. School exclusion is considered as a vehicle for the reproduction of social inequalities. Learning to Labour is used as a tool to support analysis and to help to shape the research design. However, this is not an uncritical use of the text, and some shortcomings in Willis' work must be acknowledged.

Criticisms of Learning to Labour

Learning to Labour came to be regarded as a landmark study in sociology and inspired many other interesting works (for example, see MacLeod 1987; Nolan 2011; Dance 2002), but there are also critics of the work. In particular, it must be acknowledged that women and girls are consigned to supporting roles, as mothers and girlfriends, and as such, it has been argued that Willis reproduced the male gaze of 'the lads' (Arnot 2004). McRobbie (1990) argues that not only does Willis not explore what the working class culture that he studies means for women and girls, but also that the domestic and family lives of 'the lads' are largely overlooked. This amplifies the public sphere and the influence of the peer group, at the expense of analysis of what happens "around the breakfast table and in the bedroom" (McRobbie 1990, p.59). This serves to further sideline the importance of women and their role in the reproduction of working class culture.

By detailing the attitudes of 'the lads', it may appear that Learning to Labour validates or even helps to promote the misogyny of 'the lads'.

Devine (1996) suggests that Willis downplays 'the lads' capacity for violence and so portrays them as irritating or amusing rather than threatening or dangerous. In response, Nolan (2018) argues that rather than sanctioning or condoning, Willis explores behaviours in order to better understand them, and offers a format for others to undertake further work of this kind. However, whilst Willis acknowledges and critiques the sexism of 'the lads', he does not confront the violence or brutality signified by their language and behaviour (McRobbie 1990). Similarly, 'the lads' expressed racist views in which they celebrated physical violence against black and Asian young men and this also remains largely unchallenged and unexplored.

This thesis focuses on the views and experiences of young people who have been excluded from school. In seeking to amplify the voices of this marginalised group, I must also acknowledge the potential conflicts for me as a researcher when I am inevitably confronted with some views which I might find questionable or offensive. The balance between exploring and promoting different points of view is difficult to achieve. I approach this study with a belief in the potentially liberatory value of education and the social divisiveness of school exclusion, but also with a desire to engage with views of young people who may have radically different views to my own. Like Willis, I seek neither to sanction nor to refute the views of young people, more to give a space to critically consider their points of view.

Learning to Labour and school exclusion

The UK industrial landscape changed significantly in the 1980s, and Willis acknowledges that Learning to Labour may have recorded the

"last gasp of a certain kind of real, if always subordinated, working-class power and celebration in England" (Willis 2004, p.156). In contrast, this study is located in the de-industrialised East Midlands in very different economic circumstances. However, this thesis is not seeking to recreate Learning to Labour, or its findings, but seeks to draw comparisons with the insights it offers.

'The lads' were not excluded from school and continued to attend, although it might be supposed that had they been in school today they may indeed have been permanently excluded. Both 'the lads' and the school-excluded have arguably failed in and been failed by the school system, leaving with few qualifications and reduced access to careers and further education. Gordon (1984) argues that Learning to Labour allows us to move away from a mechanistic view of this process, which makes young people passive victims of the school system. Instead, it shows how young people might respond agentically, making choices and forming identities which may reject or align with mainstream values. By engaging with the experiences and explanations of young people who have been excluded from school, I seek to explore how they understand and respond to their situation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to tell the story of how I set out to answer the research questions that have been developed to guide this study. In it, I explain the rationale for the choice of methods, related both to the stated aims and to the theoretical framework. I give an explanation and justification of the research choices made. I describe how I identified a suitable setting for the fieldwork and offer some reflection on the process of gaining access to participants and managing the data collection. In this chapter, the complexity of ethics, health and safety and the emancipatory research paradigm are discussed as is my approach to data analysis.

Research questions

How do young people experience school exclusion?

1) How do school-excluded young people narrate their journey to school exclusion?
2) How do school-excluded young people reflect on their experience of school and school exclusion, post-exclusion?
3) How is the experience of school exclusion shaped by the marginalised identity of the young person?
4) Were there factors (key moments, types of support) that could have avoided exclusion from school?

Drawing on research context and theory to guide research design

This research project is motivated firstly by my own years of experience working with young people who have been excluded from school. Secondly, it is motivated by the knowledge that the official statistics (Department for Education 2023a) show that school exclusion is more likely for young people coming from certain already marginalised groups. Consistently, we see that young people who claim free school meals (FSM), are in the care system (LAC), from certain minority ethnic groups and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are more likely than their peers to be excluded from school. Because of this, I propose that school exclusion is both an educational and a social justice issue (see literature review for a more detailed discussion).

Although the number of official school exclusions is relatively small (less than 1% of the school population), the pattern is consistent in terms of the groups most likely to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). As reports such as Making the Difference (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017) and the Timpson Review of School Exclusion (2019) outline, the potential negative outcomes of school exclusion are well documented. The purpose of this study is to deepen our understanding of school exclusion, complementing the statistical trends with stories of people who they represent, and locating this human experience in a social and historical framework (McLaren 2010).

In my previous roles as a teacher and a youth worker, I have observed, participated in and formed views on the school exclusion system and education after school exclusion. Anecdotally, most of the young people who I taught in this time were from vulnerable groups, from areas of high deprivation, had SEND or had experienced family adversity and trauma. But many were grateful for the second chance that alternative provision (AP) offered, or for a different approach to education to what they had experienced in mainstream school.

It was important to me to ask young people themselves about their experiences of school exclusion, and I wanted my research to give them a platform to speak. In collecting stories of young people excluded from school I wanted to afford them the respect that I believe should be a core principle of inclusive education (see Bombèr 2007; Warin 2017; Whitaker 2021).

Drawing on Humphries, Mertens and Truman (1999) I adopt an emancipatory research paradigm, with a belief that social research can lead to new understandings and new knowledge that contributes to human rights and leads to change. I do not approach the topic of school exclusion as a neutral observer and regard continued exclusions from school, in particular of young people from marginalised groups, as a societal and educational failing. As such, I have applied a critical realist approach to research.

The philosophical perspective of critical realism aims to use social sciences to bring about change that enables people to flourish (Bhaskar 2009). As discussed previously, critical realist concepts of a stratified ontology and morphogenesis are called upon for the analysis offered in this thesis, and so this theoretical position is also of influence in the choice of methods, as was the work of Willis (1977). The theoretical framework is discussed in more detail in the literature review, and in this chapter, I show how the adopted theoretical position is used to inform research design decisions.

Learning to Labour and ethnography

A key component of the theoretical framework for this study is Learning to Labour (Willis 1977). Willis features 'the lads' who seemingly reject school and yet help to maintain and reproduce social and cultural structures in doing so. I was interested in whether some

of the analysis from Learning to Labour could be applied to today's school-excluded.

Learning to Labour was a ground-breaking piece of research in its time, partly due to the content and arguments and also because of the use of ethnography as a research approach (McGrew 2011). Whilst it is difficult to find a collectively agreed definition of ethnography (Hammersley 2018), it is suggested that ethnography should involve participant observation, over a period of time, seeking in depth exploration, with an openness to methodological innovation and an awareness of researcher positionality (Hammersley 2018; Atkinson 2014; Willis and Trondman 2000). Although I did spend extended periods of time with young people in their education setting, this setting was not the focus of the study. I was seeking to investigate participants' past experiences, not observe the current education provision, and so I concluded that this research would not meet the criteria for ethnography.

I did, however, seek to learn from the ethnographic approach. As ethnography has evolved through different disciplines, Atkinson (2014) suggests that at its heart, ethnography is humane, social, ethical and comes from a shared humanity and the researcher's commitment to learn from the lives of others. This 'looking' and experiencing is not chaotic or only personal, it should culminate in "systematic conceptual frameworks" (Atkinson 2014, p. 6), the work must be theoretically informed and critically presented (Willis and Trondman 2000). In this way, whilst not an ethnographic study as in Learning to Labour, my own work was influenced by some of the principles of ethnography: in seeking to look and learn from people; the keeping of regular fieldnotes and diaries; the desire to conduct research respectfully and ethically; and the use of this data to apply a critical use of theory. In this way, I draw inspiration from Learning to Labour, alongside using some tools offered by critical realism.

Critical realism and methodology

Archer proposes a balanced tripartite between ontology, methodology and theory, with methodology acting as "the necessary link" (1995, p.5) between social ontology and practical theory. In early sociology, Archer (1996) reflected, there was a tendency to divide into a debate on structure / agency, potentially leading theorists to conflate downwards (seeing structure as determining society with little room for human action) or conflate upwards (rendering society as a passive aggregation of individuals). Instead, Archer (1995) suggests that methodology must strike a balance between these positions. Thus, it is important that my methodology is in concert and not in contradiction with the aims of the research and my ontological assumptions.

In attempting to investigate the structural inequalities inherent in school exclusion, but whilst hoping to avoid conflationary theorising, I was keen to hear people's stories of their own lived experiences. In this way, I am able to draw on an analysis of structural pressures that create the context for exclusion, but also acknowledge the importance of the understandings, responses and feelings of those involved. I can then move towards a 'practical theory' or sociological understanding of school exclusion.

Gathering the data – interviews

Interviews give an insight into lived experience and allow participants to speak "from their own perspective and in their own words" (Kvale 2007 p.11) and so are ideal for this element of my research. In-depth interviews are a common tool in critical realist research, and in qualitative research more generally, adding a richness to the data

which then helps us to understand complex social processes (Brönnimann 2022).

Consequently, the decision to use interviews for data collection was both theoretically driven and pragmatic. There were practical considerations about how and where I would be able to conduct research and interviews offered the chance for short and moveable research tools that could be adapted to the setting. This would come to be important as most of the interviews were in fact conducted in snatched moments, outside and in a variety of locations.

In this study, it was important to me to try to understand the thoughts and feelings of the young people who have been excluded from school, and to hear their stories of exclusion. The ideas and beliefs that people hold shape the way that they make sense of their experiences and the decisions that they make. This happens within the cultural and structural contexts that they live in (Archer 1996), and so I was keen to hear from school-excluded young people themselves how they told their stories and how they made sense of what happened to them. Willis (1977) argued that 'the lads' actively rejected school and instead forged a counter-school culture focused on ideas of masculine manual workers. I was interested to learn whether the young people I would speak to would also express this active rejection of school as Willis suggests, whether they might see school and home as a 'clash of two worlds' (Broomhead 2014), whether they would feel anger or loss at their exclusion from school.

Many of the interview questions were based on simply asking young people to tell me what they had experienced at school: working chronologically, what their memories of early school were, how this had changed as they progressed through key stages, and so on (see Appendix 3 for interview schedule). I wanted to ask about the lead up to exclusion and memories of the moment of exclusion. Being professionally committed to inclusive practice, I was also keen to ask

if there were things that the young people felt had helped them to stay in school, or that could have avoided exclusion, for example the kinds of support they felt they needed or had benefited from.

As well as amplifying the stories of school-excluded young people, I was also interested in the structural inequalities of school exclusion, as noted in the exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a). In seeking to pose questions in an accessible way, initially I did not include questions which required a developed analysis of the wider cultural and social issues affecting school experiences. However, I wanted to be open with the participants about my position on school exclusion, and my interest in the relationship with certain marginalised groups. Influenced by further reading on critical realist research (Brönnimann 2022), I decided to add some questions that addressed these issues more directly. Alongside questions about memories, feelings and experiences, I also wrote questions asking participants for their own thoughts on why certain groups are more likely to be excluded from school.

Interviewing "entails an asymmetrical power relation" (Kvale 2007, p.14) and I was sensitive to this, and that I was wanted to ask participants about personal and potentially upsetting events. I was wary of being too direct as I did not want to upset or cause offence. Hence, I did not feel that I could ask, for example, if they felt that poverty was a factor in their school experience. Some questions could be posed more generally: did they have an opinion on why certain types of people might be more likely to be excluded from school than others? I did not feel that it was appropriate to question participants about any possible family adversity or diagnosis of SEND but would ask follow up questions if this was offered, to ask how they thought that these factors had affected their school experiences.

Building a rapport with young people takes time and often the need for researchers to "jump in and out of children's worlds" (Spyrou

2011 p. 156) can lead to a caricature or surface impression being created. I was able to spend two days a week in an AP with the participants over a period of five months and so, whilst I had to acknowledge my outsider status and the power imbalances mentioned, I hoped that this 'hanging around' would help to make trusting relationships which might lead to richer or more in-depth interviews. I used reflexive diaries and fieldnotes to reflect on the interview questions and process and from this refined the interview questions over the fieldwork period.

I hoped to take an approach that was neither 'miner' nor 'traveller' (Kvale 2007) but a combination of both. In keeping with the critical realist tradition, I sought to investigate objective social structures (Porpora 1998). In this way, I perhaps fit more ontologically with the miner, seeking nuggets of sociological insight. The journey is shaped by a search for real world explanations (Porpora 2015) that bring together personal experience with an understanding of societal pressures - structural inequalities which are an element of school exclusion, whether the young people experiencing it recognise that or not. In the spirit of the traveller (Kvale 2007), I planned to keep a conversational tone in the interviews and to be open to opportunities to learn from the people around me. When planning the study, I was aware that elements of research design and planned interview questions might also need to be modified once a suitable fieldwork setting had been identified.

Gaining access to a fieldwork setting

When considering where to go to interview young people who had been excluded from school, I began by looking at the local authority website where AP is listed and attempted to make some contacts with

local authority officers. Despite a couple of friendly responses, it was soon clear that this was a dead end in terms of trying to get access to provisions. I also had some contacts via a Facebook group of SENCos where I had previously posted about my work and had a warm response. I followed up a contact from those conversations who was head at a local pupil referral unit (PRU), and he was keen to help and invited me in to look around. The meeting seemed to go well, but again communication dropped off and I realised that the setting was facing its own challenges at that time. I needed to look elsewhere. In trying to approach as a researcher, rather than an 'insider', I had overlooked the most likely option – to use contacts from when I had worked in the field.

I remembered an AP, that I have named Float (Fishing and Learning Outdoors Activities and Training) that I knew of through my previous work as a teacher. I had talked with Bob (names of people and organisations have all been changed), the manager of Float, on occasion over the years and had always got on with him and admired his approach. I felt confident that Bob would remember me. I emailed Bob via the Float website and initially I asked if they might be interested in helping me out. I gave just a few sentences overview of the project. I was worried that saying too much (or too little) would create a wrong impression and put him off. I did not know if Bob would pick up the email, or if he'd respond. Thankfully, I got an answer to my email the next day. Bob said he did remember me, and to phone him for a chat.

I phoned Bob and we had a brief catch up. He said they would be happy to help with my research and that I should send him the details. I was so grateful and relieved - without a place to conduct fieldwork, there would be no study. It felt like a lot that I was asking for and I was worried that they might seem keen at first but then

change their minds. I was worried that they were busy and that they might just feel that this was one more job that they did not need.

It was also hard to judge how to refine the details of the research plan. My approach in teaching was to be ready to respond to the unexpected, to try to be responsive to the young people. I would always have alternative options, back up plans for if they did not engage with the work, if they were having a difficult day, or if they had something else that they wanted to have a go at. I saw the research in the same way – I wanted to get to know people, to be able to respond to what works for them. The same applied to the staff – I wanted to be helpful ideally, but certainly to avoid being too big a burden. I had the room to be flexible, about who I speak to, where and when. I wanted to communicate this openness, to make space for collaboration, but was also aware that sometimes people just want the simple answer. So I had to judge how much to say 'it will be like this' and how much to say 'what works for you?'.

When I approached Float, I had started the university ethics process, but hadn't yet submitted the forms. It felt like a trap – I have to say exactly what I am going to do, how long, how many people, how many interviews, over what timescale, when I do not yet have anywhere to go to do the research. Having at least an agreement in principle helped to move on my ethics application. I realised that the uncertainties were causing delays, and began to feel overwhelmed by the process. I decided to prioritise the ethics form and so some time passed without any further contact with Float.

Having got ethics approval and a DBS through my university, I needed to get back in touch with Bob. I tried sending an email but got no response. This was worrying - maybe I'd left it so long that things had changed and they were no longer going to let me in? I allowed a suitable amount of time for a reply, then decided to phone.

When Bob answered the phone, he immediately apologised that he had not got back to me. I assured him that of course it was my delay, not his, as I'd taken a long time to get ethics approval, but now I was ready to go. Were they still interested in being involved? The answer was yes, and I arranged to go and visit Bob to talk in more detail.

Having first made contact in June, I went for an initial visit on the 16th of December. We talked through the project and about the AP. Due to the nature of the provision, all of the young people are also connected with a school or local authority who arranges and funds their place at Float. This meant that I needed to work with Float to ensure that the school or local authority with responsibility for the young people were made aware of the research and given an opportunity to ask questions or to withdraw from the project. When I left, we both had a list of tasks to do, such as arranging to send references. I was aware that there might be little loss of momentum as it was the penultimate week of the term before Christmas, but I did not want to wait until the new year to arrange a visit. I followed up the visit with an email and sent a one-page overview that could be used to inform schools of the research.

In January, I phoned Bob. He said he would find his list of what needed doing and get back to me soon. I quickly asked if I could set a date to come in and talk to staff, as that was what we'd agreed I needed to do next. He agreed and we set a date for the following week.

I wondered how to approach the staff meeting. Should I do a presentation, so that they would have all the details about the project? I felt that a presentation seemed a bit too formal. I did not want to put too much distance between myself and the staff, both physically (if I had to stand at the front) or by appearing too academic. I opted for printing off the one-page overview and taking

with me a copy of the ethics form and a consent form in case they were interested to see it.

When I arrived, there was a member of staff there, Ryan, and it was clear that he was not expecting me. He told me that Bob had emailed me to cancel - he'd tested positive that day for Covid. I decided to be brave and asked, since I was there now, whether I could talk to him anyway. He agreed, so I perched on the edge of a table and began. Ryan and another member of staff, Dave were there. They were interested and the conversation flowed. They wanted to talk about what they do at Float, their ethos, what to expect from the young people and I tried to respond in ways that would let them know that I was prepared for that and that I wanted to try to fit in. They seemed happy to have me there and I felt that they would help me to make it work, despite being warned that some of the young people do not like women, teachers or people from my city! Nonetheless, it had been a positive meeting and it helped that the people who I would be with seemed supportive. I had wanted to set a start date, but they were going to be struggling with the Covid situation, and I was not sure how definite anything was or if the staff needed to speak to each other again first. So we left it that they'd get in touch in a week or so once things calmed down.

I allowed some time for Covid to hopefully have passed, then gave Bob a call. He suggested that I should now talk to Ryan about arrangements, which I was pleased about as he seemed open to letting me get started on the fieldwork. Bob also then mentioned that he'd looked at his list, and that he would like a DBS to be applied for through Float.

In the meantime, I spoke to Ryan who agreed that I could start attending on the 28th February. He asked if there was anything I needed. I said I would need a quiet place for the interviews, but I understood that might be difficult. He said that wouldn't be a

problem, and anyway, he expected some of the interviews would be outside, while the group were out and about, maybe by the lake while they're fishing. This was brilliant, exactly what I'd been thinking but had been reluctant to suggest in case they felt it was an intrusion. I felt excited to get started there. I reflected on how I'd missed working with young people and was looking forward to doing that again.

Next morning, I went to visit Bob in the office. He had his original list, from my first visit. I could see that he was concerned with doing things properly, showing a paper trail and that they hadn't taken any unnecessary risks. Bob wanted to send out an information pack to the schools where my participants are on roll. Some young people remain registered with a mainstream school who then arrange and fund their place in AP, others have been formally permanently excluded from school and so the responsibility for their education reverts back to the local authority where they live. It was important to ensure that the school or authority with responsibility for the young people were fully informed of the research project, although in this case Float acted as 'gatekeepers' and so I judged that it was appropriate to inform rather then request permission from those organisations. I knew that this was a complication of using the AP as Float were not the main education provider for their students. Bob suggested that we should send my one-page cover letter and a copy of the consent form / information sheet. He felt strongly that the schools should see what their students were going to be agreeing to and so I accepted that.

It was settled that the schools would be informed of my research and given the chance to opt out, and that I would be asking for consent from the young people themselves. This was partly because I judged that the young people were in a better position to make that decision for themselves as they would meet me and could ask me any questions they might have. Had I asked for consent from the schools

as well, I had the practical concern that they may not get around to responding, or that the issues raised elsewhere about gatekeepers would come into play: the schools may begin to be selective about who they thought were suitable participants (based on perceptions of vulnerability or capacity for example) (Garcia-Quiroga and Agoglia 2020), rather than allowing this to come from my selection criteria and the young people themselves. I made a plan with Bob for how we would approach this, and I hoped that he was able to get the information out to schools quickly.

Bob introduced me to Jess who was working in the office. She was the person who would be arranging the DBS check, so I showed her my ID and she said she would get that done soon. It felt a little like I was running on two tracks: one with Bob, sorting out paperwork, safeguarding etc, and one with Ryan about coming in to do the fieldwork. For a detailed overview of the process of gaining access to the provision, with first contact in June 2021 leading to the start of fieldwork in February 2022, please see table in Appendix 1.

Conducting ethical research with vulnerable young people

A concern about protecting the rights of young people in research predates but has been largely shaped by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef 1989), which gave legal and international weight to the concept of children's rights. From this, the argument followed that children have a right to be properly researched (Beazley, et al. 2009). Much debate has been spent within sociology on the nature of children and childhood, whether children are seen as active agents in their own lives, as influenced and understood by an adult-centric view of the world, and as people with a separate identity to adults (Beazley, et al. 2009; Spyrou 2011;

McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain 2019; Garcia-Quiroga and Agoglia 2020). I do not intend to engage further with this argument, but instead to acknowledge the direction of travel in terms of impact on accepted ways to undertake research that explores the lives of children and young people.

A current trend in research allows participants to be part not only of the data collection, but to be co-creators throughout the project (Davidson 2017; Dixon, Ward and Blower 2019; Brady and Franklin 2019). Participants could be involved in formulating the research questions, research design, data collection and dissemination – the participants become both researchers and informants (Horgan 2017). Whilst I aspire to carry out research in a way that is respectful and hopefully even empowering, I had to acknowledge the difficulties for this project in meeting the high standards set by Spyrou (2011) and others. The young people in this study are likely to have had a difficult relationship with school and are likely to have had limited experience of engaging with adults on an academic task over a sustained period of time. Offering the chance of an interview to tell their story of exclusion may appeal to some young people, especially if they feel they have previously had limited opportunities to talk about their experience of exclusion from school. In contrast, expecting to find a group of young people within an alternative provision (AP) who all wish to commit time and energy to this project over a school year is less realistic. The population in AP can be very transitory and so I had no guarantee that the same young people would be attending the provision over the full period of the fieldwork. A model of fuller involvement in the research design and decision-making process brings expectations in terms of time and engagement. There is a danger that what I might see as respecting rights and agency of those 'being researched' is actually received by the young people as a request for work that has little material or

other reward for them. In light of these limitations, I was open to offering young people in this study opportunities to contribute and shape the project beyond engaging in interviews, but without this being a condition for participation. In accepting this compromise, I must then acknowledge the increased importance of the kind of critical reflexivity called for by Spyrou (2011).

The concern with rights has led some to question what can be seen as paternalistic ethics procedures (Horgan 2017) which arguably govern much research. For example the need for informed consent and the need for researchers to operate via gatekeepers who may select young people who they consider to be 'good' participants – articulate and likely to express views in line with the organisation – and conversely to block access to those young people who do not fit this profile or who are considered to be vulnerable and therefore need to be protected from the demands of academic inquiry (Garcia-Quiroga and Agoglia 2020). This is of particular relevance to this study, as young people who have been excluded from school are often linked with anti-social behaviour and anti-authority attitudes (McCrystal, Percy and Higgins 2007) which may lead to them being reluctant to be involved with research or also not to be selected by their education provider as someone who should be offered such a project. I wanted to talk to the disaffected, the angry or those who are struggling, and not only those exceptional or inspirational young people who have kept a positive outlook or who have 'turned around' the behaviour that led to exclusion. One way to overcome the difficulties of relying on gatekeepers to identify participants was to spend some time at the education provision, getting to know the young people prior to selection for the project. In this way, I was able to meet a broader range of young people than if I were only to go on staff recommendation, to become a familiar figure (Barley and Bath 2014) and make some positive relationships with those young people

who might not have initially volunteered to talk to me, and through this to help to put interviewees more at ease. However, this choice of approach did cause some complications in applying for ethics approval.

Gaining ethics approval

The need to protect participants must be balanced against the right to participate – deciding for ethical reasons to not talk to young people for example then excludes their voices from the literature (Daley 2015). Gaining ethical approval is an important and complex step in the research process, especially as I identified that the young people in my study would be from marginalised groups: belonging to those groups more likely to be excluded such as those claiming free school meals, care experienced, certain ethnic groups and those with SEND. Additionally, the very nature of school exclusion is to become marginalised. School exclusion is not a planned life event and so might be considered to be an adverse childhood experience (ACE), which we now know to potentially cause other social and developmental delays (Bombèr 2007). Many of the young people I would engage with would also potentially have an additional learning need or SEND, and so this brought the need to be especially clear and accessible in my choice of language and approach. I was already keen to find ways that if not emancipatory would at least avoid being exploitative or diminishing for participants. For these reasons, the ethics process is a useful step in the research design process, providing an impetus to consider the ethical implications of the research and to plan accordingly.

The ethics procedure requires specific details to be given about participants, how many people will be involved, some demographic

details, how many interviews over what time frame. This part was challenging for me as I strongly felt that I needed to be responsive to the young people, the staff and the setting. From my teaching career, I knew that I had the skills to form supportive relationships with young people and to be able to judge a situation and change my plans to fit. This was a skill set that I was proud of and that gave me the confidence to go into the AP setting and talk to school-excluded young people.

However, I felt that this openness to change, to flexibility and to being creative was in some ways in conflict with the ethics process. Being too rigid in the specifications about participants might have led me to overlook opportunities to include young people who may not have been obvious candidates or who would not have initially volunteered. I judged that my being a regular presence at the setting and joining in with group activities would help young people to decide for themselves whether they wished to be interviewed and what they were willing to share. I also felt that staff at Float, whilst friendly and supportive, were initially wary of me, coming from a different background to them. My getting involved in the daily activities at Float helped me to build relationships with the staff too, who became advocates for my research with the young people and who also consented to interviews themselves. I felt a conflict between the desire to be a reflexive researcher and the need to fulfil ethics criteria. After some time, I was able to articulate clearly enough my aims and research design in a way that allowed me some flexibility in approach but also satisfied the need to comply with the ethics process as set out by the university and BERA ethical guidelines (British Educational Research Association 2018). An example of the participant information sheet and consent form can be seen in Appendix 2.

What's in a name?

A standard part of ethical practice is to remove identifying information and in particular names from research material. It is important to ensure that my participants are as protected as possible, especially given that their life experiences may lead to being categorised as vulnerable young people. I needed to consider what ethical issues might arise from the research now, but also consider how participants might feel as adults looking back at their teenage selves. The young people in this study have spoken openly and welcomed me into their education setting, and so I have to be sensitive to thinking about how I keep them safe in the research process. Taking steps such as limiting the personal details shared and changing names allows some separation of the participants as they presented to me, their future selves, and potential readers.

It seemed an uncontroversial or even trivial decision in the research design commit to the use of pseudonyms. Whilst the use of pseudonyms is standard practice, it is less commonly written about in the methodology sections of journal articles, and we are often not privy to the process by which new names were chosen (Moore 2012; Guenther 2009; Allen and Wiles 2016). I was aware that in exchanging names for pseudonyms, I could not guarantee that others in this small setting would not be able to identify them, but by choosing the pseudonyms myself, I offered a layer of 'internal confidentiality' as the young people would not know or be able to ask / tell each other which names they were to be given. Giving new names also gave some additional 'external confidentiality', meaning that readers who did not know the setting or the young people would then not be told the identities of speakers (Allen and Wiles 2016).

Seeing the giving of pseudonyms as a routine job, I was surprised by how much the naming came to matter to me. The more removed

from the young people the pseudonyms are, the more protected the participants' identities would be. But I began to feel that the names of the young people had some cultural importance. In naming our children, we draw on many factors, including gender, family, religious and ethnic traditions and other cultural influences (Pilcher 2017; Pilcher, Hooley and Coffey 2020). The removal of real names in research has been argued to have contributed to the silencing of the voices of women, refugees and asylum seekers (Moore 2012), and indigenous people and communities (Allen and Wiles 2016). I began to feel this way about the renaming of my research participants – they come from particular communities and, as the school-excluded, are likely to be drawn from marginalised groups as previously explored. In giving pseudonyms, I wanted to give names that I felt reflected something in essence of their real names. This was a subjective process – I drew on my knowledge of names from my time in teaching, and referred to lists of popular names for inspiration, and tried to give new names that did not allow identification but that I felt came from similar cultural pools as the original names.

Selection of Participants

There is a distinction to be made between fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions (Department for Education 2023a). Fixed term exclusions (also known as suspensions) remove a student from the school premises for a set amount of time, but keep that student on the roll of the school. I was most keen to speak to young people who no longer attended school – to use their phrase, those who were 'kicked out' – and so had initially thought that this would mean those with an official permanent exclusion.

Permanent exclusion (also known as expulsion) is a disciplinary process which results in a student being removed from the school roll. After this, the student may be taken by another school, or are moved to alternative provision (AP) (Department for Education 2013). However, recent work has highlighted that large numbers of young people are not officially excluded from school, but do not attend school and instead are educated in AP (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Education Select Committee 2018; McShane 2020). Their school week and day to day experiences are difficult to distinguish from those with a permanent exclusion, the main difference being who keeps legal responsibility for them as students, and how their provision is funded. This was the case at Float, where young people might have an official exclusion, have the same package without an exclusion, or split their week between school and AP. This led me to decide to set the inclusion criteria as those who no longer attend a school, whose education is all through AP, whether or not they have an official permanent exclusion.

It was notable that at Float, the staff were usually unaware of which students had a formal permanent exclusion, and often also of who were still attending a mainstream school. I initially interviewed those young people who Float staff identified as no longer having a school place, and as I spent time there, through conversation with the young people I found others who met this criterion. The young people at Float were often unaware themselves of their official status (perhaps an interesting finding in itself), and so I would establish their eligibility by asking them where they go every day for their education.

I also spent time and had informal conversations with other young people at Float who were still attending mainstream schools. They were not included as participants for interviews, but these

conversations were noted and reflected on in my fieldnotes and diaries.

Three interviews with Float staff members, Tom, Ryan and Dave, were also conducted. All three staff members had experienced difficulties at school and two (Tom and Ryan) had attended this provision themselves as school-excluded young people. These staff members were generous in their time and openness and had the advantage of the passage of time to reflect on their own experiences of school. In centring the voices of the young people in this study, staff interviews are referred to sparingly. Staff interviews are used to deepen, and occasionally contradict, the perspectives offered by the young people who remain the main focus of this thesis.

Interview details

See table 2, Appendix 4 for a table listing each interview, the pseudonym and school year of each participant, when they were last in attendance at school (not AP), and the location of the interview.

Interviews took place in a variety of settings (as shown in table 2): sitting on a bench outside the classroom, beside the lake, on the minibus to name a few. One outcome of this was that the interviews were done in places that felt like a reflection of the setting and circumstances in which they happened, and so for staff and the young people were a less obvious intrusion into their daily routines. None of the locations were completely private, and there were often brief interruptions as others walked by. Often, interviews were punctuated by people passing by and the sound of geese, dogs or even horses.

Some interviews were more public than others. I had tried to avoid using the minibus journeys for interviews as this was inevitably going

to be quite public and noisy. However, I made an exception for Samuel as he had initially been reluctant to talk to me and when he changed his mind, there was not much time left before the end of term. Samuel is to be commended for remaining focused on the interview as there was considerable noise and disruption during this journey. He also did not appear to be too concerned about who might be listening, which had been my main reason for wanting interviews to be more private.

I felt that the openness amongst the staff at Float helped as the young people attending were mostly at ease with each other and knew that people tended to know a lot about each other already, so I felt that they were less inhibited by the possibility of interruption than they might have been. Occasionally, other young people would chip in comments to support or elaborate on what the interviewee was saying. Despite their apparent ease, I must of course acknowledge that young people may have spoken differently to me if they knew that we were in a private space.

The timings of interviews also varied. Some of the interviews took place whilst the group were out on an activity, and I would ask the young people to leave the group to talk to me. This often meant that we had the length of time needed for the group activity, then the group would be ready to move on and I would bring the interview to a close. The two who I felt had more to say were Jordon and Jack. I had the opportunity for a second interview with Jack, but Jordon was year 11 and a poor attender and so there was never a chance to revisit for a second interview, which was a shame as he had a lot that he wanted to share, and perhaps had more of an analysis of education in general too.

Most of the interviews reached a natural end as I had asked my main questions and also judged that the young people had been kept talking for as long as was reasonable for them. The first two

interviews with young people, with TJ and Rhys who were both people who had difficulty in maintaining focus for any length of time and I judged that I would need to keep the interview short for them to feel that it had been manageable. TJ left Float shortly after the first interview and I was not able to catch Rhys again on a day that he felt able to talk which was unfortunate as I learned a lot from the process and later interviews and would have welcomed a chance for a follow up interview with both.

There were only a few second interviews as I sensed that the young people tended to see it as over with once they had spoken to me. With this in mind, I struggled with how to approach them for second interviews until towards the end of the fieldwork when I had begun to put together some initial analysis and then was able to go back to the young people to talk through my conclusions with them. Dan and Jack both gave feedback on this summary in second interviews.

Managing the data

I used a password protected digital recorder to record interviews. I would then transfer these recordings to a secure database and delete them from the recorder. I transcribed the interviews, making use of the transcription tool in Microsoft Word to get an initial transcript, and then checking back through for inaccuracies. The transcription process helped me to further familiarise myself with the data, and so to begin an initial analysis, spotting common themes. Because of the time-consuming nature of transcribing, I was not able to listen back and transcribe each interview before the next, which may have been helpful in developing further interview questions. However, I had transcribed some interviews as the fieldwork went on and I continued to reflect and to write reflexive diaries during the fieldwork to help

me to begin to pick out what I felt were important aspects of the data and to refine the interview questions. For example, early interviews showed that some of the young people had been out of school for significant lengths of time and had limited recollections of the details of previous schools. Instead, I was able to ask more questions about future plans and next steps.

Although this was not an ethnography and Float was not the focus of the study, I did keep some diaries of observations and incidents. This was to help me to make sense of what I was seeing and learning about the young people in addition to what they might say in interviews. I was, however, cautious about the diaries as the setting we were in was not the intended focus of the study, and I was also aware that I had asked to be allowed in on that basis. I tried to note observations that I felt were relevant for the focus of my research and research questions, and not to stray into keeping records of what happens at Float. I did record my thoughts about conversations that I had with staff and young people which were not interviews. Several of these were conversations I had with young people who did not fit the interview criteria and were still attending mainstream school, which offered a useful contrast.

As the weeks went on, sometimes young people would seek me out to tell me something as they knew that I was interested in their experiences of school. For example, Alex did not want to do a formal interview, but was happy for me to write about our conversations. When we first spoke, she had been worried about going back to school to take exams, and then when the school later decided not to allow her to go back, she was upset and wanted to tell me as she knew that I would be interested to know. Incidental conversations were also often a chance for me to hear school-excluded young people talk together about things they remembered from school. For example, I spoke with two young people about their experiences of

being put in isolation booths at school, which had not been part of their interviews. Although some of the young people remained seemingly bemused by my interest in them or in school, they did begin to talk to me about these aspects of schooling and I was able to sometimes ask deeper questions based on what they had shared. I would write up my recollections of these conversations once I got home from Float each day. Fieldwork notes and diaries were also kept in a secure database. The diaries and reflections helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the setting and of the young people at Float but do not form the data set used for analysis, with the exception of notes of conversations in addition to interviews and those who chose not to consent to a recording but did consent to an interview.

Data Analysis

I conducted a thematic analysis of the data using NVivo. A sample of the data analysis can be seen in Appendix 5 and of codes in Appendix 6. This process was largely modelled on Braun & Clarke's (Braun and Clarke 2022) well established approach to analysis. A reflexive thematic analysis allows me the opportunity to become more familiar with the data, aided by the fact that I conducted and transcribed all of the interviews myself. A reflexive approach also allows me to bring my own responses, thoughts and reflections into the analysis. My use of reflexive analysis was further shaped by applying concepts from critical realism.

Bhaskar's (2016) so called holy trinity of critical realism is ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality. This framework guides my approach to the data analysis in several ways. Firstly, ontological realism takes the position that there are objective realities that exist independently of human naming or categorising –

there are things that are true whether we recognise them or not. Epistemic relativism allows that there are many ways in which we seek greater knowledge or understanding, which are influenced by cultural and structural factors shaping the skills and perspectives available for analysis. Objective realities can only be understood through cultural tools such as language and so knowledge shifts and is reshaped by new learning and developments over time. In this analysis, I use my position as a former teacher and as a researcher with views about the value of education as a starting point to look for explanations and solutions to the social problem of school exclusion. Finally, judgemental rationality requires me as a researcher to offer an explanatory critique. Whereas Braun & Clarke (2022) are seeking to offer interpretive stories about their data, I use judgemental rationality to consider and review potential causal explanations for my findings.

Fryer (2022) offers a model for thematic analysis, adapted from Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) which was in turn built on Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to thematic analysis. In this way, the method that I use here is not a departure from more commonly used reflexive thematic analysis, but a development of it which aligns more closely with a critical realist analysis.

Fryer suggests a five-step approach to analysis, shown in figure 4 below.

Step 1
- Develop your research questions

Step 2
- Familiarise yourself with the data

Step 3
- Apply, develop and review codes

Step 4
- Develop and review themes

Step 5
- Generate conclusions and reports
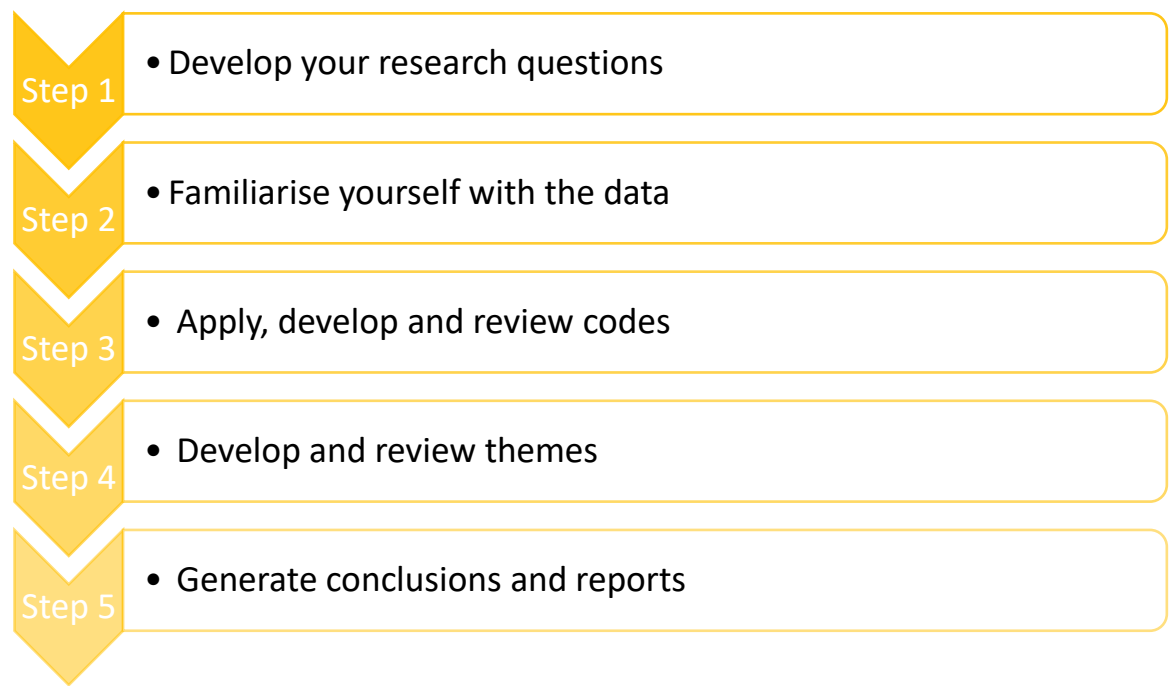
Figure 4: Summary of the five-step critical realist approach to TA. Adapted from Fryer (2022) Permission to reproduce granted by Taylor & Francis

I followed the five steps, with an awareness that there may be movement back and forth between the steps as ideas develop and are checked back with the data. Step 3 introduces coding, beginning with data led descriptive codes which allows me to work with the "data as it is" (Fryer 2022, p.7), rather than looking first for theory led explanations. To keep the number and scope of codes manageable, I moved between applying, developing and reviewing codes, looking at one or two interviews at a time and then consolidating similar codes and reviewing to check that the meaning is not lost in this process.

Using the models offered by Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) and Fryer (2022), I coded data and organised them by theme to offer causal explanations. Findings are presented in the format shown in figure 5 below.
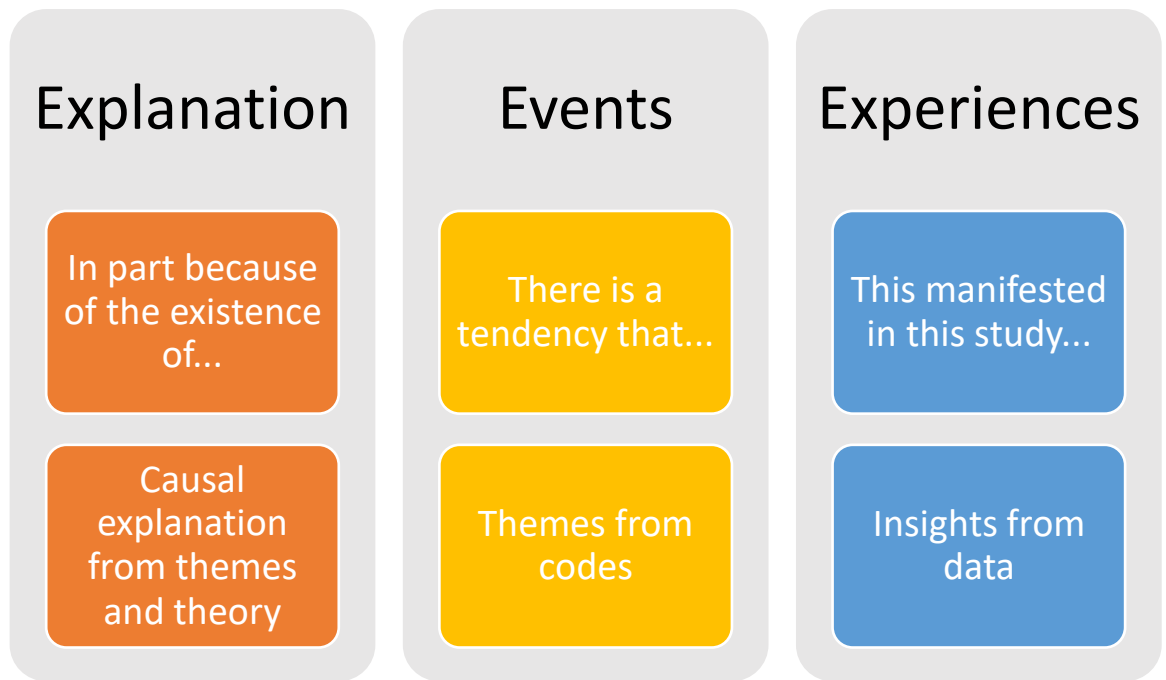
Figure 5: Causal diagram, adapted from Wilsthire and Rankainen (2021) and Fryer (2022)

In this way, data is analysed and coded. Themes from the coding show tendencies for which there is an explanation, based on the data and application of theory. Findings are presented following this model in the following two chapters.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion part 1

In the following two chapters, the findings of this study are presented and discussed. First, a description of the fieldwork setting is given as this gives context to the findings that follow. Some details of the young people who shared their thoughts and experiences in this study are also given.

Five themes were identified through thematic analysis and they are presented in two chapters. The five themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Individual blame

Theme 2: Marginalised groups

Theme 3 : Disengagement from school

Theme 4: Hostility to school

Theme 5: Future plans
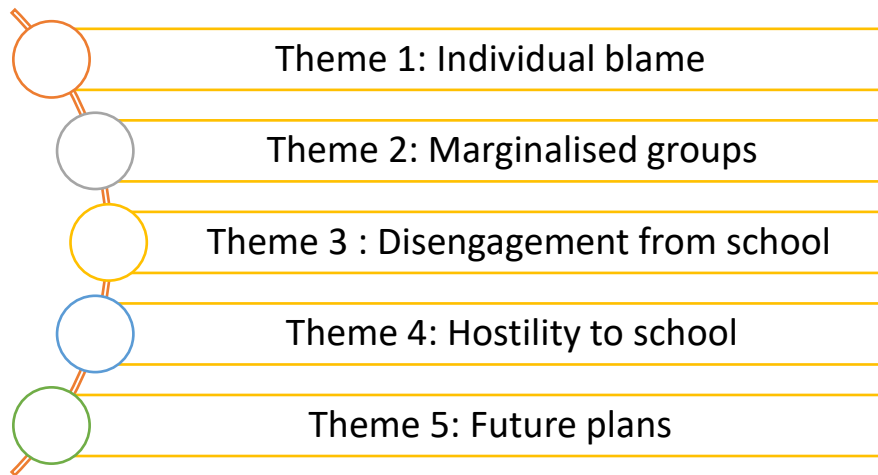
This chapter presents themes 1 and 2, which focus on the individualisation and needs profile of those excluded from school. The following chapter discusses themes 3, 4 and 5 which focus on the views of school-excluded young people on school and how this relates to their future plans.

Fieldwork setting

Fieldwork was conducted at Float, a small alternative provision (AP) in the East Midlands. The AP offers outdoor activities and land-based

work, leading to vocational qualifications. Whilst the courses all have a theory element, the emphasis is on being outside and enjoying nature. Staff are not qualified teachers, but recruited for their subject knowledge, aptitude with the young people and commitment to the ethos of the project. Some staff were previously educated at the provision themselves. Two main buildings are used, one largely for offices and storage with a small teaching space, and one with a larger room with some tools and equipment and set with chairs, tables and a whiteboard.

Young people attend the provision from across the region, some still on roll at mainstream schools and some directly funded through the local authority. The provision is for secondary aged students, with most in years 9, 10 and 11 (the last three years of compulsory schooling, ages 13-16). Most attend the provision for one or two days per week, and several then attend other APs for the rest of their education provision. Although Float does not take full responsibility for students (this is not a full-time provision), some do not attend any education on the other days of the week and so for them, Float is their only education provider.

As the students are travelling in from a variety of locations, the beginning of the day is left free flowing until everyone has arrived, which allows time for staff to complete admin around attendance and free school meals as well as deal with any incidents or queries with the young people. In the morning there is some lesson time when the folders for various vocational qualifications are completed. After this, groups split up and go out to do various activities. Most of the interviews were conducted during the afternoon activity sessions, with a few taking place at the base before or after groups went out.

There is a strong ethos of care amongst the staff. Sessions are very informal, first names are used and staff share their own experiences with young people, acting as mentors. Relationships are important

and it was notable the respect that most young people had for the staff and the minimal number of incidents or clashes between young people or damage to property etc. Alongside this, staff often expressed strong anti-school views and the environment was very male dominated.

In total, twenty interviews were conducted with 14 school-excluded young people and three members of staff from the AP where fieldwork was conducted. Details of each interview, with details of the participants and locations of interviews can be found in appendix 4.

Given the nature of the AP, Float, the young people attending and so on this study cannot be taken as a representative cross section of the school-excluded. The location of Float meant that most of the young people and staff were white British, as reflected in the local population, and so did not fit the national profile of school-excluded where students racialised as black and GRT are over-represented (Department for Education 2023a). Float offers outdoor, vocational activities and so it is possible that those school-excluded young people who were considered to be more academically able may not choose or be directed to this provision. This is has particular relevance when considering the attitude to school and future plans of the young people in this study. Nonetheless, a range of young people in different circumstances, some still attending mainstream school and sitting GCSE exams attended Float during the fieldwork period, reflecting some of the diversity of young people attending AP.

The philosophers

Fourteen school-excluded young people were interviewed as part of this research. As will be explored in theme 3: disengagement, often the young people were vague about the details of their school

experiences and some found it difficult to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Amongst those who agreed to be interviewed, two stood out and were referred to in my field diaries as 'the philosophers'. Jack and Jordon spoke eloquently at times about their memories of school but also about their world view or philosophy. Jack had given a lot of thought to the effects that his home and family life had on his school experiences. Jordon spoke passionately about his desire to pursue personal freedom and be his authentic self.

Whilst I have taken care to ensure that all of the participants are represented in these findings chapters, there are sections which feature more of Jack and Jordon. This reflects the way in which they both went beyond answering my questions and offered their own analysis of their experiences of school exclusion. In contrast, George declined to be recorded and was reluctant to share much in interview. For this reason, George features only briefly. The other young people all offered insight and shared personal stories, often from the most difficult times in their lives, and I remain grateful to all of them for their openness and generosity.

Marginalisation and blame in school exclusion

This findings chapter includes themes 1 and 2 from the data:

| Theme 1: Individual blame |
| Theme 2: Marginalised groups |
| Theme 3 : Disengagement from school |
| Theme 4: Hostility to school |
| Theme 5: Future plans |
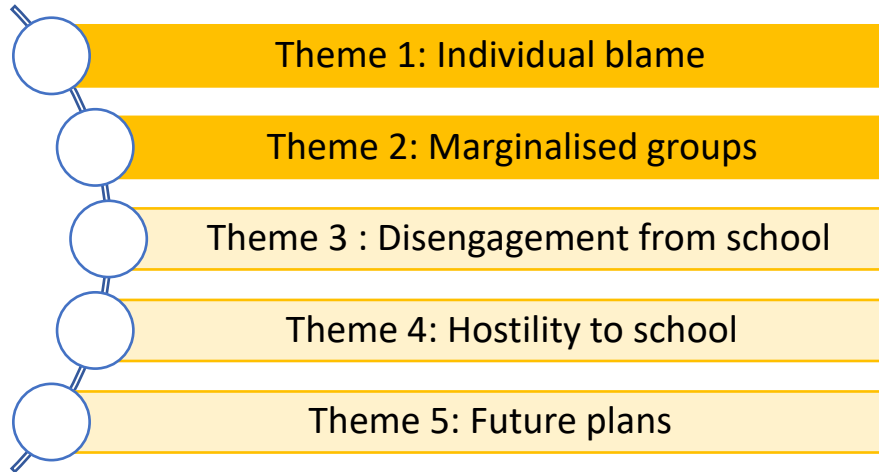
This chapter explores the contrasting themes of individual blame and marginalised groups. Young people from certain marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). Despite this enduring trend, both national policy and the accounts of these school-excluded young people tend to focus on the role of the individual. The young people in this study shared details of their special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their adverse family circumstances. However, the explanations offered by the young people for their exclusion from school tended to focus on their own unsuitability for school.

A core tenet of neoliberalism is "radical individualism" (Vassallo 2015, p.83) and this is reflected in the English school system (Reay 2022). This focus on the individual leaves school systems unchallenged and thus perpetuates inequalities. A morphogenetic approach (Archer 2016a) allows both personal experiences and wider social factors to be considered. This makes possible an analysis that values the views of the young people in this study and places them in a context of the structural inequalities that have shaped their school experiences.

Theme 1: Individual blame

Theme 1 explores how the young people in this study reflected on their experiences of school and school exclusion in terms of individual blame. Focus is on the ways in which the young people explained their exclusion from school as resulting from their own flaws and behaviours. Of particular interest is the negative language that the young people in this study used about themselves.

The young people in this study offered individualised explanations for their difficulties at school, focused on their behaviour or on their own deficits as learners. It suggests that the young people have absorbed and internalised the messages of individual responsibility promoted in a neoliberal school system (see Reay 2022).

The causal diagram below (figure 6) is based on a critical realist approach to thematic analysis (Fryer 2022; Wiltshire and Ronkainen 2021) as outlined in Chapter 3. It offers a possible explanation for events, which are groups of experiences from the data.
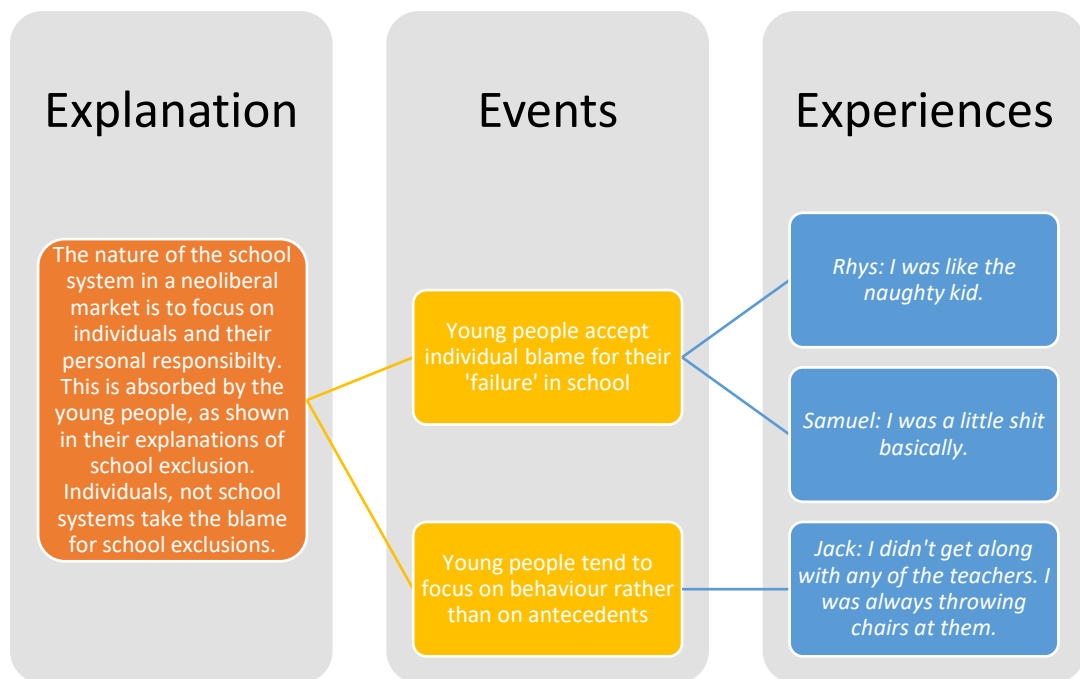
Figure 6: Causal diagram, Theme 1: Individual blame

In this section, the views shared by young people on the theme of individual blame are explored. All quotes are from individual interviews with school-excluded young people conducted over a five month period (see appendix 4 for more details). Their language includes some swearing.

Being naughty

One of the notable commonalities across the data was the negative language that young people used when they spoke about themselves. They regularly described themselves as naughty when explaining why they had got into difficulties at school, as shown in the examples below.

> **Rhys** (15.03): I was like the naughty kid.

Stacey (21.03): Like probably three weeks in, I started to be naughty.

Finn (17.05): I started to get more naughtier.

In addition, more extreme language was often used when the young people reflected on how they had behaved at school.

Samuel (06.06): I was a little shit basically.

Jack (06.06): I was a twat! I was horrible.

Lucy (29.03): I was just a little dickhead!

I was struck by the strength of the language that the young people used about themselves. Their words suggested they often saw themselves as irredeemable, difficult to manage and therefore as people who did not belong in the classroom. This makes the experience of being excluded from school more understandable and reasonable – for the teachers as disruptive students are removed, and for the young people as they accept that they do not belong in the classroom.

Education policy in England has been shaped by a neoliberal "drive to markets, privatisation, hyper-competition and individualism" (Reay 2022, p.10). This is reflected in the way that the young people in this study described themselves. Their accounts of exclusion from school were rooted in an understanding of behaviour that focuses on

individual responsibility. They offer examples of how school "ignores, excludes or stigmatises" (Ball and Collet-Sabé 2022, p.6) those who do not conform or seem to belong. AP staff member Ryan shared this view.

Ryan (29.03): It's like they want a specific kid and if you don't meet that criteria, you're left behind and there's no help for you.

Focus on behaviour

As well as the negative language about themselves, the young people spoke with an openness that they had behaved in ways they understood would lead them to get into trouble. Occasionally this came across as boastful:

TJ (15.03): I got kicked out of there because teacher tried restraining me, it didn't end well for him.

But mostly the young people spoke in a matter-of-fact way about how they had behaved in school. This included fighting, swearing, walking out of lessons and 'messing about' with friends. Geeno described his own behaviour as 'disrespectful'. A lot of the behaviour that the young people described was linked to conflict with teachers or peers.

Jack (06.06): I didn't get along with any of the teachers. I was always throwing chairs at them.

Lucy (29.03): I didn't like anyone. And if I didn't like anyone I'd just make it clear.

TJ (15.03): I got into a fight.

Some behaviours that the young people described were about avoiding the classroom.

Joseph (25.04): If I get frustrated in lesson, I'll just walk out or something.

Stacey (21.03): I walk out.

I had anticipated that the young people might want to tell stories of unfair treatment or provocation that led to their outbursts, to justify their behaviour. More often, their "personalised folklore" (Willis 1977, p.22) centred on their own behaviour that resulted in sanctions or exclusion from school.

Challenging behaviour in school was a fundamental characteristic of the personal and group identity of 'the lads' (Willis 1977). They would try to out-do one another in their stories of misdemeanours and prioritised "having a laff" (Willis 1977, p.29). Whilst some of the behaviour described is similar, the way that the school-excluded young people in this study spoke about themselves was much more negative than the celebratory tone of 'the lads'. Whereas 'the lads' revelled in a deliberate attempt to undermine teachers, the young

people in this study tended to frame their behaviour as something that came from their own inability to meet the demands of school.

School rules

A refusal to accept school rules led to some of the behaviour described by the young people.

> **Finn** (17.05): *No one was allowed to have sweets. So I, er, bought some anyway.*

> **Stacey** (28.03): *They said if you come back I have to wear a skirt, all girls wear skirts … I'm definitely not going back!*

Finn's refusal to abide by the rules resulted in the end of his placement in that AP. The restriction on his freedom (explored in more depth in theme 4), and more generally feeling a lack of motivation to make that placement work, led Finn to feel that his determination to ignore the no-sweets rule was more important than keeping his place. Similarly, 'the lads' engaged in "the struggle to win symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules" (Willis 1977, p.26). In contrast, Stacey highlights an inflexibility in the school rules which appears to have simple solutions. The school expectation that girls wear skirts added to Stacey's feelings of vulnerability at school as, she said, "boys look at you more". This became one of main reasons she did not want to go back to school. The school rule about uniform was linked to her anxieties around school but became a disciplinary rather than a support issue.

Individual blame by teachers

The negative ways in which the young people in this study described themselves were also reflected in how they imagined others saw them. The young people expressed a great deal of hostility towards teachers, which will be explored in theme 4, but they also felt hostility *from* teachers.

> **Joseph** (25.04): *all the teachers hated me, that's why, that was another reason why I moved, cause like I was just naughty and they didn't really like me.*

> **Samuel** (06.06): *Basically, the teachers just didn't like me. Because I was different to everybody else like.*

> **Jack** (06.06): *I seen it in teachers' eyes, they like, that they were like frightened, like of what I could do.*

This antagonistic relationship with teachers – although several of the young people were able to name teachers who had helped them – reflects the narrative of personal deficit and individual blame. Clashes with teachers became an almost inevitable part of that picture. Respectful relationships were very important to the young people, but they saw this as something rarely achieved in school. AP staff member Ryan also saw the relationship with teachers as important.

> **Ryan** (29.03): *If you've always been told you're doing bad, and then you get told you're doing well then it's like, well,*

actually do they even mean it 'cause you've kind of lost the trust there. And you need the learners to trust you.

The way that the young people described feeling hated by teachers shows their vulnerability. They are "coherent selves, centers [sic] of consciousness and feeling" (Porpora 2015, p.23) and they have absorbed the message that they do not belong in school. 'The lads' were also "very sensitive" to the insults of teachers, "it really strikes home" (Willis 1977, p.78). However, Willis suggests that 'the lads' received hostility from teachers as a "class insult" (Willis 1977, p.77), whereas the young people in this study viewed the hostility as relating to themselves as individuals. These school-excluded young people gave little sense of themselves as "Corporate Agents seeking to transform society" (Archer 2016a, p.20). Instead, the young people accepted the narrative that they did not belong in school and regarded exclusion from school as a likely outcome.

Personal deficits

Aligned with the individualistic explanations of school exclusion was the way in which young people talked about their own difficulties. This tended to be presented in ways that placed a deficit in the young people – identifying things they were not good at or could not cope with – rather than a questioning of school expectations or the possibilities for support or adaptation in the classroom. Some young people spoke of being unable to manage the demands of school.

> **Joseph** *(25.04): I couldn't cope being in that school all the time.*

> **Dan** (24.05): I went to this other school … and I really struggled there.

Some of the young people found the academic work in school challenging.

> **Rhys** (15.03): I'm not very good at like paperwork.

> **Eddie** (28.03): When I used to do like maths and everything yeah, I couldn't really do it proper so I needed someone to help me like.

Jordon made a few references to being stupid. He described himself as "a bit stupid" because he "never learned anything in school", but later also rejected that characterisation, saying "I'm not stupid". In this, Jordon shows that he is aware of the judgements that might be made (including by himself) of someone who did not do well at school, whilst also maintaining an inner confidence that rejects that view. He offers an insight into the "internal conversation" (Archer 2016a, p.30) through which he is deciding who to be. While Jordon was perhaps the most clear in articulating the contradictions of this conversation, several of the young people spoke about themselves in negative terms whilst managing to maintain an inner confidence that they were 'not stupid'. Others asserted that they learn in different ways, or did not value the kind of learning offered in the school classroom. For example, Samuel was confident that he would be successful in the workplace but did not see himself as someone who could benefit from formal schooling.

Samuel (06.06): I'm good with my hands. I can't do pen to paper writing.

Rhys (15.03): I'm a practical learner.

Whilst the young people sometimes attributed their difficulties in school to SEND (this topic will be more closely examined in theme 2), often these difficulties were presented as personal quirks or character traits.

Stacey (28.03): It's like just going in circles with me.

Finn (17.05): I just got more like, how I am now across the years.

Jordon (25.04): I'm weird like that.

The way that these young people described their difficulties placed the focus on the individual. Approaches to inclusion, including the revised SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education 2015), are often still based on a deficit model (Ainscow 1999; Byrne 2013; Parker and Levinson 2018; Runswick-Cole 2011) which locates the problem within the young person. Following a deficit model leads to support and intervention that focuses on the needs of the young person, in isolation from wider structural factors. In this way, efforts at inclusion leave school systems unchanged.

Only one interview, with Alex (22.03, who declined to be recorded), included a discussion of the school's performance or status. She described the school as having been recently academised and as a 'bad school' that people did not want to send their children to. Alex felt that she and her friends from the school's inclusion unit had been badly let down by its closure. This conversation stood out as rare in its acknowledgement of factors beyond the failings of the young people themselves.

An analysis of school exclusion which concentrates on within-person deficits cannot offer solutions to the persistent exclusion of young people from marginalised groups. Instead, a (pre-pandemic) rising number of fixed term and permanent exclusions (Department for Education 2023a) and increased use of isolation, zero tolerance policies (Clarke, et al. 2021) and withdrawal from class (Power and Taylor 2020) suggests that this approach leads to more punitive punishments.

The inevitability of school exclusion

Often the young people in this study spoke about exclusion from school as an anticipated part of school life. Sometimes they were fatalistic about events, seeing school exclusion as expected or inevitable.

> **Samuel** (06.06): And I probably would have got excluded by now, fully excluded. But they put me onto this [AP] so I didn't.

Joseph (25.04): I knew since I went to secondary school, it just wasn't gonna work. So did my mum to be honest. So, she knew I was gonna get permanently excluded.

Geeno (13.06): Probably gonna get kicked out soon… I'm surprised, I'm still here [AP]. They just take me back.

Permanent exclusion from school should be a last resort after "approaches towards behaviour management have been exhausted" (Department for Education 2022d, p.3). Consequently, it is likely that these young people will have experienced many difficulties in school, had many behaviour incidents and been the subject of many disciplinary procedures (Department for Education 2022a). In accepting the idea that they cannot be kept in school because of their own personal deficiencies, the young people began to see exclusion from school as inevitable, a fact of life. They had mostly rejected the idea that school could be reformed or even that possibly more could have been done to keep them in school.

SK (17.05): You don't think there was anything that could have kept you in mainstream?

Finn: No, I wouldn't say so really.

SK (29.03): Might you have wanted to stay do you think, if you'd have felt more like there was people who were like on your side?

Lucy: I still probably wouldn't have stayed, I'm not gonna lie. I think some people would have but I wouldn't.

SK (25.04): What do you think they [people in charge] should be trying to do about school?

Joseph: I don't really know to be honest … I don't know good stuff of mainstream school, I only know how to [do] bad in that school.

The apportioning of individual blame does not explain the trend shown in school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a) to exclude those young people from already marginalised groups. Instead, the young people largely accepted the more mainstream assumption (such as Bennett 2017) that they were excluded from school because of a problem in themselves, not a problem in the school system.

This explanation was often also repeated by the AP staff, who showed an awareness of the difficulties many of the young people have faced, but tended to focus on that rather than any critical analysis of the school systems. When I asked AP staff member Tom why he thought that young people from certain marginalised groups, such as those who were care experienced or with SEND, were more likely to be excluded from school, his answer focused on the young people and not on school or wider social inequalities.

Tom (07.03): It could be to do with like home. But like their parents not talking to them and so they want more attention at school. Or, I don't know, just trying to show off because they're the biggest of the group.

Looking only to explanations based on individual or family failings does little to explain the social context of school exclusions or why young people from certain marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). In contrast to 'the lads' and to Archer's (2016a) conceptualisation of a corporate agency, these school-excluded young people express neither a view of themselves as part of a collective, nor as agents of change within the school system. They do not offer an analysis which leads to collective action or challenge of the school structures.

Theme 1: Individual blame, summary

The young people in this study seemingly accepted and internalised the messages of individual responsibility. "Explanations involving random causality or pathology" (Willis 1977, p.62) were offered in place of "proper social explanations for the development of an anti-school culture" (Ibid.). These school-excluded young people accepted much of the blame for their difficulties in school and positioned themselves as people who could not be educated in mainstream classes.

Rather than mourning the loss of their place in school, the young people tended to frame school exclusion as something they welcomed, as an escape from a school system that they did not see as offering them what they felt they needed for a successful life. This is further explored in theme 5. The focus on individual blame shifts attention from structural inequalities and from the links between school exclusion and marginalisation.

Theme 2: Marginalised groups

Across this group of school-excluded young people there was a tendency that they had faced difficulties in their lives, including family adversity and SEND. This aligns with national school exclusion statistics which show that, for example, young people with SEND, who are care experienced and who come from low-income families are consistently more likely than their peers to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). Often, the young people in this study offered this information about themselves as context, rather than as an explanation for why they had been excluded from school. There tends to have been limited (successful) support offered by school despite a number of reports and policy initiatives (Department for Education 2015; Department for Education 2022c; Ofsted 2021; Partridge, et al. 2020; Timpson 2019).

Although the young people in this study could identify that these difficulties may be factors in their exclusion from school, they did not necessarily see this as a reason why schools might offer more support. Instead, having SEND and difficult family lives tended to reinforce the young person's view of themselves as people who did not belong in school.

The causal diagram below (Figure 7) is based on a critical realist approach to thematic analysis (Fryer 2022; Wiltshire and Ronkainen 2021). It offers a possible explanation for events, which are groups of experiences from the data.

Explanation

Despite policy and statutory obligations, young people with SEND or affected by family adversity are subject to disciplinary procedures that lead to exclusion from school. Thus, young people from marginalised groups become further marginalised through school exclusion.

Events

Young people had SEND which affected their school experiences

Young people had families who had experienced loss and adversity, which affected their school experiences

Experiences

Joseph: They didn't believe I had ADHD and they didn't try and help me get diagnosed.

Geeno: I couldn't stay in a classroom for more than 10 minutes, the work were too hard.

Stacey: It was all family problems. It [was] all just hard to keep my emotions inside.

Figure 7: Causal diagram, Theme 2: Marginalised groups

As previously discussed, young people belonging to marginalised groups are more susceptible to being excluded from school. In particular, those with SEND, who are care experienced, whose families qualify for free school meals (FSM), and those from certain ethnic minority groups are more likely to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). The nature of the fieldwork setting, in a post-industrialised part of the East Midlands, was such that there was not a wide range of ethnic diversity and so for this study, a focus on ethnicity or race, whilst acknowledged as an important aspect of the national statistics, would not have been appropriate. Out of sensitivity, the young people were not asked directly about their socio-economic status, family details or any diagnosis of SEND, although this was then discussed when offered as a topic by the young people during interviews.

In this section, the views shared by young people on the theme of marginalised groups are explored. All quotes are from individual interviews with school-excluded young people and AP staff conducted over a five month period (see appendix 4 for more details).

Family adversity

Several of the young people in this study had experienced bereavement and unsettled family lives. An increased understanding of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) helps to highlight the potential impact of such experiences, in terms of brain development, mental health (Herzog and Schmahl 2018), behaviour and educational attainment (Bombèr 2007). In turn, ACEs can impact on the ability of the young person to cope with the demands of school.

Joseph recalled being taunted at school about the death of his father.

> **Joseph** (25.04): Well, my dad died when I was like two … And people used to try and cuss me for it, so I just used to bang them out.

There was a lasting impact on the family of their loss.

> **Joseph** (25.04): My mum's got like problems with like in her head and stuff. Cause of what happened with my dad.

Several of Joseph's older siblings had also been excluded from school, for which he offered a simple explanation.

> **Joseph** (25.04): Cause we've all got problems mate. That's why.

Joseph also spoke about being from a large family, with some estrangements and the death of an older half-sister, showing that he has experienced multiple losses. This was echoed in how he described the loss of his in-school support.

Joseph (25.04): And then. When I got to year 6, he left me because he had to go work with another kid.

Joseph had experienced a series of losses in his early life, and the loss of a trusted adult at school became yet another. His story serves to emphasise the way in which seemingly small changes at school can be amplified by the things that the young person is dealing with away from school. Trauma can reduce the window of tolerance (Corrigan, Fisher and Nutt 2011), to make dealing with challenge more difficult, and can lead to shut-down or apparent over-reaction. This perhaps goes some way to explaining "why people do not respond in uniform fashion under the same structured circumstances" (Archer 2007, p.11). Young people who have experienced ACEs may respond to challenges at school in ways that are unexpected or interpreted as excessive (Bombèr 2020), potentially leading to disciplinary action by the school.

Like Joseph, the loss of his dad at a young age led Geeno into conflict at school.

Geeno (13.06): I threw a chair at some kid that talked about my dead dad.

Others had also experienced bereavement.

Samuel (06.06): Well, just as I was about to do, start year seven, Marmar died, so that were hard for me. But. You just got to deal with it haven't you? So

SK: Yeah, but it sounds like that had a big impact on you?

Samuel: It did.

SK: And how did that affect how you were doing at school?

Samuel: Just give me no motivation.

From diaries (22.03): Alex told me that her sister had had a ring stolen at school, that 'had my dead brothers ashes in it' but that school didn't take any action to get it back.

Alex presented an image of toughness but was deeply affected by what she perceived as a lack of care or sensitivity from school. She had attended an inclusion unit within the school which had closed suddenly, and Alex had felt cast adrift. She was visibly upset when she heard that she would not have the chance to take GCSEs at school. The incident described above, when the school failed to help to recover an item of such value to the family was experienced by Alex as further lack of care.

Whilst Stacey had a number of health problems, she identified her difficult family situation as the main reason she had struggled at school.

Stacey (21.03): It was all family problems. My mum left and then it [was] all just hard to keep my emotions inside.

At times, Stacey did not have contact with her dad. She felt that things might have been different at school if he had been there.

> **Stacey** (28.03): Yeah, he would stop me. He would like just talk to me and then he change it. My dad would. He's like a opposite person. My mum. My mum doesn't really care what I do, my dad does.

Stacey highlighted the importance for her of family in influencing her experiences of school. Parental engagement is a dominant factor in school success (Siraj-Blatchford 2010). When families are in crisis, their capacity to offer "practical and emotional support" (Watt 2016, p.33) for education may be lessened, with potential knock-on effects for the children. This view was highlighted by AP staff member Dave. He recalled the stigma of being on free school meals when he was at school. He was also sensitive to the demands on parents of having financial and other worries.

> **Dave** (12.07): They're more worried about money and getting through life than getting the kids their proper education, maybe.

Young people who have had social care involvement are more likely to be excluded from school, even after controlling for other factors (Department for Education 2019a). This suggests that elements of school structures and culture are failing to be inclusive for young people experiencing family adversity. This is especially true for those young people who enter the care system and live away from their

families. For example, Dan told me about living in a boarding school as a looked after child (LAC).

> **Dan** (25.04): *Yeah, to be honest I don't really like it there.*
>
> **SK**: *What is it that you don't really like?*
>
> **Dan**: *It's care innit?*
>
> **SK**: *Right. What would be better for you?*
>
> **Dan**: *Living with my family. But I can't really do that.*

Dan seemed sad but resigned to his circumstances. He expressed little sense of agency, but perhaps exercised this in small acts that demonstrated his disengagement. During both interviews, Dan spent much of the time lying down on a bench, and he maintained an air of quiet detachment most of the time at Float. I had taken some time to get to know Dan over the weeks before I asked for an interview, as he was very quiet and I wondered if he would be willing to talk. He was generally compliant during the days at Float, but gave the impression that he had not invested emotionally in either his home or school placement. A school system which assumes young people to be rationally engaged in their own progression – "homo economicus" (Mikelatou and Arvanitis 2021, p.2) – may be at odds with young people such as Dan who seem to be lethargic and disinterested, perhaps at least partly as a result of ACEs. Whereas 'the lads' are painted by Willis (1977) as being proactive in their adoption of an identity that challenged school, Dan appeared to be exercising agency in a less overt way, by simply not engaging fully with the self-improvement project of the neoliberal agenda (Türken, et al. 2016).

Parents and school

Jack lived with his mum with visits to his dad. He spoke at length about his unusual upbringing, growing up around gangs and violence.

Jack (06.06): I've always been brought up around like bad stuff. Like, from my dad. My dad was a drug dealer … So I've, I've been brought up thinking it's normal … Don't get me wrong, I've realised that it's not normal, but it's just what I've been brought up around, it's the only thing I know.

These comments were echoed in AP staff member Tom's thoughts on why young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school.

Tom (07.03): I think it's because of like they look at like their mates or family members being like that. Like they've been around that kind of social group, for their life, so they're used to that, so they think it's normal [anti-social behaviour], but you just try and talk it out of them.

Jack was clear about how this upbringing had shaped his own behaviour. He was able to articulate how he saw his turbulent home life as directly impacting on his experiences of school, from how it has shaped him as a person and how he perceived that others viewed him. Jack arrived at school with a reputation in the community that he maintained through acts of defiance and violence.

> ***Jack*** *(06.06): My dad, he wanted me… he wanted to make sure I would never get bullied, so he turned me into like a monster, basically… He wanted me to be like him.*

Jack saw clearly that there was a conflict between the values and expectations of home and of school – a "clash of two worlds"(Broomhead 2014, p.143). Whilst he recognised the limitations of the gang lifestyle being offered to him, Jack still aligned himself more with this than with the values and expectations of school. Similarly, 'the lads' (Willis 1977) chose to follow their fathers into industrial labouring jobs, despite its drawbacks. In this way, each of 'the lads' "becomes not so much like his father as of the same world" (Willis 1977, p.75). This in turn fed their counter-school culture whereby the values of home, including the valorisation of masculinity and manual work were of more significance to them than the possibilities offered by schooling and qualifications. The parents of 'the lads' seemed, if not to actively encourage their sons' school rebellion, to have a "fatalist recognition" (Willis 1977, p.75) that their sons were beyond their control. Similarly, Jack seemed to feel destined to follow his father but into crime rather than manual labour. The young people in this study often demonstrated values that were more aligned with their families and communities than with school. We see a morphogenetic cycle (Archer 1995) in which structural inequalities and cultural conditioning conspire to limit the success with which parents from marginalised groups navigate the school system (Reay 2017). The outcome of this is a reproduction and further perpetuation of the inequalities which lead to marginalisation. Some of the young people in this study had a family history of difficulties in or not completing school. Finn's dad had experienced his own challenges as a young person.

> *Finn* (17.05): Cause his parents died when he was young, so he was going through a very difficult time and that … he just wasn't in the right mind to be like learning, school and mainstream especially. Imagine how hard that was to deal with … Yeah, he went to borstal for a bit.

Finn felt that his dad had hoped for better for him.

> *Finn* (17.05): He doesn't want my life to turn out like his.

Despite his dad's aspirations for him, Finn had also had a difficult school career. Even though Finn was an articulate and potentially academically capable student, he had, like his dad, been excluded from school. George also gave the impression that it was usual in his family to be excluded from school, but seemed unconcerned about that.

> *From diaries (23.05): I asked if the adults at home and around him [**George**], if any also didn't finish school or been excluded and he said all of them … he suggested that it was a relief to be out of mainstream and that it was also less hassle for his mum.*

AP staff member Dave showed an awareness of families facing adversity. He also suggested that parents' cultural attitudes to school could be a factor in their child's engagement.

> *Dave* (12.07): I don't think some of the parents. They don't see the importance of it [school], do they?

This seemed not to be the case for Lucy, whose family experiences of school were more positive. Lucy's mum worked in education and had done well in school.

> *Lucy (29.03): All of my family like … they all completed school. they all completed school, got their GCSEs, did whatever... Except for my Uncle Gary. I don't know if he completed or not, but he was like, a bit like me … everyone's always said that I'm like my Uncle Gary.*

Lucy's mum had been proactive in her choice of secondary school in a bid to avoid further conflicts.

> *Lucy (29.03): my mum didn't want me going to like any local secondaries because I already had like loads of problems with loads of people what were going to them schools. So my mum, like sent me to like a different secondary.*

Parental choice has been much lauded as a way to improve school standards, by introducing a competitive market in which parents are the customers (Thomson 2020). However, evidence shows that parents who are themselves more educated, who have a higher socio-economic status and who come from less disadvantaged communities have made the most gains from this system (Allen, Burgess and McKenna 2014). Whilst the rhetoric is of more choice, parental control and school improvement, in reality this marketisation of schools has created structures which reinforce social inequalities (Angus 2015).

Impact on family of difficulties at school

Not only is family important in shaping experiences of school, but the school experience also in turn has effects on family life. Some of the young people described the impact on the family of their difficulties at school.

Lucy (29.03): Since I was like in primary, my mum had to quit all of her jobs. Cause I was like being kicked out of school that much and needed picking up that much, she had to quit her job.

Geeno (13.06): She [mum] was in school, she was in secondary school more times than I just went in!

Jordon and Geeno both had extended periods of home education, with responsibility falling on their mums.

Geeno (13.06): Oh, I feel bad for her [mum]… Because all the shit I done, yeah, reflects on her. And all the time I've had off even, Year 6 and whatnot. It reflects on her and all.

Jordon was aware of the strain that his sometimes volatile behaviour caused at home. As a younger child he had "bad anger tantrums" and he sometimes still got angry. This could cause rows at home, sometimes resulting in him walking out and the police getting involved. Jordon felt that he and his mum had worked together to understand how to manage his emotions.

Jordon (25.04): I was like, this is what you [mum] are doing wrong, I would explain to her like, this is what you are doing. It took me years for her to actually understand my brain innit.

Despite their difficulties, Jordon felt supported and protected by his mum. He felt that she had to choose how to respond to his problems at school and to prioritise family life.

Jordon (25.04): Obviously she don't want to ruin her relationship over school. You know what I mean. No point falling out with me for the rest of her life just over me going to school.

Jordon was also aware of the financial costs of him being out of school.

Jordon (25.04): Normally you know they like help you, like they give you books and stuff and they like help you? My mum had to spend like £300 on schoolbooks and stuff.

At one point, Jordon was sent as a punishment to a different school in the multi-academy trust (MAT).

Jordon (25.04): They tried telling my mum, you've got to pay for the taxis, to get him there and back … that's like £20, £25 from our house in a taxi … it's not feasible.

These young people highlighted the strains placed on families when there are difficulties at school. There is a financial impact not only from the practical implications of maintaining a job whilst being available for attending meetings, collecting from school and home-schooling, but also from the additional costs of having a child not in school. For families who are already facing challenges, or on low incomes, having to withdraw from work and the additional financial burden of exclusion from school serves to further perpetuate their marginalisation. Having a child with SEND adds an additional layer of complexity to this process.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Whereas some of the young people in this study identified family concerns as a reason for their difficulties in school, SEND tended to be mentioned later in the conversation, as additional detail rather than an explanation of problems in school. This is in contrast to the assumption of Dave, a member of staff at the AP:

> **Dave** (12.07): Yeah. I think they're told they've got this aren't they? There's all these kids told they've got it and they're labelled and I think they do use it and this is why I'm like I am because I've got ADHD.

There are often concerns about whether having a 'label' of SEND or a specific need will lead young people to excuse themselves for poor effort or behaviour in school (Bonnello 2016), as Dave suggested.

Similarly, school teachers may reduce their expectations of students who have SEND (especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds) (Chatzitheochari and Butler-Rees 2022), which can result in stigma and limited opportunities. Instead, young people in this study tended to have SEND but not to offer this as a primary explanation for their difficulties in school. Some of the young people talked about having specific diagnoses such as ADHD and autism. Others described having struggled academically, and having needed extra support in lessons.

SK (21.03): Why is it that you struggle with the work do you think?

Stacey: It's reading and my keeping myself on that paperwork.

Eddie (28.03): well I had to have a teacher with me … he had to start coming into every lesson to help me like write and everything. Like and help me do my work.

Joseph (25.04): I don't like writing. I don't like doing stuff like that.

Samuel (06.06): I'm better with my hands, I, I'm just bad with pen to paper.

Geeno (13.06): I couldn't stay in a classroom for more than 10 minutes, the work were too hard.

AP staff member Ryan suggested that falling behind academically could be behind some of the challenging behaviour that the young people exhibited.

> *Ryan (29.03): If you actually sat down with them learners and explain, well why did you do that in the first place? Nine times out of 10 they'll say I was too far behind, I wasn't getting help. So then they're gonna get kicked out.*

Often a diagnosis of SEND was mentioned later in the conversation, not offered as the primary reason for their difficulties in school. For example, Joseph had spoken mostly about his family and his dislike of school before turning to ADHD as a factor.

> *Joseph (25.04): When I was in primary school it was like the main thing where I couldn't focus in school.*

Dan agreed to a second interview to help me to review some of my findings. He hadn't mentioned SEND in his original interview.

> *SK (04.07): lots of people mentioned having special needs. So autism, ADHD, dyslexia, epilepsy.*
>
> *Dan: I've got all of them. Apart from epilepsy.*

Some of the young people described how their SEND affected their experiences in the classroom. As discussed in theme 1, often the conversation about what was difficult in school related to a sense of

individual difficulties, rather than institutional failings. These young people were able to identify some of the ways in which having SEND made them feel incompatible with the demands of the classroom.

Samuel (06.06): It probably has because like my brain compared to like your brain. My, my brain works at 5 thousand mile an hour. All the time. No stop but. Sometimes you can be chilled out but my brains going. [whoosh sound] On a go fast.

SK (04.07): I'm just wondering maybe if you've got ADHD school is harder for you to cope with?

Dan: Yeah it is.

SK: Yeah, what sort of things then, do you think? What makes school hard?

Dan: Like sitting down. Like all that. Cause when I'm in a classroom I always like stand up and like walk around.

Rhys (15.03): I can't, I've not got the attention span to sit there for long enough to put it down on paper, I don't like doing it.

Jordon (25.04): I can't sit here. Like I have ADHD I can't like, I'm with you now, I'm clicking buttons, I can't help it.

Some felt that teachers were unaware or unsupportive of their needs. Others had disjointed levels of support as they changed schools.

Rhys (15.03): It's just misunderstood kids, they're just kids with ADHD and autism like and the teachers don't understand that they just can't, I can't help that I can't do it, I haven't got like, I can't concentrate that's not my fault. But the teachers just see that 'ah, he doesn't want to do it, he's refusing to do it, he doesn't like doing it'.

Jordon (25.04): It was in Quarry Way where they like told my mum like you need to like see someone like.

SK: That was the school where it was working out and they referred you?

Jordon: That was the school that was good to me. They helped me out and everything, they told Leaders [secondary school] that I need keyworkers but they don't listen.

Alex gave an interview but declined to be recorded. I kept notes in my diaries of our conversations. Alex told me how having an EHCP had made a difference to support in school. When their inclusion unit closed, students from the unit had been returned to mainstream classes.

*From diaries (22.03), **Alex** shared that: Jordan had been allowed when they went back into mainstream to go and work in a separate room 'because of all his problems he has', and he later said that he thinks he is still allowed to go in because he has an EHCP.*

Alex was returned to regular classes.

*From diaries (07.06): After that 'didn't work out so well', she [**Alex**] was told not to go in to school anymore and had lessons online on a laptop at home.*

When it came to GCSE exams, this pattern seemed to be repeated.

*From diaries (17.05): [**Alex**] was upset that her mainstream school have now told her that she is not entitled to sit GCSEs and not to go in… It seems that her friend who is still attending as he has an EHCP may be sitting exams, even though at Float he relies on her to help him with the work.*

Although Alex was recognised as needing additional support in school, the lack of a diagnosis or EHCP left her without the protection that others from the inclusion unit had been offered. This suggests that in some ways, the SEND system was effective in that school, as those with EHCPs seem to have received more support. However, it also shows that students such as Alex, identified as having additional needs but not through formal SEND processes, can be overlooked. In contrast to the young people, AP staff were more aware of the link between SEND and school exclusion. Two of the AP staff had been excluded from school themselves and both described having found school work difficult. The staff made a clearer connection between struggling academically and getting into trouble at school.

Tom (07.03): I couldn't stand paperwork. It wasn't a bit of me.

Ryan (29.03): Like if you struggled to read like myself. When they're getting me to read books. You think, I'd rather set on

fire than read it and that's what I did. I wasn't reading it for no
one.

Identification of SEND

Several of the young people described difficulties in getting their SEND recognised. Sometimes this meant that difficulties with behaviour were recognised before their other needs.

***Joseph** (25.04): They didn't believe I had ADHD and like they didn't try and help me get diagnosed with it or anything so I could like get help with it. So then my mum had to do it all on her own, so it took us about three years. So that's, so it took me since year 4 to year 6 to get diagnosed with it.*

***TJ** (15.03): I've only got ADHD innit and I don't think I got, I don't think I got diagnosed ADHD either, before. Because it took three years to diagnose me with it.*

The SEND system is chronically under-funded with extended waiting lists and often parents have to become SEND experts with "special competence" (Ryan and Runswick-Cole 2008, p.204), "crusaders" and "activists" (Ryan and Runswick-Cole 2008, p.206) in order to advocate for their children. They have to "wade through a treacle of bureaucracy, full of conflict, missed appointments and despair" (House of Commons Education Committee 2019, p.3). The degree of bargaining power people have in this process is "endowed in wider society by virtue of family, class, gender and ethnicity" (Archer 1995,

p.10). The structures of the SEND system serve as additional barriers for families from marginalised groups, such as those from particular ethnic groups, on low incomes or from deprived areas (Chatzitheochari and Butler-Rees 2022; Hutchinson 2021; Nevill, Savage and Forsey 2022). Those young people whose needs are not identified and supported may then be subject to school disciplinary systems as their behaviour deteriorates (Parker, et al. 2016). Thus, despite apparent protection in law, young people with SEND continue to be over-represented in the school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a).

Sometimes the young people had had difficulties with medication and some did not fully understand what their diagnosis meant.

SK (06.06): Did anyone really explain to you what that means then? Or like support you with that?

Samuel: Yeah, they did explain to me but I can't remember now. Definitely not.

TJ (15.03): I went on medication but it made me worse … it was just making me more violent.

For Stacey, having epilepsy was a factor in her difficulties in school but also a potential barrier to identifying other needs.

Stacey (21.03): Well, we did go to the doctors … She said I can get you on it [assessment or medication for possible ADHD], but then if bad thing about, if we found out you do have it and we put you on tablets it could affect your fits.

The barriers to identification and diagnosis of SEND can lead to young people being noticed in school for their behaviour rather than their support needs (Parker, et al. 2016). The processes are complex, underfunded and vary across age ranges and geographical areas (Sinclair and Zaidi 2023). There are also race and class implications, with black, GRT and poor and care-experienced students more likely to be identified at school level as having SEND (Department for Education 2018b), but less likely to access higher levels of support (Hutchinson 2021; Nevill, Savage and Forsey 2022). These disparities demonstrate a "complex interplay" (Archer 2016b, p.57) of structure, agency and culture. Many of the young people in this study had been identified as having SEND but had nonetheless been excluded from school, thus demonstrating that the policies aimed at better support for SEND have failed to protect them from school exclusion.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs

The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education 2015) brought in a new SEND category of social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH). Several of the young people spoke about struggling to manage relationships at school, or experiencing anxiety, stress and strong emotions. During the period of fieldwork, Lucy shared with the group that her recent absence was due to an attempted overdose for which she had been hospitalised. Others talked about their mental health in interviews.

> **Joseph** (25.04): *They put me on medication and I didn't like that, like I wanted to kill myself and stuff.*

Samuel (06.06): If it weren't for here [AP], I, I'd probably be dead. I'm not even just saying that.

Stacey (21.03): I'd go to the door. And my anxiety past that time was not good. I was trying to sort it by myself, but it didn't work.

I asked Stacey if she had thought about the consequences before she locked herself in a classroom.

Stacey (21.03): No. I just always think it's gonna be nobody can get in to annoy me or say what I don't wanna hear that moment.

Behaviour management in schools often focuses on making "wise and civil decisions" (Bennett 2017, p.23). Like Stacey, others also described a loss of awareness of consequences when in those moments of heightened response.

Geeno (13.06): When I'm pissed off I don't think about the outcome, I just think of what I'm gonna do.

SK (15.03): I'm guessing then that there wasn't a moment in that where you were like, if I hit him, this is gonna be bad for me?

TJ: Oh no, it just happened.

At these points, the young people seem more susceptible to "emotional drivers" (Mulvennay 2017, p.143) that compel them to act with few thoughts about the consequences for themselves or for others. In those moments, which may arise in contexts shaped by a combination of school structures and family circumstances, "the personal power to reflect subjectively upon one's circumstances, and to decide what to do" (Archer 2007, p.11) become paramount. This reflection may not be careful and considered, as Archer perhaps suggests, but driven also by emotional responses which are in turn rooted in earlier life experiences. Thus, the many complex structural and cultural factors that led to family adversity, the demands of school and the emotional responses of the people involved all interact to culminate in one of many possible outcomes.

Several of the young people mentioned that they had difficulties getting on with their peers. This may be due, at least in part, to "extreme distress" (Mulvennay 2017, p.144), unmet learning or SEMH needs (Timpson 2019). These social difficulties often led to conflict, including physical fights, or social isolation.

> **Stacey** (21.03): It's new people there then, I don't want them to talk to me. I'd blank them and then they think I'm rude.

> **Lucy** (29.03): I was such a dick to everyone. I didn't like anyone. And if I didn't like anyone I'd just make it clear... I didn't like none of the teachers or none of the kids, I just didn't like them.

> *Jordon (25.04): I was bad, innit. I was chill but then if someone says something to me, you know what I mean, I would scream at them.*

Conflict with others is what often led the young people into being in trouble at school. Despite their apparent openness about their difficulties, school seems to have been able to do little to address them. Removal from school may have been welcomed both by the young person and by their teachers as a short term-solution, but exclusion from mainstream school then makes these young people vulnerable to other poor outcomes related to school exclusion, such as unemployment, prison and poor health (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019). Again, there is a cycle whereby those young people experiencing marginalisation due to their difficult life experiences or inability to cope in mainstream school become further marginalised by exclusion from school.

Jack's home life had been complex. As mentioned previously, he was aware of ways in which his early life experiences had shaped him, and that some of those influences had made it difficult for him to fit in at school. Despite mostly positioning himself as a perpetrator in his stories of poor behaviour at school, Jack also remarked on the impact of the life he has experienced outside school, which served as a reminder that he is also a vulnerable young person.

> *Jack (04.07): Like it don't, it don't just affect you physically or ought, like it, it's mostly mentally.*

At times, Jack seemed like a weary old man, cynical beyond his years and seeing few choices in his own future. The focus on punitive

behaviour policies of recent years (Clarke, et al. 2021) presents schools with a challenge when they have students like Jack – how can they both provide the emotional support that he needs as well as punish the behaviour that he brings to school? Archer contends that education systems are "the result of compromise and concession" (Archer 2016a, p.5) where competing ideologies and demands are worked through to produce a system that "does not conform closely to what anybody wanted" (Archer 2016a, p.5). There is an in-built contradiction for schools when they have responsibilities for both a punitive system of rewards and punishments, and a duty to care for mental health and emotional wellbeing (Corcoran and Finney 2015). Competing priorities can lead to a lack of support that some young people need to help them to feel that they belong in school.

School belonging

For some of the young people in this study, their difficulties outside school or struggles in the classroom led them to feel that they didn't belong in school. They had found school difficult and accepted that they would be better off out of school. When I asked if they wanted to go back to school, most said that they did not.

> **Joseph** (25.04): *No, I don't wanna go back*
>
> **SK**: *You don't want to. Why wouldn't you want to go back?*
>
> **Joseph**: *It's shit!*

> **Dan** (24.05): *I don't really work in mainstream school.*

Stacey (21.03): They did say they were gonna take me out [of AP] at some point and I said don't do that. Why? It's so good back there than back to old school.

Some said that their parents were also happier with AP than mainstream school.

Joseph (25.04): When, when I started coming in to this school and she [mum] could see that I was doing better. She was just glad that I was not in mainstream no more.

Samuel (06.06): To be fair I think my mum was, my mum was more glad because they [school] were putting loads of pressure on her and that.

Eddie (28.03): Now he [dad] knows that I'm going to schools like these and everything, now he knows what they are. Like he's saying it's better for me and everything.

Most of the young people felt that they were better off in AP, despite the limitations on timetable and academic opportunities. They felt that their emotional and learning needs were better supported in AP than in school.

Finn (17.05): I ended up coming to Float, which was probably one of the best things school wise that happened in my life … You don't really get rules, sort of. It's like, you can do what

you're doing, as long as it's not like endangering people and stupid.

SK *(15.03): So the way you described it then sort of sounded like once you were in AP things changed?*

Rhys: *Yeah .. It was different obviously in most APs you don't just do work everyday. Like obviously like here I feel like you come and do fishing or we go out and do something … Or like teach me in a different way instead of just being sat there in a classroom. Being sat in a classroom all day drives you insane, it drives you nuts.*

Eddie *(28.03): I'd rather just stay into APs like Float and everything. Because like obviously they respect you more and everything, and like, they're more caring for you and that.*

The young people perhaps lacked some agency in terms of how their SEND and life experiences affected their ability to engage in the classroom, the kinds of support they were offered and their home life and family circumstances. However, they accepted and even embraced the idea of themselves as people who did not belong in school, and then choose paths that reinforced this idea. Their more positive feelings about AP deepen the sense that they are better suited to an education outside of the mainstream.

Stacey told me that her behaviour had changed since attending AP.

Stacey (28.03): *Why are you here? Cause I used to kick off. We never see that in you. Here you don't make me do work and do that and do this.*

Other young people also described feeling more in control of their behaviour than they were when they had been excluded from school.

Joseph (25.04): *I'm more like more chilled out.*

Samuel (06.06): *But, now I'm year 11 I'm, matured a bit, to say the least.*

Jack (06.06): *Lately though, I've been trying to like put my emotions into music.*

Stacey (21.03): *they've said I'm not coming back because my temper was so bad that time. But I have been trying, I have changed.*

Jordon (25.04): *Since I was a little kid I used to be, like have some bad anger tantrums like. Smash everything up … I've chilled out now though, it's not as often.*

TJ (15.03): *I've just calmed down since I've got older innit.*

Although the young people felt that they had changed, perhaps due to a combination of the benefits of AP and maturity, this did not lead to a wish to return to mainstream school.

A sense of finality

The young people showed an awareness that they were not likely to return to school after exclusion. There was a sense of loss but also acceptance about this.

> **SK** *(25.04): And are you expecting ever to go back to mainstream? Is that the plan?*
>
> **Joseph***: No.*

> **Eddie** *(28.03): I'm not allowed back into a mainstream, I'm not.*
>
> **SK***: Not ever?*
>
> **Eddie***: No, never. I just have to stay into APs.*

> **TJ** *(15.03): I've got home tutoring two days a week now for a year, till I finish. I can't go back to a mainstream school.*

TJ was unusual amongst the young people in this study as he expressed dissatisfaction with being in AP and a desire to return to mainstream school.

> **TJ** *(15.03): I'd go back. But I'm not allowed.*

The young people in this study tended to accept that their exclusion from school was final. Most seemed to have emotionally cut their ties with mainstream school, with the exception of TJ who expressed a nostalgia for mainstream school but showed little awareness of why he had been excluded from school or how he would have to change if he was to attend school again. Several of the young people had experienced losses in their family lives, and the loss of school, its possibilities and relationships, was borne less with anger or surprise but with the same stoicism as the other hardships they had endured. Again, there is a "calm acceptance" (Willis 1977p. 165) of school exclusion as an inevitable consequence of the mismatch between these young people and school.

Theme 2: Marginalised groups, Summary

School exclusion statistics consistently show that young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). Despite this, the young people in this study tended not to recognise the significance of their SEND and family adversity as factors in their experiences of school. Willis also noted that, amongst the people he spoke to, there was little recognition of "systematic suppression" (Willis 1977, p.165) in the school system. Instead, as in this study, suppression was more likely to be described as "a random part of the human condition" (Willis 1977, p.165). Overlooking the significance of structural inequalities maintains school exclusion as a mechanism by which those inequalities are both emphasised and perpetuated.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion part 2

Who needs school? Disengagement, hostility and future plans

This findings chapter includes themes 3, 4 and 5 from the data:

Theme 1: Individual blame

Theme 2: Marginalised groups

Theme 3 : Disengagement from school

Theme 4: Hostility to school

Theme 5: Future plans
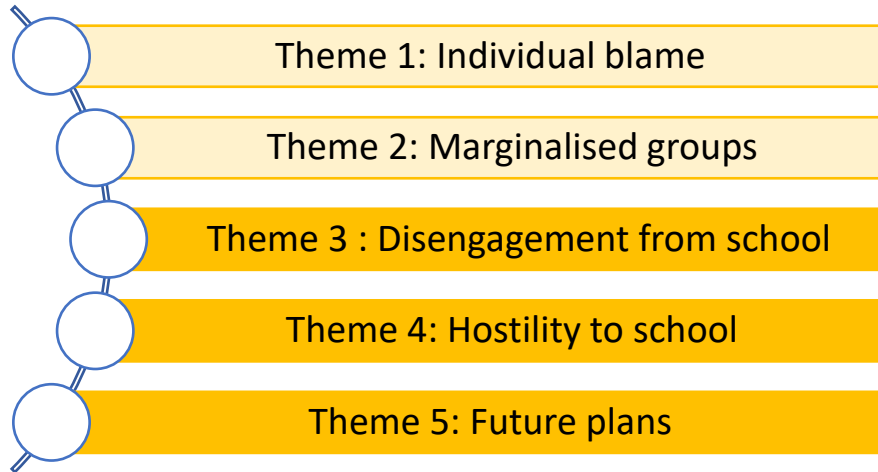
This chapter explores the attitudes towards school of the young people in this study, both their seemingly passive rejection of school and their more active hostility to school and to teachers in particular. This is an important contrast. Whilst I had anticipated that the young people might be angry about their experiences of school and about their eventual exclusion from school, many were also accepting or welcoming of this outcome. This suggested that these school-excluded young people had not invested themselves in a neoliberal school system which was focused on outcomes. A consideration of the future plans of the young people, covered in theme 5, showed how their disengagement from and hostility to school feeds into post-16 choices. It illustrates the interplay of structure, agency and culture (Archer 1996) by which these young people choose "working class jobs" (Willis 1977, p.1).

Theme 3: Disengagement from school

This theme explores how the young people in this study described their disengagement from school. Linked to this disengagement are the views of the young people about the purpose of school as they see it. In contrast to theme 4, which goes on to look at an active rejection of and hostility to school, this theme focuses on the more passive acceptance by these school-excluded young people that school has little of value to offer them. An observed vagueness about school, including about the processes of decision-making and school exclusion is also considered. This vagueness is analysed as further evidence of a disengagement with school that leads to an acceptance of exclusion from school as both valid and welcomed.

The causal diagram below (figure 8) is based on a critical realist approach to thematic analysis (Fryer 2022; Wiltshire and Ronkainen 2021). It offers a possible explanation for events, which are groups of experiences from the data.
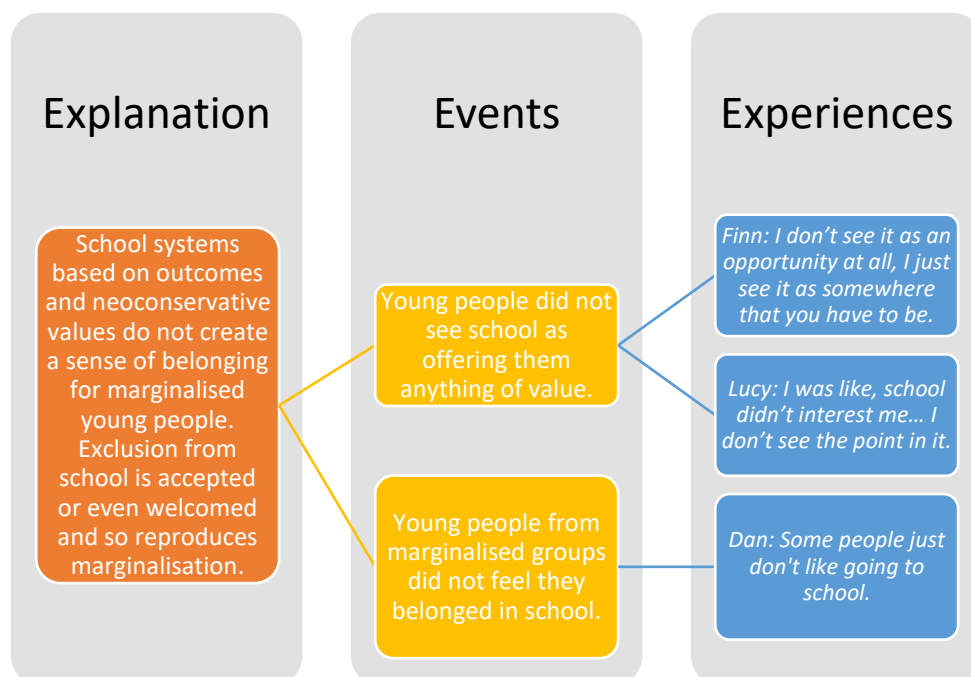
Figure 8: Causal diagram, Theme 3: Disengagement from school

In this section, the views shared by young people on the theme of disengagement from school are explored. All quotes are from individual interviews with school-excluded young people conducted over a five month period (see appendix 4 for more details). Their language includes some swearing.

Enduring school

The young people in this study tended to describe school as something that was an obligation to get through, rather than an opportunity for development.

> **Finn** (17.05): I don't see it [school] as an opportunity at all, I just see it as somewhere that you have to be for a few hours of your day, don't really want to be there.

> **Rhys** (15.03): You come back and stress about that you've got to go and do it all again tomorrow and you've gotta do that for a lot of years of your life.

There was a sense of weariness about attending school or even AP. The young people had become used to failure and rejection and seemed to accept this as a normal part of their educational experience. Speaking about his current placement at Float, Jordon told me that he thought he could make the placement last the remaining weeks until the end of year 11, in contrast to previous placements which had broken down. He made it sound like a job to

work through, rather than something that offers him a reason to attend.

Jordon (25.04): *I'll last here. I'm nearly done now, I might as well.*

Jordon shows the view shared by some young people that school (and AP) is something that they are made to do and recognise that they have to fulfil, rather than something that they are keen to engage in. Archer (2016b) suggests that as basic education becomes more universal, the competitive value is reduced. Some pursue further qualifications but for others, education becomes less an opportunity than something "endured to avoid penalisation" (Archer 2016b, p.56). The young people in this study appear to feel that they endure, rather than embrace school.

Changing attitudes

Some of the young people had originally had positive expectations of school which changed over time. They may have felt they had tried to engage in school, or had begun with positive expectations about what school might have had to offer.

Finn (17.05): *At first, yeah. The younger I was I wanted it to work out more and I wanted to be like successful and that. But then I just started caring less and less and less.*

Jordon (25.04): I used to be like yeah I would love to go to school. But it starts getting to that point where I just don't like going.

Joseph (25.04): I used to like being in secondary school, but then it just got too much at one point.

*From diaries (23.05): **George** said he made a good transition to secondary school and was there until part way through year 9. I asked what had changed but he said he didn't know.*

AP staff member Ryan also described this gradual process of disengagement from school.

Ryan (29.03): I think at first you kind of like. You want to be there, you want to do well, but then at the same time, you think you're behind, you never going to catch up, what's the point in even trying? So then it's just a case of, I don't want to be there. You kinda go through being angry and everything, and then you just get to a point and you think, well, I don't really care anymore. I've had enough.

'The lads' (Willis 1977) also spoke of a change of attitude in the first year or two of secondary school. Willis (1977) suggests that everyone begins as 'ear'oles' (conformist learners), at least in appearance until they find others to support them to become 'lads'. The social group is central to this process, whereas for the young people in this study, explanations tended to focus more on an individual switching off from

school. In both cases, there is little awareness of any "deep causes" (Willis 1977, p.61) for this change. In contrast to this change in attitudes, some young people reported that they had never wanted to go to school.

SK (15.03): Were you excited to go to school?

Rhys: No, I hated it! I hated getting up then going to school as a little kid. It was the most annoying, stressful thing.

SK: Right. Always just right from day one?

Rhys: Yeah, always hated it. Never really liked normal schools.

It cannot be certain whether even those, such as Rhys who now have no happy memories of school had in fact had any sense of optimism at the outset. Even if they had, it was clear that by the time of these interviews, they had no positive recollections to share. Those who described a change in their feelings towards school tended to not to be able pinpoint a moment when that had happened, more a gradual disillusionment with the ideals of school as a place of opportunity. This was a surprise to me as I had anticipated a clearer recollection of the reasons for becoming disengaged from school, perhaps connected to certain incidents or social connections as described by 'the lads'. Instead, the young people in this study created an image of a gradual, or sometimes very early, rejection of school values.

Disconnection

The vagueness in many of the young people's answers in interview was a surprising finding. I had anticipated, as I'd seen this from my years in teaching, that many might have had happy memories of primary school and vivid recollections of the incidents that led to exclusion. 'The lads' (Willis 1977) were also able to tell many boastful stories of their antics in school. However, several of the young people could not remember details of their school history, some struggling to remember what year of school they had got to, or when they had been excluded from school.

SK (17.05): how long have you been out of school?

Finn: Erm, I think coming up on about a year and a half, two years. I think it's been at least half a year. I know that much for absolute certainty.

TJ (15.03): Well, I don't think I finished year 7 in there actually. I might have though, I dunno.

Some of the young people had only vague memories of primary school.

SK (24.05): Can you remember anything about how primary school was for you?

Dan: Err

SK: Like did you enjoy it?

Dan: I actually forgot.

SK (28.03): Was primary school OK?

Eddie: Well, I can't remember!

SK (15.03): Thinking about when you first started school-

TJ: I can't remember

It was interesting to me that the young people spoke in such hazy terms about their recollections of school. The young people in this study were all of secondary age and had already potentially had nine or more years of compulsory education, yet some had very little to share about what they remembered of that time. Some of the vagueness may have been a desire to avoid the subject, and I felt that a longer-term project with a broader focus might have helped to prompt more memories for the young people. Nonetheless, it seemed to me to be of significance how many of the young people talked about having very few memories of their time at school. Similarly, when the young people spoke about the processes of exclusion and the decision making around their educational packages, there was also a sense of distance or disengagement.

Decision making and the process of exclusion

When it came to being excluded from school, the young people described themselves as disengaged from the processes. This is in contrast to the DfE exclusion guidance to schools (Department for Education 2022d), which sets out a clear procedure to follow which includes the young people and their parents. For some of the young people, it was unclear whether they had received official permanent

exclusions, or whether their school had kept them on roll but had 'functionally excluded' them by placing them exclusively in AP. The young people did not describe a process by which they felt informed or prepared for the loss of their school place, but seemed more bemused than upset at this loss.

Rhys (15.03): I was in a normal school and then one day in year 5, they just, this guy just walked through the door and they was like 'you've got to go with this man for an hour and see if you like it'. And then he took me out and I can't remember what we did because it was ages ago… and the day after they was like, 'oh yeah, you don't have to come to school anymore, you've got that' and I was like 'oh alright, if that's how it is'.

SK (28.03): Could you see it coming that you were gonna get excluded?

Eddie: no, not really… They rang my dad up when I got back from school and said I'm permanently excluded, and I was like what? And I was like everyone was shocked and everything and like.

Finn (17.05): I didn't really get any warning. I just sort of went into the school one morning. A bit late, went into the front office and then I just got told by the deputy head that I had to go home. She just said you don't go here anymore. You need to go home. As simple as that.

Alex had already been attending only AP since the closure of her mainstream school inclusion unit the previous year. When we first spoke, she had felt angry about the school requiring her to go back onto the school site to sit exams. However, it seems that quite critical decisions about this were taken in her absence. The lack of a formal school exclusion put Alex in a position whereby there was no transparent process, representation or recourse to appeal.

> *From diaries (06.06): When **Alex** found that her friends were being given their exam timetables and she had not, her mum phoned the school to ask and they said that they had not entered her for exams. This was how she found out that she'd not been entered.*

Sometimes the young people suggested that there may have been opportunities for some involvement in these processes, but they had rejected them. This seemed to illustrate that they had already disengaged from school and saw little relevance for themselves in the processes.

> **SK** *(15.03): Did you have to go to loads of meetings?*

> **TJ**: *No, I never used to go innit. Cause I couldn't be bothered with them.*

Perhaps the young people were not fully informed of the potential future impact on them that exclusion from school might have, or were not aware of having any right to participate in school exclusion processes, to be heard or represented. The school exclusion process can be difficult to understand or to access (De Friend 2019) Some of this reluctance could be linked to an ambiguity about whether the

young people are still considered to be students of the school or not. The young people may have already become disconnected from their school by the time of their exclusion.

> *Jordon (25.04): They wanted me to go but I wasn't allowed like back on school grounds or whatever.*

The young people gave differing accounts of the ways in which decisions were taken about their current education provision, suggesting a varying approach. Some young people did not feel involved in decision making about their schooling or future plans.

> *Eddie (28.03): They never, they never gave me options they just sent me, like I got permanently excluded from that school. And then … some council woman, Michelle, erm she like, basically saying like I'm under her now and like with schools and stuff and like she's got me like into Float and that.*

> *SK (04.07): Did you choose Float?*
> *Dan: I don't know*

Others had made requests about the kind of AP they would like.

> *Joseph (25.04): My brother was like oh there's a fishing school like, and I just told Miss to try and get me here.*

Stacey had been reluctant to attend Float at first. Once she got settled there, she was able to request to stay at Float when the

school suggested the placement might end. It was not clear whether the AP placement would be maintained the following year, or whether Stacey would be involved in making that decision.

> **Stacey** (21.03): They [the mainstream school] did say they was gonna send me to another school and I said I don't wanna go another school, I can try and cope here … They just said oh we've got this other place at Float. It sounds alright so I'll just go to that one, so I did. They did say they were gonna take me out at some point and I said don't do that … I asked Ryan when I come year 11 can he just tell them no.

The apparent lack of engagement in decision making about school may suggest a lack of opportunity offered to young people, or a lack of knowledge or transparency about how schools make decisions. It may also be symptomatic of a lack of emotional investment by the young people in the potential outcomes of decisions about school. The young people in this study tended to be dismissive of the value of school more generally, and this perhaps links to why they do not readily engage in making decisions about their provision.

Purpose of school

Many of the comments the young people in this study made shed light on what they saw as the value or purpose of school. School is promoted as "the engine of our economy" (Gibb 2015), a way to gain skills and qualifications and to advance future opportunities. The responses of the young people to this are complex: in many ways the young people in this study seem to accept this narrow view of

education, but then for the same reasons reject schooling as they see no value in the skills and qualifications being offered. These school-excluded young people do not buy into the educational "chain of exchanges" (Willis 1977, p.64): knowledge, qualifications, pay. This often leads the young people to conclude that school is not offering them anything they want.

Jordon (25.04): I don't believe in school … I don't have interest any more.

Lucy (29.03): Because I'm already like bear smart. I was just. I was like, school didn't interest me… I don't see the point in it. Most of it yeah, like most of the shit that we learn I'm not actually gonna need anyway.

*From diaries (23.05): **George** said school is useless, you don't learn anything you need at school anyway. He would prefer to learn on the job.*

The young people in this study focused on school as a place to gain knowledge and skills, rather than suggesting any broader benefits to education. This is in some ways in line with education policy and a neoliberal focus on outcomes (Ball 2017). However, the kinds of knowledge that might be offered by school are often dismissed as either of little use, or as things that can be more practically learned on the job or as required.

Joseph (25.04): It don't help me. I don't think it does anyway. 'Cause I. In school it's just like, what is the point of being in school, when you can just learn it when you're older?

Dan (24.05): No, you don't even need maths, you just get a calculator, just do it on there.

The dismissal of the value of school is redolent of 'the lads' (Willis 1977). However, 'the lads' seem to go further and suggest that the young people who engage with school do so "because they do not have the imagination or wit to do things any other way" (Willis 1977, p.95). For 'the lads', education is a weaker and less tenacious option than working. Rather than striving to gain qualifications, 'the lads' prefer to gain skills through work experience which is more aligned with their counter-school culture and valorisation of manual labour. This reversal of norms positions gaining qualifications through school as a lesser option than learning through work.

The future plans of the young people are further explored in theme 5, but often the choices that the young people are making for their futures further compound the idea that school has little value for them.

*Lucy (29.03): I'm not really bothered about my GCSEs …
Cause I don't even need them to do what I want.*

Samuel (06.06): Most, I know quite a few people that's made, went from nothing out their life and made it. So that's why I weren't too bothered.

School is presented as a way to access future opportunities, but for these young people, the future they have planned does not require a school education. Like 'the lads' (Willis 1977), the young people in this study held a view that formal qualifications would not be necessary for the working lives they anticipated.

In morphogenetic terms (Archer 2016a), this process of disengagement from school may be conceptualised as shaped by the structures of school and work, as well as the young peoples' cultural expectations of both. The young people arrive into school structures that pre-exist them and exercise a kind of agency by not buying into what school claims to offer. This is not agency as a proactive force, seeking alternatives or creating new ways of being, but nonetheless, agency in refusing to participate in or to accept the mainstream view of school as a pathway to careers. Despite this dismissal of school, the young people leave the structures of school and work largely unchanged, as the role of school as a provider of knowledge and qualifications remains unchallenged. Rather than promoting school, or education more generally, as something not only practical but also emancipatory, the rhetoric of school as a passport to work further alienates these young people.

Accepting school exclusion

Often the young people spoke of being excluded from school as something they welcomed, usually because they hadn't wanted to be in school anyway and so saw exclusion as a better option.

Finn (17.05): I don't really care cause I didn't like it there to begin with.

Dan (04.07): Well, some people just don't like going school.

Lucy (29.03): If you like, if you exclude a child yeah who's being a dickhead yeah, they basically won't care. Because I know when I was excluded, I was like, cool.

AP staff member Tom described his experience of school as having been difficult.

Tom (07.03): It wasn't the best to be honest.

Like the young people in this study, Tom also described his own exclusion from school and move to AP as a welcome escape.

SK (07.03): How did it feel to be coming here [Float] then, in comparison?

Tom: Relieving. Yeah.

The lack of belief in school as something offering anything of value leaves attending school feeling more like a chore or a burden – something endured - than a right or a privilege. A sense of disengagement from both schooling and the processes of decision-making leads to these young people feeling apathetic about, or a "calm acceptance" (Willis 1977, p.165) of their eventual exclusion from school. The opting-out of these school-excluded young people then shifts focus from the interplay of wider structural mechanisms to

the need to tackle disengagement (Duffy and Elwood 2013). Thus, the structural inequalities represented by school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a), showing that young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school, remain unaddressed.

Theme 3: Disengagement from school, Summary

Theme 3 focuses on the disengagement of young people from school, prior to their exclusion. This disengagement often appeared to be a quite passive process, with young people not seeing school as being for them, or offering them things that felt important or relevant for their lives. Some welcomed exclusion from school as a relief and the loss of education was not regarded as profound. The neoliberal focus on outcomes and promotion of school as a pathway to work leads to further disengagement for those young people who do not expect to succeed academically or to gain the rewards of formal education. Some of the young people in this study had initially had positive expectations and early experiences of school but had become gradually less engaged or emotionally invested in school over time. There was also a vagueness about the details of school which indicated a sense of detachment both from the school experience and from the decision making and disciplinary processes of school and exclusion from school. This detachment amplifies the passive nature of the narrative offered by these school-excluded young people.

Theme 4: Hostility to school

This section explores the hostility that the young people in this study expressed towards school. In contrast to the disengagement

considered in theme 3, this hostility is more proactively counter-school. There was a tendency that the young people expressed dismissiveness about school rules and expectations and hostility to teachers. This came from a feeling that school makes unreasonable demands: demands that the young people did not feel they could meet, or demands that they objected to as demeaning, unfair or restrictive. Individual liberty tended to be important to the young people, and school was positioned as a limit on personal freedom. As a result, exclusion from school was often seen as desirable as it offered a way out of the tyranny of school.

The causal diagram below (figure 9) is based on a critical realist approach to thematic analysis (Fryer 2022; Wiltshire and Ronkainen 2021). It offers a possible explanation for events, which are groups of experiences from the data.

Explanation	Events	Experiences
School-excluded young people expressed hostility towards school and teachers. Feeling that they have freedom is important to the young people and sometimes this is expressed through a rejection of school.	Young people feel that school / teachers make unreasonable demands on them or are hostile to them	Rhys: I can't concentrate that's not my fault. But the teachers just see ... 'he's refusing to do it'
		Joseph: All the teachers hated me...they didn't really like me.
	Young people value their individual liberty and see school as a constraint on this	Jordon: I don't like people telling me I can't do something. Cause like I'm a free person, I can do what I want.

Figure 9: Causal diagram, Theme 4: Hostility to School

In this section, the views shared by young people on the theme of hostility to school are explored. All quotes are from individual interviews with school-excluded young people conducted over a five month period (see appendix 4 for more details). Their language includes some swearing.

Hostility towards teachers

When the young people in this study described their feelings about school, it was teachers who were the main focus of animosity. Sometimes this was specific teachers or related to a specific incident, but often this was generalised into a broader mistrust or dislike of teachers as a whole.

Joseph (25.04): I didn't really like it [school] cause the teachers and stuff, they was annoying.

Rhys (15.03): It's just the teachers aren't really like, they're teachers not people.

Eddie (28.03): All the teachers was like basically like dickheads and everything.

Lucy (29.03): Like certain teachers … yeah, teachers don't really give a fuck.

*From diaries (23.05): **George** didn't like school. He didn't like teachers, he said they think they're better than you.*

Some of the young people were more equivocal, with an ability to recognise the role of teachers as helpers, but still holding a negative view.

__Jordon__ (25.04): All that shouting and you're like, oh teachers are scary. You know what I mean? But they're nice but they're scary.

__Finn__ (17.05): I just sort of like got help off the teachers sometimes, but other than that I just saw them as like mardy.

School exclusion creates "folk devils old and new" (Kulz 2019, p.94). For Kulz, this represents a demonisation of young people within the school system. Perhaps in some ways, teachers have also become folk devils for this group of school-excluded young people. They represent authority within a system which the young people experience as oppressive. This view was shared by some of the staff at the AP.

__Ryan__ (29.03): every teacher I've ever met thinks they're above them.

School structures "replicate the hierarchical division of labor [sic] which dominates the workplace" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, p.12) and Willis positions 'the lads' opposition to teachers as part of this class dynamic. For 'the lads', opposition to teachers was a core part of their

counter-school cultural identity and they were well practiced in the "subversion of authority" (Willis 1977, p.84). As such, an adversarial student-teacher relationship emerges from class antagonisms. More recently, a militarised, zero-tolerance approach to school discipline is most commonly applied to schools serving working class or marginalised communities (Giroux 2003; Kulz 2017). This approach maintains an oppositional relationship between students and teachers, which amplifies students' sense of injustice and teachers' "affront" (Willis 1977, p.77) at challenging behaviour.

Hostility from teachers

The young people in this study tended to believe that teachers disliked them. As discussed in theme 1, this could be experienced very personally, with a focus on the individuals involved, rather than as a result of structural or cultural factors. The sense of being disliked by teachers reinforced the young people's own rejection of teachers as they tended to suggest that the feeling was mutual.

> **Jordon** (25.04): *And the teachers hated me so it's sort of like well I'm just gonna hate them back.*

> **Joseph** (25.04): *All the teachers hated me.*

> **Samuel** (06.06): *No teachers like me.*

> **Lucy** (29.03): *No one liked me.*

Our interpretations of our experiences, our "reflexive deliberations" (Archer 2007, p.3), are a key factor in how we then choose to respond. For the young people in this study, their "internal conversation" (Archer 2007, p.2) was less about the structural inequalities of the school system than about their own emotional responses to their perceived treatment by teachers. A critical realist approach to analysis requires acknowledgement of the real, actual and empirical strata of each social situation (Scott 2015). The responses of the young people are largely based on their empirical experiences in the classroom, but the school system itself also operates on the level of the real and the actual, with social structures forming the context for each interaction.

Whilst the young people in this study tended to focus on the personal in their accounts of their school exclusion, AP staff member Ryan was able to identify some aspects of the school system as contributing factors. In particular, Ryan felt that the large class sizes in mainstream schools were a barrier to effective learning and support. Similarly, he was aware that some education policies led to perverse incentives to exclude.

Ryan (29.03): *Schools need more funding. Hundred percent. With more funding, and I don't mean funding to get rid of learners... I mean funding as in to employ more TAs. So there's sort of three teachers per classroom and they'll be surprised actually how much the kids would actually calm down.*

Although Ryan was able to see the impact of policy and shortage of resources, his main focus remained on the emotional experiences and

relationships between young people and their teachers and AP staff.

The young people in this study were able to share some of their emotional responses to their experiences, but a fuller sociological explanation "should look for causes in the domain of the real" (Fryer 2020, p.24) - the structural and cultural mechanisms that shape their context. Nonetheless, the testimonies of these school-excluded young people show that the emotional connections and interpersonal relationships at school are central to their responses to school.

Relationships matter

It was clear that relationships and how people make them feel mattered to the young people. Feeling respected, cared for and listened to was important to them.

Samuel (06.06): If a teacher can't have a laugh and joke then I think they're just not a good teacher.

TJ (15.03): I've got a new teacher coming though… I've got a girl teacher, cause I get on better with girl teachers than boy teachers like.

Lucy (29.03): I only got along with one of my tutors, the rest of them I didn't like.

SK: So it sounds like the getting on with people is the crucial bit for you?

Lucy: Yeah.

In the following statement, Jordon claimed to keep an emotional distance from school staff, including in AP, but at other times had also spoken about the importance to him of feeling respected. Perhaps this apparent inconsistency is part of a strategy to protect him from feelings of rejection when a placement fails.

SK (25.04): Were you sad to move on from there [a previous AP]?

Jordon: No, I wasn't bothered. Stuff like that don't bother me, it's just like school wank. It's not like it's like happy relationships… It don't really bother me, stuff like that.

Despite many negative experiences at school, several of the young people in this study spoke about members of staff in school and in AP who had made a positive difference to them.

Eddie (28.03): The teacher that I liked, he respected me he did.

Joseph (25.04): But I used to have a one-on-one teacher. He was bless. He used to take me to forest school and stuff.

Samuel (06.06): There's this teacher. And he had put a lot of support in place for me.

From diaries (06.06): She [Alex] then went on to name a

couple of teachers in the unit who were really nice. She seemed to have a nostalgia for that time. She said that one of the teachers brought in old cars that he bought himself and they used to be allowed to work on the cars 'in their spare time' around lessons.

Feeling respected and cared about made a difference to the success of support strategies in school.

Eddie (28.03): Cause the teacher that I picked [to support in lessons], he got along with me and I got along with him.

Lucy (29.03): I only liked one person… the primary school I went to they got me like my own TA and she literally only worked with me. So all the way from like year 3 to all the way to year 6 like she just worked with me.

Geeno made a distinction between teachers and support staff.

Geeno (13.06): It was only the TAs that actually helped me. I fucking loved TAs. They were amazing. The things they do for me, mate.

For TJ, being allowed to spend time with the school caretaker had been meaningful, although of course this did not help him to stay in the classroom.

TJ (15.03): I had so much help. To the point where I wasn't going in any of my lessons, I was going out with the caretakers on the tractors and that. I was doing that. I wasn't in school. I had my own boots and that. And I used to go and get my food and that with the caretakers.

Jack felt that mainstream school was impersonal, he didn't have adults who made a meaningful relationship with him.

Jack (06.06): I just got treated as like, yeah, he's just another kid.

In contrast, Jack felt cared for in AP.

Jack (06.06): Dave [member of staff at Float], he's like my second dad. You know, he's like one of the father figures in my life.

Others also made a comparison between the staff in AP and in school.

Rhys (15.03): I'm not very good at like paperwork … I only do it at Float because Ryan [staff member at AP], I like Ryan.

Eddie (28.03): I'd rather just stay into APs like Float and everything. Because like obviously they respect you more and everything, and like, they're more caring for you and that.

The AP staff interviewed were proud of the way that they built relationships with the young people, and saw this as central to what they do.

Dave (12.07): To help them, I find it's just listening to. You know what I mean. Not. Telling them exactly. Not telling them all the time.

Coming from the same communities and having similar experiences to the young people helped the AP staff to feel more relatable.

Ryan (29.03): I had a crappy childhood, I went through care and stuff, and I know how a lot of the kids feel.

All of the AP staff I interviewed talked about the importance of relationships. They all had negative views of teachers and their ability to understand or relate the young people.

Tom (07.03): the teachers don't talk to them enough to get to know them, and like, what, how they work and stuff.

In contrast to mainstream school, Ryan saw their provision, Float, as being able to offer some emotional security.

Ryan (29.03): I think that a lot of the learners who haven't got a very good life, they kind of see it [Float] as like a safe place away from everything as well.

This focus on relationships of course serves to strengthen the way that the young people tended to reflect on their school experiences as individuals (as discussed in theme 1), rather than having a sense of the collective or critiquing school systems more broadly. It is clear that staff who can form meaningful and respectful relationships with the young people are the most effective in supporting them. The neoliberal focus on performance leaves little space for nurturing "authentic and purposeful relationships" (Ball 2003, p.223). However, to focus only on the interpersonal conforms with the individualising pressures of the current school system previously outlined.

Whilst AP staff were generally suspicious of teachers, they were able to recognise the pressures on them to achieve outcomes, and the impact this could have on relationships.

Ryan (29.03): You've got one teacher to thirty learners and they they've got all the pressure to get 80% of them through. How can you expect that when it's a one man army? You could see why they get rid of learners, 'cause I do feel sorry for the teachers.

When considering schooling in terms of structure, agency and culture, it is clear that the nature of relationships is one important component. Interaction in the classroom happens within, and then goes on to strengthen or challenge the structures of school and wider society. The nature of these relationships offers an insight into the structural roles of the teacher, and the power battles between competing forces, structural, cultural and emotional or agential.

Communication with teachers

Several of the young people talked in interviews about how teachers spoke to them at school. This often linked to the sense of fairness, with a view that teachers expected respect but did not always speak to the young people respectfully. Again, there was a contrast with the staff in AP.

> **Rhys** (15.03): Ryan here, even when there's like 12 people in a classroom, he still talks to everyone, still like, be normal.

Staff at the AP also made this comparison.

> **Ryan** (29.03): if they've done something wrong, we'll go and have a chat with them instead of screaming and shouting get in my office and stuff like that. That's not gonna work.

Some of the young people felt patronised by school teachers.

> **Jordon** (25.04): These teachers have been talking to me like I'm an idiot.

> **Eddie** (28.03): It's like when they speak to me like, they always just used to be like, like be rude and everything.

Some of the school-excluded young people in this study regarded themselves as having had adult experiences and a "distinct maturity" (Willis 1977, p.104) not acknowledged by the school system. They sought more equitable relationships with adults where respect was to be earned by both teacher and student. This may link to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as explored in theme 2: some of the young people in this study have developed skills and resilience in overcoming adversity that then leads them to feel that they have a maturity that school structures (and teachers in particular) do not recognise.

> **Jack** (06.06): *I didn't like none of them [teachers]. They all treated me like an idiot. Or. It annoyed me the most, the fact that they all tried to speak to me like I was a baby, but obviously I was like I'm, I'm, I'm very streetwise for my age and like that's all I knew so I didn't like people speak, speaking down to me.*

> **Jordon** (25.04): *They treat you like a kid, that's what it is.*

'The lads' did not accept an automatic authority of the teacher, seeing themselves as more mature than they were given credit for. They constantly sought to demonstrate their maturity by "association with adult values and practices" (Willis 1977, p. 19) such as sex, drinking and smoking. Because of this behaviour and their rejection of school, 'the lads' saw themselves as having a "structural role of superiority and experience" (Willis 1977, p.15) that held them apart from conformist students, and put them more on a level with teachers. This highlights the complexity of the student-teacher relationship, as

young people look for equity with teachers, but also regard teachers as authority figures who they position themselves in opposition to.

Behaviour management

In an apparent contradiction with their challenging of teachers' authority, some young people expressed views that teachers should be better at managing behaviour. It appears the young people expected teachers to engage in a battle for hierarchy, in which they did not accept the rule of teachers, and yet also expected this rule to be imposed. The young people in this study sometimes felt that they were blamed for incidents that should have been prevented by school staff.

Lucy (29.03): *If you can't get one child to listen or do a bit of work, how the fuck is that my fault?*

Jordon (25.04): *It's not my fault that your kids are naughty, you know what I mean. Teach your kid better. It's not my problem… It's not my fault that your kids are refusing to do what you say. You're just clearly not a good enough teacher.*

This can lead to a contradictory view of teachers which is difficult to resolve – one the one hand the young people see teachers as the people with power to manage behaviour, and on the other hand, they reject the automatic authority of the teacher. Willis (1977) argues that at school 'the lads' recreate a factory-floor conflict where the worker "usurps and challenges" (Willis 1977, p.182) the role of the

foreman. School becomes a "systematic cultural self-preparation of 'the lads' for a certain kind of work" (Willis 1977, p.97), where they learn the subversive behaviour of the factory worker. This dynamic requires an authority figure to oppose – the teacher at school and the supervisor at work.

This contradictory view of authority was illustrated by Jordon, who was directed to spend time at another school in the MAT as a punishment. He saw this as a dereliction of duty, even though he had also rejected the authority of the school staff in trying to manage his behaviour.

> **Jordon** (25.04): You're putting your problem on another school, you can't do that, you can't just, just cause you can't cope with me, kick me out, you can't just put me on another school.

The young people in this study engaged in a battle of wills with teachers which arguably becomes part of their identity as school-excluded. There are many parallels with the defiance at school which, Willis (1977) argued, helped 'the lads' to learn essential cultural aspects of their future working lives as manual labourers. School exclusion is linked to poorer job opportunities and unemployment (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019), and yet the same training for factory life identified by Willis is still apparent in the confrontational relationship with teachers that these school-excluded young people described.

Unfairness

Some of the young people felt that they had been treated unfairly at school. This might have been from specific incidents or due to a perceived difference in standards of behaviour for staff and for students. The young people were alert to any observed injustice or abuse of power and this shaped many of their stories about school.

> *Samuel (06.06): And just, teachers just thinking that they can overpower students. Like sit there and shout at them because the children can't. And if they do, then they just get excluded and stuff like that. Like this teacher locked the door on me before. And it made me angry so I swore at him but I got excluded for a week for swearing at him. But he locked the door on me. Mad.*

> *Jordon (25.04): They tell you to have respect for them, but they have no respect for you.*

> *Lucy (29.03): They have like favourite students too.*

I found the young people generally to be very open about their misdemeanours in school, and even, as discussed in theme 1, ready to take individual blame. However, there were times when they shared that they felt that disciplinary decisions had been unfair or excessively harsh.

Joseph (25.04): They just kept putting me in isolation for doing absolutely nothing, like I just think they hated me for some reason.

TJ (15.03): They shouldn't have straight permoed [permanently excluded] me. There was no need for that.

Jordon (25.04): I'm just sitting there … Then they start shouting at me that this is your fault.

Samuel (06.06): The teachers like. [sigh] They do bully on some people like not like bullying but picking on them. So it's like, Samuel, you've been doing this, and like another person could be doing that and she would be telling me off for it.

For Alex, this perceived unfair treatment included having access to GCSEs withdrawn, a decision with potentially serious long-term consequences for her.

*From diaries (06.06): **Alex** was annoyed that other people who weren't likely to do as well as she might have had been allowed to take the exams but not her.*

Some of the young people said that they had felt that they received less help than others. This is especially pertinent when considered alongside the evidence in theme 2 regarding SEND and family adversity. Whilst they may not request help in acceptable ways, many of the young people quoted here also shared that they had found school difficult to manage, socially, emotionally or

academically. Several had the sense that teachers found them challenging or a burden on their time and resources.

> **Eddie** (28.03): *They always used to put me in a corner, like in a corner in the room, like, just on my own basically.*

> **Geeno** (13.06): *They always helped the other kids and like tried to avoid me cause I was annoying. I'd ask question after question, so every teacher avoided me.*

There was also a feeling amongst some of the young people that teachers were not fully aware of how to accommodate their additional needs. Instead of being able to support struggling students, it was suggested that teachers shift blame back onto the young people.

> **Rhys** (15.03): *It's just misunderstood kids, they're just kids with ADHD and autism like and the teachers don't understand that they just can't, I can't help that I can't do it, I haven't got like, I can't concentrate that's not my fault. But the teachers just see that 'ah, he doesn't want to do it, he's refusing to do it, he doesn't like doing it'.*

The current school context in England, with a shortage of trained teachers (Department for Education 2019b), persistent underfunding of schools and of SEND in particular (NEU 2021), and the performative regime of accountability (Ball 2003) all contribute to the potential for conflict between teachers and young people. At times, lack of support may become, or at least is recognised by young

people as, hostility from teachers.

Some of the young people felt that they had a reputation in school, from their own past or from their family name, that affected how they were treated. Stacey and Joseph both shared their background of ACEs due to family circumstances. Both also felt that teachers would pre-judge them because of a knowledge of their families.

SK (28.03): Teachers see your name on the list and they think -

Stacey: Mm, it's like oh no! … They gave me a chance, yeah they did. They didn't give me a full chance.

Joseph (25.04): So then, as soon as they heard that my name, they just knew straightaway that I was gonna be naughty cause of my brother and that's why they hated me.

Others had an awareness that, due to their own difficulties in school, they had gained a reputation amongst school staff that led to more scrutiny or prior judgement by school staff.

Lucy (29.03): I was always on their radar though. And I knew from the day I started was gonna be on their radar cause like everyone knew me.

Jordon (25.04): I was already that kid. I was already that kid that was like, you know I had that reputation of being that sort of kid, do you know what I mean.

For some, their experiences of being unfairly treated, as they saw it,

led to a sense of persecution. School behaviour policies are often based on cumulative records of behaviour – a so-called 'dataveillance' (Lupton and Williamson 2017) - and rewards-based systems (Moore, et al. 2019). This tracking of behaviour leads to some students having a higher profile as being responsible for "persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy" (Department for Education 2022d, p.12). An exclusion from school can be taken to an independent review panel, and so schools may be required to provide evidence that the exclusion was "necessary as a last resort" (Department for Education 2022d, p.3). This process suggests a morphogenetic cycle (Archer 2016a) which begins with school exclusion guidelines as a structure which pre-dates the school staff and students. The compiling of evidence can lead to some young people being more surveilled than their peers, which in turn leads them to feel unfairly targeted. The adversarial nature of the exclusion process leads to a strengthening or elaboration of the structures which require evidence to support an exclusion (Murphy 2022). Rather than leading to a better understanding of the social and emotional needs of the young people, disciplinary school exclusion leads to a further alienation of those young people from the school system.

Unreasonable demands

Some of the young people felt constrained by school and that they were being made to do things they weren't comfortable with. Others struggled with the everyday classroom expectations, staying in class, staying in their seat, etc. Often, the young people described these expectations as being petty or unnecessary.

Joseph (25.04): In mainstream school right, they just pick out the most littlest things ever and they just wind me up.

Eddie (28.03): Some of the stuff yeah it was a bit pathetic, that I'd done, like what they excluded me for.

Dan (04.07): In my school I literally have to ask if I want to go to the toilet or get a drink. It's long.

Stacey (28.03): They said if you come back I have to wear a skirt, all girls wear skirts.

Again, questions of fairness and respect were raised.

Jordon (25.04): If you're gonna shout at me, I'm going to shout back at you. If you're shouting at me for talking, I'm gonna talk more and I'm gonna shout back at you, you know what I mean. You can't do that.

Eddie (28.03): Yeah, when I used to go and sit down in the class, where I was meant to be sat … they always used to move me to another seat … I just used to walk out their lessons because they didn't let me move back, basically.

Jack (06.06): I've got respect for everyone here [AP], but I didn't have respect for no one there [school] 'cause no one treated me with respect.

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Lucy's mum had chosen a Christian school for her in hopes that she would get into less trouble, but Lucy felt at odds with the expectations there.

Lucy (29.03): They try to like force shit on you and it's like I'm not gonna sit and pray.

Often, the young people felt that the everyday expectations in the classroom were difficult for them to meet.

Rhys (15.03): I'm not very good at like paperwork. I can't, I've not the attention span to sit there for long enough to put it down on paper, I don't like doing it.

Samuel (06.06): If I'm sat down for more than 20 minutes I just get agitated.

Stacey (21.03): I don't mind but then it's going to be just the whole day on paperwork. I can't do it.

As discussed in theme 2, this struggle to conform may often have been related to SEND or learning needs, but was not always recognised as such. Framing these difficulties as a deficit in the young person reinforced the sense that they did not belong in a mainstream classroom. Exclusion from school then

becomes a release from what are felt to be unreasonable or unachievable demands.

> *Lucy* (29.03): *it's like you've given us what we want [exclusion]. We haven't got to go to school, we haven't got to do what you want, we haven't got to do work.*

In this way, school is not described as something offering opportunities, but as something that places demands and restrictions on the individual.

Personal freedom

When describing school expectations as petty or unnecessary, the young people in this study then often also framed these expectations as a restriction on their personal freedom.

> *Samuel* (06.06): *And they try to just make you do it. You have no choice, but I'm one of them people well, I, I have a choice. I'm not gonna do it if you told me to.*

> *Joseph* (25.04): *I don't like people telling me what to do.*

> *Jack* (04.07): *And at the end of the day, I don't like getting told what to do … I absolutely hate getting told what to do. Like I'm my own person. I tell myself what to do. Like it's my brain that tells me, no one else says.*

AP staff member Dave also described this need for personal freedom as a barrier to school.

Dave (12.07): They don't like being dictated to, a lot of the kids who come to us, they don't like being dictated to, they don't like being kept in the classrooms, told what they've got to do.

School was often experienced as undemocratic and inflexible.

Rhys (15.03): they don't let everyone have their own say.

Whilst most of the young people reflected on school in quite personal and reactive terms, perhaps focusing on certain incidents or relationships, Jordon and Jack both took a more ideological stand against what they saw as the tyranny of school. Their need to be in control led them to see compliance as a kind of weakness, in a similar way to 'the lads' view of 'ear'oles' as weak in accepting the school rules and hierarchies (Willis 1977).

Jack (04.07): I've never, ever been a follower. Never will be either. I don't like being a follower. I like being the one in charge.

Jack viewed himself as having more to him than could be recognised in school. He rejected the idea of conformity.

Jack (04.07): *I don't want to be in like a mainstream school like through the whole time, doing what everyone else does. I'm not. I'm not being that same person that everyone else wants to be.*

Jordon also claimed his rights to choose his own way.

Jordon (25.04): *I used to get mad cause like I don't like people telling me I can't do something. Cause like I'm a free person, I can do what I want. If I want to walk out these school gates, you cannot tell me no I am not going to walk out these school gates.*

Jordon would resist the restrictions placed on him, preferring to follow his own instincts about what felt right to him in the moment. This regularly placed him in conflict with the school.

Jordon (25.04): *I'd tell them like, yo, I'm going to go and walk around the field and you're not telling me no, you know what I mean?*

For Jordon, his position on personal freedom extended to his views about ADHD. He felt that instead of trying to control symptoms through medication, people needed to be able to accept him for the person that he is. Whilst Jordon aligned this with his views about freedom and control, he also taps into a current debate about neuro-diversity and how much the social world needs to adapt to or even value neuro-divergent people (Runswick-Cole 2014).

Jordon (25.04): I used to have meds for [ADHD] but I don't, I don't do well on that.

SK: Why don't you like the meds?

Jordon: I'm all about free will. And I hate people telling me like.

Whilst the school had made some effort to accommodate Jordon's needs, this was not sufficient for him as it still placed expectations on him to conform to others' rules.

Jordon (25.04): They just gave me a time out card. I was like, what am I meant to do with that? Just go out the lesson for five minutes and get told I have to go back. No man! I hate people telling me I have to do something.

Jordon was able to articulate his strong need for control. He needed school expectations to be something whereby he could exercise choice and opt-in, not something imposed on him.

Jordon (25.04): I need, everything needs to be my choice. I can't cope with people telling me you have to do this and you have to do that. Cause I feel the same. It's like I don't wanna be the same as everyone else. I don't. Like, I do what I want.

It is not clear why Jordon had such a strong need to feel in control. It appears to relate to his ADHD and is possibly also linked to the

trauma of his early experiences (Morgan, et al. 2015). Jordon echoes the views of 'the lads' (Willis 1977) and their challenging of authority in school. As he rejected the idea of schooling on a more philosophical basis, Jordon then questioned the hierarchies and structures of the school system, and his place within that. As will be discussed in theme 5, school appears to have offered Jordon little of what he wants for his future. He had fewer reasons than those with work or study ambitions to comply to the demands of schooling.

"We are simultaneously free and constrained" (Archer 2016d, p.77) and the young people in this study illustrate this. They experience school as restricting, but still exercise freedom to make their own judgements about school, to opt in or out and to push back against what they see as unreasonable demands. The young people "have some awareness" (Archer 2016d, p.78) of both the restrictions and their ability to react within the constricts of school, or even to reject school altogether.

Individual liberty was important to the young people in this study. Through our inner conversation, we weigh up our options and concerns, and settle on "those with which we feel we can live" (Archer 2016b, p.142). For Jordon, attending AP was still experienced as a restriction, but it allowed a level of flexibility he was willing to accept. For young people who felt school to be an excessive restriction on their freedom, exclusion from mainstream school was experienced as a relief or even as something they actively wanted.

School exclusion as a welcome alternative

Because of their negative feelings about school, the young people tended to talk about exclusion from school as welcome to them. Rather than a loss or a punishment, being excluded from school gave them a way to avoid what they experienced as unfair restrictions and

unnecessary curbs to their freedom and perhaps even to their sense of themselves.

Joseph (25.04): Oh, I was glad that I wasn't in school I was. Cause I hated it.

Lucy (29.03): Like when you kick us out of the school, yeah, we couldn't give a flying fuck, it's like you've given us what we want.

Finn (17.05): I don't really care [about being excluded from school] cause I didn't like it there to begin with.

There is a wealth of evidence that being excluded from school is linked to limited life chances in a range of ways including future employment, health and involvement in crime (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019). Despite this, for most of the young people in this study, exclusion from school was welcomed. The short-term benefits of being away from school outweighed the potential long-term losses.

Geeno (13.06): I just didn't like the school that I went to.

Lucy (29.03): And then I was like out of school for a while and I wasn't under anything. I was just chillin' at home doing what I want.

SK (24.05): Can you remember when you sort of realised that you were gonna get an exclusion?

Dan: I really didn't care.

The young people in this study describe school as a hostile place and in turn express their own hostility to school. 'The lads' (Willis 1977) actively pursue a working class counter-school culture but, in adopting this identity, they unwittingly help to reproduce the very structures against which they are rebelling. Similarly, in this morphogenetic cycle (Archer 2016a), the young people in this study do not challenge the school systems that exclude them, they do not fight for their right to a school education. The rejection of school by these young people in turn helps to reproduce those same school systems. As they not only accept but welcome their exclusion from school, the structural inequalities that led to exclusion remain unchallenged.

Theme 4: Hostility to school, Summary

Theme 4 draws out an active rejection of or hostility to school in contrast to a more passive disengagement as discussed in theme 3. The young people tended to focus this hostility on teachers in particular rather than the school system as a whole. I have argued that there was little sense of a corporate agency (Archer 2016a) amongst these school-excluded young people. However, the dislike of teachers suggests some sense of 'us and them' which may be broadly seen as a collective response, not focused solely on the individual, but challenging something more structural in the school system. This antagonistic relationship is also present in Learning to Labour (Willis 1977). 'The lads' model their relationships with teachers on their

likely future relationship with bosses. Thus, their attitudes towards teachers come from a working class counter-school culture. Despite the changing nature of work in the post-industrialised East Midlands, echoes of this attitude to teachers can be seen in the responses of the young people in this study.

It is clear from what the young people shared that the way that school made them feel was a powerful element in their rejection of it. However, the emotional responses of these young people must also be placed in a wider social context where it appears that schooling has failed to connect with the cultural assumptions of these young people, or to offer them reasons to reduce their personal freedom in order to conform to school expectations and to engage in formal learning. The future plans and aspirations of the young people are a key element of this relationship and this is explored in more depth in theme 5.

Theme 5: Future plans

This theme explores the future plans of the school-excluded young people in this study. The young people tended to have positive plans for their futures. They planned and expected to work, in manual jobs. They chose areas of work where they expected not to be held back by a poor school record or lack of qualifications. This tended to strengthen the view of the young people that school exclusion has not limited their future chances significantly.
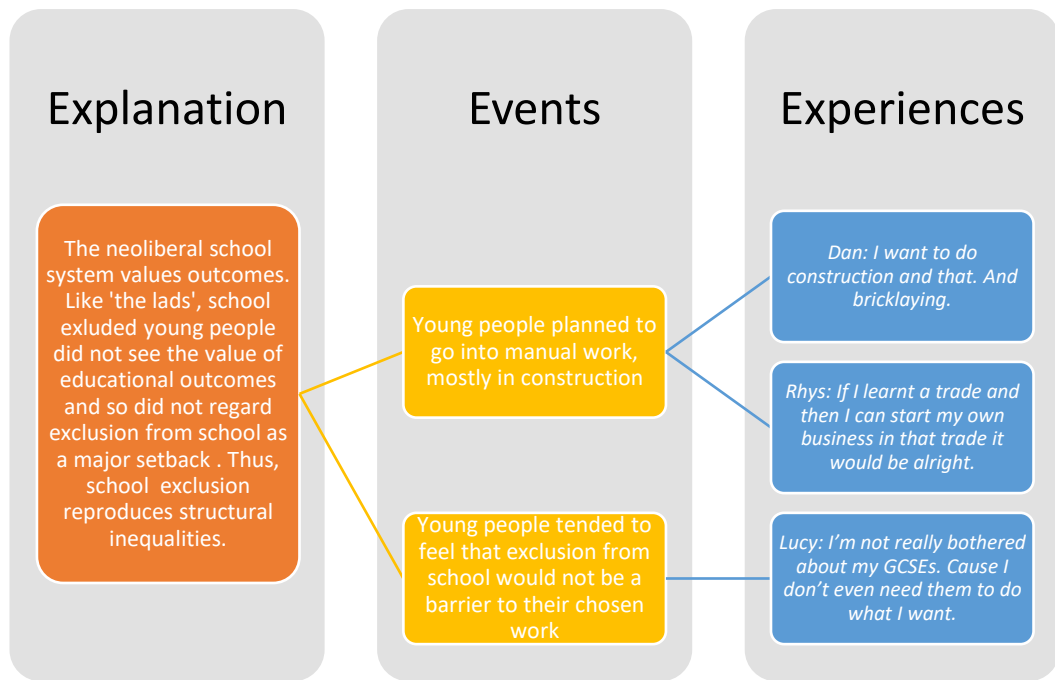
Figure 10: Causal diagram, Theme 5: Future plans

The causal diagram above (figure 10) is based on a critical realist approach to thematic analysis (Fryer 2022; Wiltshire and Ronkainen 2021). It links experiences (from the data) to events (groups of experiences) and offers a possible explanation for this finding. In this section, the views shared by young people on the theme of future plans are explored. All quotes are from individual interviews with school-excluded young people conducted over a five month period (see appendix 4 for more details).

Next steps

In interviews, I asked the young people about their plans for the future. Stacey was in year 10 at school and she shared some concerns about her next steps.

> *Stacey* (21.03): *Cause my dad was looking at a college and he doesn't think if I can cope with it.*

It was still undecided whether Stacey would take GCSEs or not, with conflicting advice from different staff – her social worker advised against but the AP were willing to support her in exams. Stacey was aware of the potential stress involved.

> *Stacey* (28.03): *I want to but I don't know if I'm gonna push myself to do it. I'll try and do it, then I just get too hot about it.*

As had happened throughout her schooling, Stacey was more concerned about managing her living situation.

> *Stacey* (28.03): *My dad was talking to me and what you gonna do? Cause I'm like leaving his house and moving in to this care place.*

For Dan, the end of schooling also meant other major life changes. His current care package was at a residential school, which was due to end when he completed year 11. So for Dan, moving on to post-16 provision also meant transition to supported independent living.

These stories illustrate how family circumstances, discussed more fully in theme 2, continue to have impact on the young people as they move into adult life. These young people were aware that they would have to manage responsibility and change at the end of their compulsory education. For some, family adversity will serve to limit

the range of feasible options after leaving school. In this morphogenetic cycle (Archer 1995), structural factors lead to limited options and thus to further disadvantage for these young people.

Career plans

Despite the known links between school exclusion and unemployment (Timpson 2019), the young people in this study planned and expected to work. Most of the young people in this study were able to say what kind of jobs they hoped to have in the future. The jobs tended to be manual, low-skilled and mostly in construction.

> **Dan** *(24.05): I want to do construction and that. And bricklaying.*

> **Samuel** *(06.06): I wanted to do joinery, but I might go for bricklaying now because I've been doing that in my spare time and that's what I like so I'm going to go for that.*

> **Rhys** *(15.03): If I learnt a trade and then I can start my own business in that trade it would be alright.*

> **Eddie** *(28.03): Well, I wanna be a chef, I do, when I'm older.*

Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) was set in an industrial town at a time when there had been plentiful work in the factories there. As such, 'the lads' planned to follow their fathers into the factories – a

decision which prompted the subtitle of the book: "How working class kids get working class jobs" (Willis 1977). 'The lads' planned to take up low status and physically demanding work which, to many, may not be seen as desirable. However, they valorised the idea of the working man and aspired to fulfil this role themselves.

In contrast to the industrial town of 'the lads', these school-excluded young people were growing up in an area previously dominated by coal mining and now largely de-industrialised. There are few jobs remaining in factories or coal mines, but the young people in this study have still chosen 'working class jobs'. Like 'the lads', the choices these school-excluded young people make about their futures inadvertently help to reproduce class inequalities – they have chosen work that will not significantly challenge their place in social hierarchies. In morphogenetic terms (Archer 1995), the young people (and their choices) are shaped by structural inequalities that pre-exist them. They exercise some agency in making choices about their futures but are both structurally constrained and culturally conditioned to choose 'working class jobs'. These choices help to reproduce or elaborate the pre-existing social structures. The changing nature of the job market does not appear, at least for these young people, to have radically disrupted this process.

Manual vs mental work

The young people in this study tended to express a preference for manual work. This was often linked to their feelings about school and a preference for practical or vocational education. It seems that still, the "world is divided into those who are 'good with their hands' or 'good with their heads'" (Willis 1977, p.146).

Samuel *(06.06): Cause I'm good with my hands. I can't do pen to paper writing.*

Rhys *(15.03): I'm a practical learner.*

Jordon *(25.04): I've got no interest sort of thing. I can do stuff that I need to do. You can ask me what's this, this and this and I can answer you easy.*

AP staff member Ryan discussed the need for a variety of approaches to learning, but seemed to feel that this was not likely to be able to accommodated in mainstream school.

Ryan *(29.03): if you've got thirty learners all them, even if they were working at the same level, them 30 learners aren't going to all work and learn the exact same way, everybody learns differently, so writing something up on a board I will not understand it at all. Reading. I'd love to be able to read properly and fix it in my head. But if I read a book, I'll have to read it over and over again before it's sits in my head. Whereas if I've visually seen something and touch it and do it, I learn. So whereas in the school, obviously you can't do that.*

The division between 'mental' and manual work was an important distinction for 'the lads'. Pursuing office jobs was equated with femininity or homosexuality, both characteristics which 'the lads' despised (Willis 1977). Instead, an image of the strong working man was promoted, with a valorisation of manual labour. The "air of practicality which prevails on the English shopfloor" (Willis 1977, p.94) is mirrored in their attitude to abstract or academic learning.

Rather than seeing manual work as a poor alternative to other careers, 'the lads' (Willis 1977) saw strength in manual work and 'mental' work as for those who lack the physical ability to cope with manual labour.

Whilst their choice of manual work was aligned with 'the lads', some of the young people in this study explained their job choices in terms of their own limitations. Their school experiences had left them feeling that they were not capable academic learners and so they expressed a view that they would be more suited to manual work. Whereas this work was presented by Willis (1977) as a positive choice for 'the lads', for some of the school-excluded young people it was also a more pragmatic recognition of their limited options.

Most of the young people in this study expressed clear ideas about their future work intentions. Jack was less consistent about his plans. He saw his path in life as inevitably shaped by his childhood and his involvement in crime.

> *Jack (07.04): Well, that's all I've ever seen, but obviously looking at my dad, I thought a bit like, it's either that I'm gonna be that or I'm going to be a drug dealer. I don't know.*

On another occasion, Jack also admitted that he was seeking a different kind of life, however he might get it. Having a regular job and predictable life lacked appeal.

> *Jack (06.06): It seems boring to me, like just being like a regular person walking to work and stuff and driving to work and coming back, like tired.*

Jack showed an awareness that the kind of low paid manual work that might be legitimately available to him would not provide the lifestyle he aspired to.

> **Jack** (04.07): I'm greedy. Like, I just want to put my hand in further and take more.

Whilst there was little talk of social mobility, with most young people aspiring to have jobs similar to their friends and families, Jack highlighted the limited options for those who did wish to experience mobility. For him, opportunities to make money were more likely to come through crime than through employment. In this way, the young people were both "free and enchained" (Archer 1996, p.x). The young people exercise agency in opting out of pursuing formal qualifications, further education or skilled jobs, but make their choices within constraints that reflect their position within marginalised groups.

School exclusion not a barrier to work

In choosing to work in low status manual jobs, the young people in this study were able to draw on social connections where formal qualifications would be less important. In this way, exclusion from school was not seen by many of the young people as a restriction on their ability to gain work, or as causing them to make different choices.

> **Samuel** (06.06): Yeah, I would have been going construction because I just can't do pen to paper.

SK (29.03): And what's the plan?

Lucy: Army. So like I get qualifications from this [Float] and I get qualifications from Sure [another AP]…

SK: And that'll be enough then to get in?

Lucy: Yeah, pretty much.

From diaries (23.05): George intends to do bricklaying with his dad, so he doesn't need any qualifications.

Several of the young people were unconvinced by the value of GCSEs or other formal qualifications. AP staff member Dave was also unsure how important gaining qualifications would be for these young people.

Dave (12.07): I mean it would be great if they all got their GCSEs. But I don't always think we need that to achieve the financial goals … I think there's as many people out there could succeed without degrees in that way, you know?

Exclusion from school limits access to a range of GCSE options and outcomes for those in AP are lower than the average (Timpson 2019). However, the young people in this study tended to have already held low expectations for their likely success in exams and so, in their view, exclusion from school did not have a great impact on final grades. The young people appeared to be largely unconcerned about leaving school with few or no GCSEs.

SK: So do you ever sort of worry about, you know like if you'd stayed in mainstream, you could have been leaving with like ten GCSEs and that?

Joseph (25.04): Not really. I don't really care.

SK (24.05): Do you ever think about what you might be missing out on by not being in mainstream school?

Dan: Erm not really. Don't know.

Jordon (25.04): I'm just doing functional skills because I don't have time to like do all that [GCSEs]. So I thought I'll just do stuff on like what I need to know.

Even those who acknowledged that they could potentially have gained good grades in school were comfortable that they felt better off out of school.

Geeno (13.06): Doesn't bother me to be honest about qualifications.

Lucy (29.03): I'm not really bothered about my GCSEs. Cause I don't even need them to do what I want.

Some allowed for the possibility of having to return to education at a later date in order to get work.

Finn (17.05): *I'm not like worried that I'm not gonna get the requirements for those jobs or anything. I believe that after Float I could probably go on to do them if I needed to, to work at a certain place. I could get some GCSE's.*

Geeno (13.06): *Even if I don't get a good job, I'll just rerun my college.*

Academic success at school seemed to have little practical or cultural value for these school-excluded young people. Qualifications are for those who "do not have the imagination or wit to do things any other way" (Willis 1977, p.95). For 'the lads' "qualifications must be resisted and discredited" (Willis 1977, p.94) as they represent a school system they have refused to engage with. One aspect of this resistance is the "informal mode" (Willis 1977, p.94) in which practical skills and experience are valued above academic achievement. Some of the young people expected to gain work alongside people from their own families and communities without a requirement for formal qualifications. This route into work reinforces the view that formal qualifications are not an important factor in employability. As such, the structural conditions shaping job opportunities and school experiences aligned with the young peoples' cultural expectations.

Finding work

Although they intended to have jobs, the young people in this study tended not to favour the career routes promoted in school but instead

to use informal networks. Some, like George who planned to work with his dad, were relying on family connections for their next steps.

Joseph (25.04): My brother's going to get, well 15 or 16 I don't know when, he's gonna, as soon as I can like, he's gonna get me an apprenticeship at his old bricklaying thing.

TJ (15.03): well obviously next year I'm just gonna go work with my brother innit.

SK: What does he do?

TJ: Concrete.

Most of the young people seemed confident that they would be able to get the kind of work that they wanted. Willis (1977) argues that in attempting to appeal to working class values, the school shifts focus to what is needed for work. Where young people do not invest in the education for itself, they may be persuaded to conform in school by linking school success to work. "Working values are bought back into the school to disqualify non-conformist behaviour" (Willis 1977, p.92). The behaviour of 'the lads' in school is seen as "damning to their future working lives" (Willis 1977, p.92). However, 'the lads' and the young people in this study both subvert this by finding work through informal channels which do not rely on a good school record.

Some of the young people in this study had plans for how they would find work, whilst others just hoped that something would come along at the right time.

Finn (17.05): I've not really got any job plans, I just sort of think I'd pick whatever paid best and just give it a shot. See if I liked it. Obviously, I know you can't just like willy nilly jobs and that but, go for the best paid one and think about all the jobs.

Jordon (25.04): you know what, I've not really like thought about my future to be honest with you, it's not like. I just sort of think, I don't really think about anything really, I just deal when it happens really

SK: Just live, live in the now?

Jordon: Yeah if it happens it happens, then we'll sort it out, don't worry now.

It seems that, despite growing up in an area that has lost most of its industry and an economy damaged by financial crashes and austerity, these school-excluded young people were still optimistic about their own futures. AP staff member Dave commented on the changing nature of work in the area.

Dave (12.07): yeah. Well what we've got nowadays is Amazon, places like Amazon. Which, you know, I couldn't do. Ha, ha! I couldn't, I really couldn't!

Willis noted that 'the lads' at this point in their lives enjoyed a "period of impregnable confidence" (Willis 1977, p.107), despite everything being "settled to their disadvantage" (ibid.). It was only later in life, once the realisation of their limited options and the harsh realities of

factory work had set in, that 'the lads' began to see that a formal education may have been beneficial to them. In the same way, these school-excluded young people have an optimism that may, unfortunately prove to be misplaced.

School exclusion is linked to poorer educational outcomes and to higher rates of unemployment (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019) and yet this seemed to have little impact (at least at this stage in their lives) on the future plans of these young people. This was an unexpected finding, as I had anticipated attitudes might have more closely reflected those of the 'hallway hangers' (MacLeod 1987)[1] who had become fatalistic about their futures and as such had not only opted out of education but also out of the formal economy and employment. Whilst rejecting formal schooling, these school-excluded young people still demonstrated a faith in the current economic system to provide them with opportunities.

Similarly, 'the lads' actively rebelled against school and yet their counter-school culture prepared them well for their future role as factory workers. In both cases, rejection of school still created a willing workforce in the future. The young people reacting within and against the constraints of the school system still go on to fulfil the needs of the economy for manual workers – their actions help to reproduce or elaborate the pre-existing social structures. However, 'the lads' were all able to leave school and immediately get jobs, although some later became workless at times (Willis 1977). Current evidence links school exclusion to unemployment (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019), which suggests that the young

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[1] In a study inspired by Learning to Labour, Ain't No Makin It follows a group of young men growing up in a housing project in 1980s USA. Whilst they show many similarities with 'the lads', the 'hallway hangers' show little optimism for their own futures, rejecting education and work. They become more fatalistic and pursue drinking and drugs as an escape from the poverty of their everyday lives.

people in this study may be less certain of gaining work, despite their optimism.

Expectations of work

The young people in this study tended to have generally positive expectations of work. Some of the young people drew a distinction between work and school, feeling that they would be more motivated in the workplace.

> **Jordon** (25.04): With me yeah, it's like my mentality I have more motivation when there's money involved.

> **Rhys** (15.03): I don't think a lot people don't realise that if even if they don't do something in school they're probably being a lot better working because you've got motivation, when there's money there like. It's obviously there you're gonna want to do it more.

AP staff member Ryan also recalled having been keen to get to work.

> **Ryan** (29.03): So I kind of got to a stage whereabouts I didn't really care about education, I'm more interested in work.

Hostility to school, explored in theme 4, seemed to strengthen the appeal of going to work. In contrast to school, going to work holds both practical and cultural appeal. The image of the working man was

valorised by 'the lads' (Willis 1977), but the work that he does is of less relevance. 'The lads' have no particular commitment to a certain job or workplace. Similarly, the young people in this study, whilst motivated to work, are mostly ambivalent about exactly the kind of work that they will do. In interviews, the young people did not talk about job satisfaction, particular skills or outputs, but were more focused on having a job for the financial benefits it can provide. Thus, whilst working is important to these young people, the nature of the work itself is not. Schooling is accepted as a means to an end (rather than, say education for liberation), and work is presented in this way too. Whilst the young people in this study largely rejected the value of school outcomes, in terms of skills and "qualifications whose promise is illusory" (Willis 1977, p.146), they looked forward to the benefits and freedoms of earning money. This transactional view of education and of work closes off the possibilities of education as liberation.

Theme 5: Future plans, Summary

This theme considered the future plans of the young people in this study. They were mostly optimistic about their futures and planned to take low-skilled manual work. In accepting an idea of school as a way to gain qualifications, as explored in theme 3, the young people did not feel that exclusion from school had limited their options. They intended to seek work through local connections that would not require formal qualifications. By taking a narrow view of the purpose of school as delivery of knowledge and qualifications, they both accepted a neoliberal outcome-focused view of school and rejected it as having little value for themselves.

Chapter 6: A novel use of theory to understand school exclusion

Critical realism has been well used in sociological studies and this chapter makes novel use of some key concepts to offer further analysis of the data. A stratified ontology (Bhaskar 2008) is adopted which informs the research design and ontological and epistemological positions taken. In particular, Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach is applied as a way to deepen understanding of the social and cultural structures and human agency which are all important aspects of school exclusion. A simplified model of the morphogenetic approach, adapted from Archer (2016c) is utilised to frame the discussion.

Structural inequalities, lived experience and ontology

The number and rate of official school exclusions can be measured but the causes and implications of school exclusion are more difficult to quantify. Interaction in the classroom and how people feel and behave in school are factors leading to school exclusion, but so also are the less visible social structures that shape opportunities and experiences. Adopting this realist position, that unseen social structures, whether we are able to recognise or measure them, have influence on our social lives, I apply a 'stratified ontology' (Bhaskar 2008) in this analysis.

A stratified ontology enables an approach that recognises the importance of factors across three domains: real, actual and empirical. The lived experiences of school-excluded young people are valued and considered as belonging to the empirical domain, whilst structural inequalities exist in the real and are enacted in the actual

domain. Although presented as conceptually separate strata, this approach to analysis enables the weaving together of personal, social and cultural factors in exploring experiences of school exclusion. In this chapter, a critical rationality (Bukowska 2021), is applied to the findings to seek to deepen understandings of the complex and dynamic processes included in school exclusion. In this way, empirical experiences are used to deepen an analysis that seeks to "look for causes in the domain of the real" (Fryer 2020, p.24) whilst giving a platform to the voices of young people who have been excluded from school.

School exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a) show that young people from marginalised groups are more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. The young people in this study do not reflect the ethnic groups more likely to be excluded from school, but do tend to come from disadvantaged communities, qualify for free school meals (FSM), be identified as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and as having experienced family adversity or be in the care system (LAC). These characteristics are all over-represented in the school exclusion statistics. Failing to address this trend means that school exclusion acts as a further tool in reproducing social inequalities, as marginalised young people are denied access to mainstream school (Perera 2020) and are exposed to the additional risks associated with being excluded from school (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Timpson 2019).

Investigating school exclusion by drawing on lived experience but in the context of structural inequalities requires a theoretical basis that can encompass both the personal narratives of school exclusion and a consideration of the structural inequalities represented and reproduced by school exclusion. In this thesis, inspiration is taken from Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach, which is used to explore the complex interplay of structure, culture and agency in

school exclusion. Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) is also used as a counterpoint for analysis, drawing comparisons between 'the lads' of a 1970s industrial town and the school-excluded young people in this study.

A morphogenetic approach to school exclusion

A simplified model of the morphogenetic cycle (Archer 2016a) is used to frame this discussion, see figure 11 below. I use this model to show a process over time by which structures are responded to and lived within, and the agentic actions of people then strengthen, modify or challenge those structures. Structures in this model may be social or cultural.

| **Structural Conditioning** | → | **Social Interaction** | → | **Structural Elaboration** |

Figure 11: The Morphogenetic cycle, adapted from Archer (2016b, p.39)

The morphogenetic cycle begins with structures that predate action. School structures, social and cultural, develop over time. Education systems, policy at national, local and school level and the cultural expectations of the classroom all, to some extent, predate the school staff and students that they govern. At the same time, social and cultural structures from outside school impact the school experience. Structural inequalities have a bearing on such things as the kinds of school people attend, their access to resources (including for example

food, housing and school unform (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2024) and their mental and physical health (Office for National Statistics 2022) which in turn all feed into the school experience. Similarly, the people within each school community bring their own cultural experiences and expectations with them. These expectations may be shaped by social structures, such as class, ethnicity, disability, that act as constraints or enablements (Archer 2016a), creating the opportunities that are, or that are perceived to be open to individuals. This thesis brings together an analysis of the structural and the personal elements of school exclusion and uses Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) as a counterpoint to the lived experience of school-excluded young people.

Morphogenesis, 'the lads', school and work

Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) shows how a group of young people known as 'the lads' rejected formal education and chose 'working class jobs' involving manual labour. The young people in this study also plan to seek manual work, mostly in construction. In this thesis, I argue that some aspects of the 'working class counter-school culture' identified by Willis (1977) continue to influence the choices and aspirations of marginalised young people, even after the loss of heavy industry locally.

'The lads' form a group in school based on a rejection of formal education and of 'mental work' in favour of manual labour and an idealised notion of the working man. Willis draws comparisons between the conflict between 'the lads' and their teachers and their future relationships, as workers, with their managers and shift supervisors, shaped by "prior authority relations" (Willis 1977, p.109). This antagonism of the classroom is recreated on the

shopfloor, and vice versa. Willis explains that as 'the lads' choose what he terms 'working class jobs' in the factories, they unwittingly contribute to the reproduction of industrial capitalism. 'The lads' feed the need for manual labourers and, through a cultural alignment, accept the low status, poor working conditions and low pay. In this way, although apparently rejecting school, 'the lads' experiences of school also help to maintain this reproduction of the industrial working class. This cycle is illustrated in the figure 12 below.
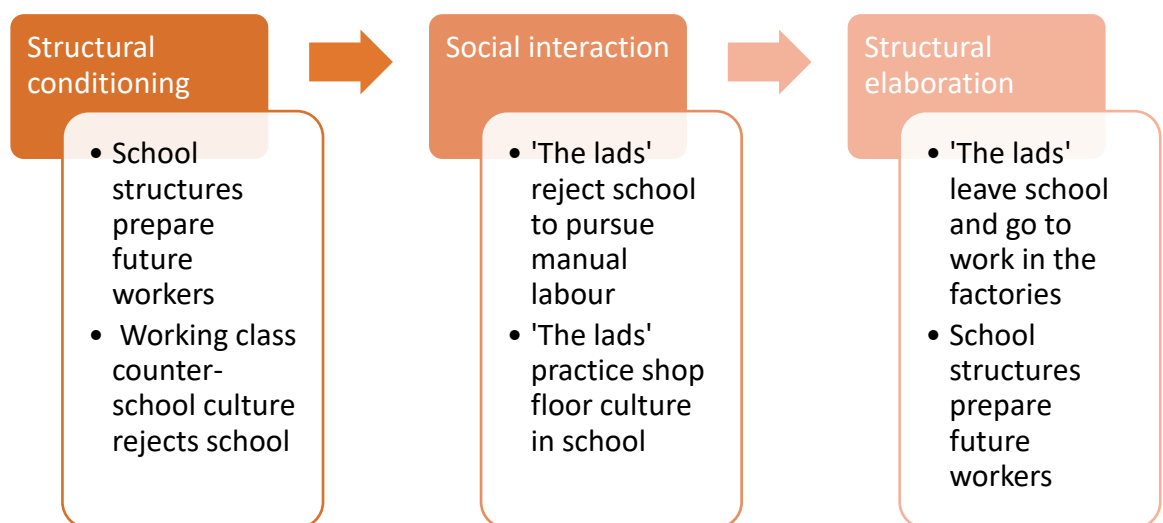
Structural conditioning	Social interaction	Structural elaboration
• School structures prepare future workers • Working class counter-school culture rejects school	• 'The lads' reject school to pursue manual labour • 'The lads' practice shop floor culture in school	• 'The lads' leave school and go to work in the factories • School structures prepare future workers

Figure 12: morphogenetic cycle, 'the lads' and working class counter-school culture

'The lads' (Willis 1977) valorised the image of the working man in heavy industry and some of these cultural values were also in evidence amongst the young people in this study. In this way, choosing 'working class jobs' is not a result of school failure or as a last resort option after better opportunities have been exhausted, but a positive choice. 'The lads' looked up to and wanted to become like the working men in their own families and communities. Similarly,

the young people in this study were choosing to follow their friends and family members into familiar kinds of work, such as TJ who planned to work in his brother's concrete business and Joseph who hoped to become a bricklayer at the same company as his brother. Whilst this is often framed as 'low aspiration' (Baker, et al. 2014), it may also signal a desire by young people to remain within the communities and values of their upbringing.

Like 'the lads', the young people in this study spoke of being practical learners, better with their hands than their heads (Willis 1977). They had experienced school as a hostile place and, given their future work plans, saw little benefit for themselves of engaging with formal education. It is important to acknowledge that these young people were excluded from school (officially or functionally) through processes they had little power over. However, it can also be seen that for the young people in this study, school had seemed to offer little appeal and they tended to report feeling disengaged or hostile to school, often from an early age. The connection between school and work is a key factor in the disengagement of these school-excluded young people.

School and work

The young people in this study generally accepted notions of school as being for entry to higher levels of education and jobs. This aligns with the neoliberal direction of school policy where schooling is positioned as a tool to serve economic needs (Gibb 2015). The young people in this study did not express school as, and seem not to have experienced, education for liberation, as a tool to gain the skills to bring about change for a more just society. Instead, school is presented and accepted as training for a future workplace. A strand

of this complex process is shown in the morphogenetic cycle in figure 13 below.

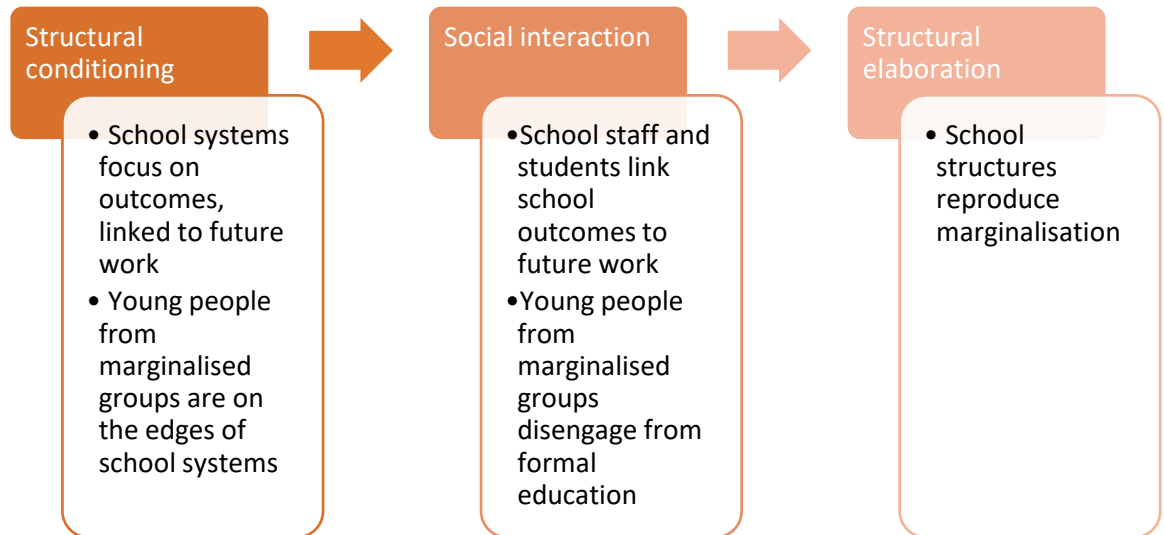| Structural conditioning	Social interaction	Structural elaboration
• School systems focus on outcomes, linked to future work • Young people from marginalised groups are on the edges of school systems	• School staff and students link school outcomes to future work • Young people from marginalised groups disengage from formal education	• School structures reproduce marginalisation

Figure 13: morphogenetic cycle, work and school

The positioning of school as a step in the process of sorting and accrediting future workers shuts down possibilities for education for engaged citizenship, liberation or human flourishing. These ideas also make it rational for some young people to opt out or emotionally distance themselves from school – a system of winners and losers is only motivating for those who stand to gain. The young people in this study mostly accepted or even welcomed their exclusion from school. These young people were willing to take personal responsibility for their behaviour and their difficulties in the classroom that seemed to make them incompatible with school success. For example, Samuel was confident about his abilities as a worker, but like others, struggled in the classroom. Some of the young people, including Lucy, Finn and Geeno acknowledged that they may have had some

academic success if they had stayed in school, but nonetheless rejected this path in favour of taking low-skilled jobs.

The future plans of the young people in this study showed that they, like 'the lads', had mostly chosen 'working class jobs' which required very little formal education. Social and cultural structures combine to keep these young people from marginalised groups on the edges of the school system. These structures are then reinforced by a rejection, on the one hand, of school by some young people and, on the other hand, the rejection of those young people by school, formalised through school exclusion.

For some young people, especially those with SEND, the challenges they face at school may encourage them to believe that they cannot succeed in education. Whilst the neoliberal / neoconservative school system continues to offer an education based on measurable outcomes tied to the needs of the economy, for some opting out may seem a rational agentic response.

Agency and experiences of school

Willis argued that 'the lads' had agency in rejecting school and actively adopting a working class counter-school culture. 'The lads' were not passive in their rejection of school. They proactively sought out likeminded people and proudly adopted a group identity that signalled their refusal to participate in formal education. In contrast, it must be acknowledged that the young people in this study have been formally or functionally excluded from school through processes they have little control of. However, I argue that there is still agency in the way that these school-excluded young people make choices about their level of engagement with formal education.

School-excluded young people have agency, but from a position of disadvantage – they are both "free and constrained" (Archer 2016d, p.77). Because of their marginalised position in society and in the school system, there may be limited opportunities to exercise agency in fruitful or positive ways. In this way, rejecting and disengaging from school, or engaging in disruptive behaviour in the classroom may have been options from a limited range available. Indeed, current neoconservative influenced school behaviour policies work to remove opportunities for agency from everyone in the school community – regulating when people can speak, the way they sit (Carr 2020) and their access to toilets (Oppenheim 2023) and prayer rooms (Jackson, Patel and Stanely 2024). In this context, a seemingly passive opting out or a self-sabotaging refusal to follow rules may be interpreted as agentic acts. However, acting as primary agents (Archer 2000), responding alone to individual situations, these young people have little impact on changing or developing the school structures that initially led to anger or disengagement.

The young people in this study acted with agency. Often this action took seemingly passive forms, such as Dan who maintained an air of detachment from school. Some more actively rejected school, challenging teachers like Jordon and Lucy, getting into fights like TJ or 'messing about' like Eddie. The sense that teachers look down on them and hold different values seeps through many of the conversations I had with young people and AP staff for this research. People value their communities and culture, even when they come from marginalised groups and disadvantaged communities and for these young people, school can stand in stark contrast to these values. Education that is based on acquiring accreditation to gain access to further and higher education and then certain kinds of work does not acknowledge or value the culture, knowledge or skills of these marginalised young people. Over time, these young people and

their teachers come to agree that school is not for them, which becomes formalised by the school exclusion process but is already often in evidence from much earlier in their school careers.

The young people in this study also tend to accept prevailing narratives about school in the neoliberal era – those of individual responsibility (Vassallo 2015) and school as a place for measurable outcomes tied to economic goals (Reay 2022). In this way, these young people identified themselves as people who did not belong in school, tending to frame their difficulties in school as due to their own shortcomings. These school-excluded young people described themselves as naughty and not academically able. Like 'the lads' (Willis 1977), the young people in this study become more disengaged from school as they pursue manual jobs that require little formal education. Through this process, marginalised young people reject school, but a school based on neoliberal ideas that does not seek to understand or value their backgrounds or cultural values. In morphogenetic terms, the school system and these school-excluded young people leave the pre-existing structures intact, as shown in the diagram (figure 14) below.
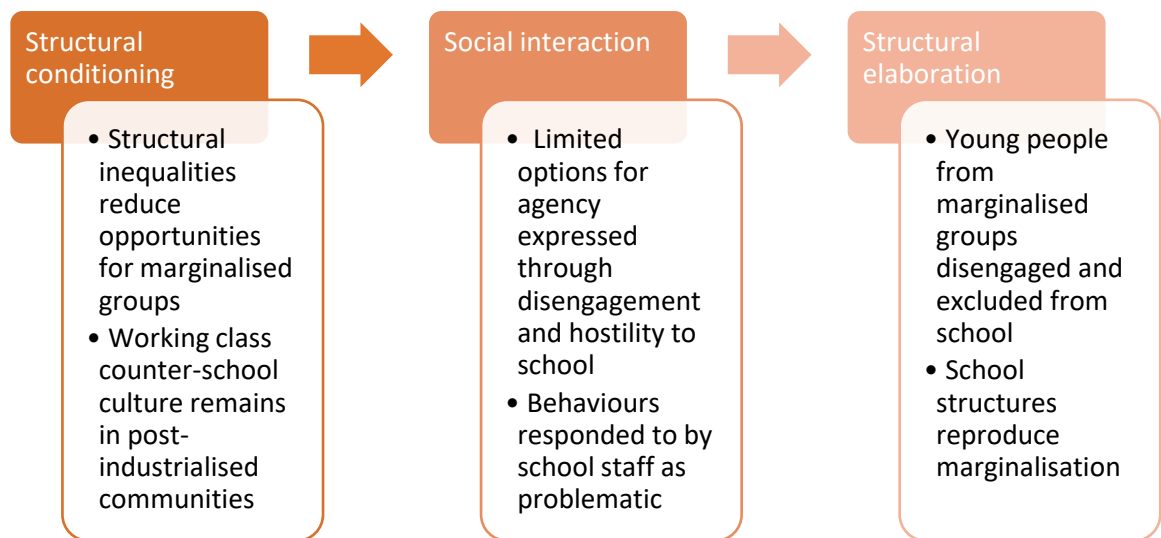
Structural conditioning	Social interaction	Structural elaboration
• Structural inequalities reduce opportunities for marginalised groups • Working class counter-school culture remains in post-industrialised communities	• Limited options for agency expressed through disengagement and hostility to school • Behaviours responded to by school staff as problematic	• Young people from marginalised groups disengaged and excluded from school • School structures reproduce marginalisation

Figure 14: morphogenetic cycle, marginalisation and disengagement

As shown in figure 14 above, there is a pattern by which pre-existing structures, based on structural inequalities and marginalisation shape the possibilities for agency in school. As young people disengage from school or present challenges to school systems, they are excluded from school and thus further marginalised. Some young people engage in a kind of "self-disqualification" (Willis 1977, p.148) which goes on to shape their future options. This cycle results in a strengthening of the pre-existing structures of inequality.

Primary and corporate agency in school exclusion

Acting as primary agents (Archer 2000), the young people in this study tended to accept individual blame for their exclusion. They described themselves as naughty and detailed incidents arising from their own behaviour. Most did not have a more complex explanation of their own marginalised position or of the marginalising effects of

the school system. Instead, there was, as Willis (1977) describes, both a disenchantment with and an acceptance of the school system as it is.

Although there was some sense of 'us and them' through a shared opposition to teachers, the young people in this study did not become corporate agents (Archer 2000) by sharing common cause with others in their position or by articulating shared goals. They did not demand a better education for themselves. However, the aggregate effects (Archer 2000) of young people from marginalised groups behaving in school in ways that lead ultimately to their exclusion can be argued for. For example, continued defiance of school rules may lead to a tightening of the rules and implementation, including neoconservative approaches to school discipline. The behaviours that the young people in this study talked so candidly about, their use of slang and presentation as hostile or indifferent to school all add to an image that, for some, may reinforce a view that these young people do not belong in school. In the current education system, based on neoliberal marketisation and backed up by neoconservative discipline, there are few opportunities to involve marginalised young people in constructive dialogue about school and their place in it.

The individualising effects of neoliberal school systems not only lead to blame and exclusion of individuals but have wider reaching consequences. In accepting individual blame as the young people in this study have done, possibilities for corporate agency through collective action are lost. The school exclusion process requires schools to log behaviours but not to evaluate the support needs of students and how they were (or were not) met (Murphy 2022). This formally positions responsibility for school exclusions with the individual young person and not the wider school systems. The focus on measurable outcomes and competition between schools leads to

some students becoming 'unsaleable goods' (Blyth and Milner 1996) and this comes to define their school experience.

Neoconservative approaches to school discipline, based on control and uniformity, reward and punishment amplify the separation of some young people from their peers. One effect of this separation and individualisation is that there are few opportunities for school-excluded young people to recognise common experiences or to make common cause with others in their position. A lack of belief in the value of education leads to disengagement rather than a demand for better. As such, young people experiencing difficulties at school are likely to remain primary agents, acting alone and responding to their own circumstances. The lack of corporate agency reflects the position of these young people more generally, being drawn from marginalised groups who may also lack corporate agency in wider society. This marginalised position in school heightens the sense that school has little relevance to the lives of some school-excluded young people, echoing the counter-school culture of 'the lads' (Willis 1977).

Cultural and economic change over time

Willis (1977) shows that through their apparent rejection of school, 'the lads' play a role in the reproduction of an industrial working class. Although they refuse to engage in formal learning and follow a different set of cultural values to those promoted in the classroom, the actions of 'the lads' do not alter the education being offered at school. Their disengagement from school and pursual of 'working class jobs' helps inadvertently to reproduce the social and cultural structures that are required to maintain a factory system that needed low status manual workers. Thus, the actions of 'the lads' can be seen in morphogenetic terms as responding to structures that pre-

existed them in ways that then lead to the reproduction of those structures, as shown in figure 12.

Archer's morphogenetic approach (Archer 2016a) allows for the importance of time as a factor in social change. And so it may be that cultural structures arising from times when industry required a large workforce of manual labourers continue to influence people in ways that do not fully align with the changing industrial landscape. In this sense, there is a "social haunting" (Simpson 2023, p.425) of former industrial communities that continues to shape values and identities. As such, I suggest that cultural structures which, as Willis (1977) demonstrated, had at one time served the needs of industrial capital, linger on beyond the economic need for an industrial working class.

Archer allows for different flows of social and cultural structures to have varying levels of influence and rates of change over time, as shown in figure 15 below. For the benefit of the reader, this diagram is presented for a second time (see also figure 3, chapter 2).
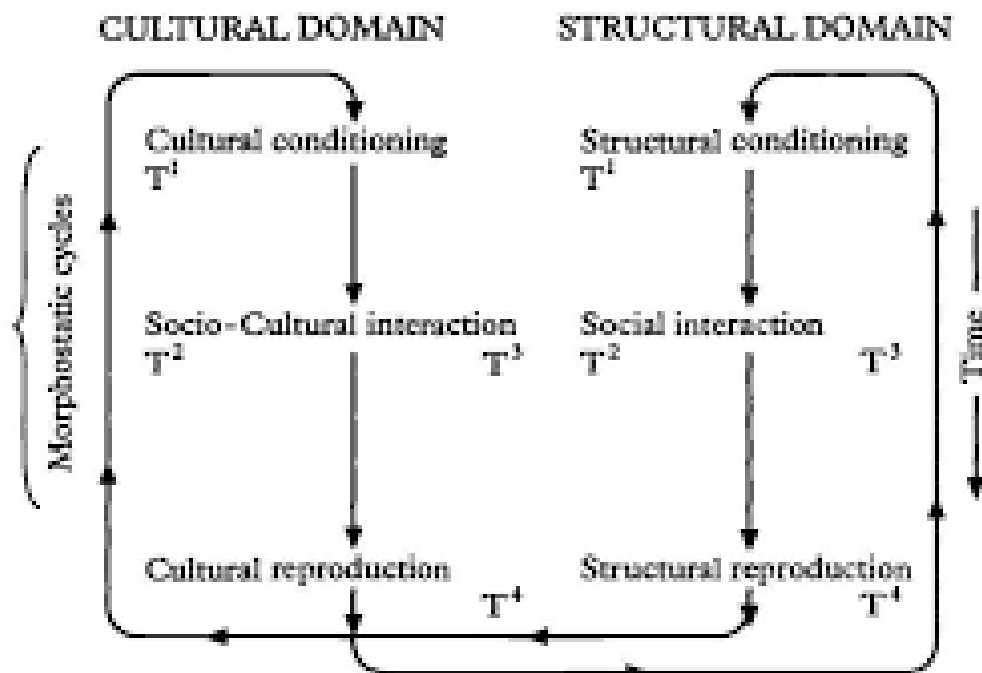

Figure 15: Morphogenesis model (Archer 1995, p.309, reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press)

Drawing on this model, I suggest that the cultural reproduction of working class values around work and school have continued in ways that may have been familiar to 'the lads' in the 1970s. At that time, manual work was plentiful, 'the lads' could easily find work and the factories needed young people to continue to take that work. However, the needs of industry have changed. The area where the fieldwork for this study was conducted is shaped by the former coal mines but there is little heavy industry remaining. There is no longer the same level of demand for manual labour and a basic level of education has become more standard and so less valued by employers (Archer 2016b) .

Despite these changes, the young people in this study expressed views of school and work which echo those of 'the lads'. These school-excluded young people were optimistic about their future plans and expected to find suitable work, despite having been excluded from school and the poorer outcomes (Timpson 2019) associated with that. Using Archer's model (figure 15), it can be seen that processes of cultural reproduction of working class ideas about work and school have not changed at the same rate as the structural conditions of the workplace. There are "consequences inherited from the past" (Archer 1979, p.24) in shaping the values and choices of today's young people. The young people in this study continue to 'choose working class jobs' (Willis 1977) and so school continues to be seen as lacking relevance for their future plans.

The relevance of school

The ambivalence towards school expressed by young people in this study raises questions of the purpose and relevance of school. State

education is arguably designed to maintain subordinate class positions (Tomlinson 2022) and favours middle class values and the needs of the economy (Reay 2001; Wrigley 2006). By focusing on individual behaviour and not on the context in which the behaviour occurred, school exclusion has a "regulatory function" (Murphy 2022, p.52) in maintaining social inequalities. The processes of school exclusion serve to silence young people as well as perpetuating a discourse that blames young people for societal problems (McCluskey 2014). Thus, school exclusion both arises from and contributes to the marginalisation associated with structural inequalities.

There can be "painful compromises" (Reay 2017, p.101) for working class people who pursue education, as success is often framed as an escape from or erasure of working class identity (Reay 2001). Some working class people return from education with debts only to take the same unskilled work that they had attempted to leave behind (Jones 2011). Brown (2018) describes the "alienating culture of schooling" for young people from poor families, which interacts with material deprivation to make school feel an unwelcoming and unfamiliar place. These experiences reinforce for some young people from marginalised groups both the barriers to and often the futility of engaging in education. Rejection of school may be a form of "self-damnation" (Willis 1977, p.3), but to engage in school may also present a different kind of challenge, especially for young people from marginalised groups.

Ideas about the purpose of school and its relevance to their own lives led the young people in this study to tend to reject school and formal education. Like 'the lads' (Willis 1977), this rejection of or disengagement from school helps to unwittingly reinforce the pre-existing structures which led to disengagement in the first place. This process is illustrated following the adapted version of the morphogenetic cycle, as shown in the diagram in figure 16 below.
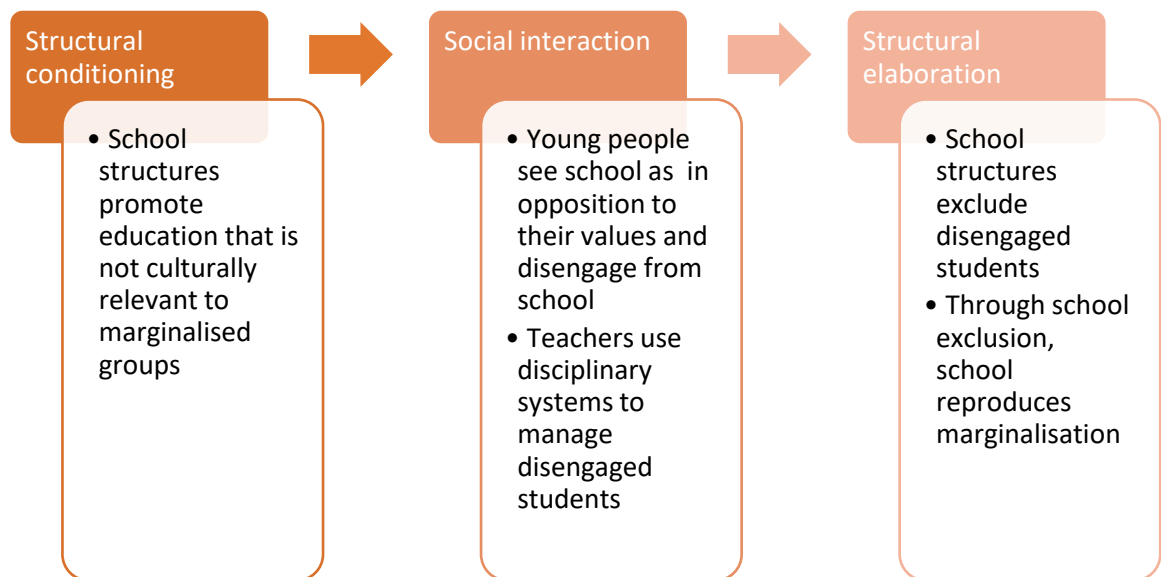
Structural conditioning	Social interaction	Structural elaboration
• School structures promote education that is not culturally relevant to marginalised groups	• Young people see school as in opposition to their values and disengage from school • Teachers use disciplinary systems to manage disengaged students	• School structures exclude disengaged students • Through school exclusion, school reproduces marginalisation

Figure 16: morphogenetic cycle, relevance and marginalisation

The young people in this study, like 'the lads' tended to see school as lacking relevance for their own lives. There are multiple factors to this question of relevance, including: a curriculum based on government approved knowledge (Tomlinson 2022); a 'clash of two worlds' (Broomhead 2014) that creates a division between school staff and students; a neoliberal assumption of meritocracy, competition and aspiration (Reay 2001) that does not match the life experience or future plans of young people from marginalised groups.

The future plans of these young people showed that they saw themselves as manual workers in low-skilled jobs. For some, this may have been a response to their difficult experiences at school, but others had always planned and expected to take these kinds of jobs, in keeping with their communities and families and the kinds of jobs that people around them had. Reay has written extensively about the conflicts for working class people when they choose to engage in

education (see, for example Reay and Wiliam 1999; Reay 2001; Reay 2017), and this may be reflected in the feelings of the young people in this study, leading them to disengage from school.

There is a tension for how we as educators offer an education that is both relevant, without reducing it to only low level vocational courses such as bricklaying, and aspirational, without requiring young people to reject their own culture, values and communities in order to pursue different kinds of education and work. Such an education needs to move away from the "discourse of deficit" (Simpson 2021, p.25) that continues to marginalise communities. How do we have a school that respects the culture and values of young people from marginalised groups, but also offers education that is liberating and relevant? This thesis cannot offer answers to these larger questions but opens a space for debate.

A realist critique of school exclusion

This analysis begins by identifying the policy direction in the school system in England as neoliberal and neoconservative. Since the 1980s, there have been moves to marketise the school system, removing schools from local and democratic accountability (1988). Schools are required to compete for business and central to this are systems of accountability which favour measurable (and so comparable) outcomes which tend to encourage 'teaching to the test' and pose a challenge to inclusivity (Hutchings 2015). Neoliberalism also makes clear the links between education and the economy, continuing the historic roots of universal education as preparation for the workplace (Wrigley 2006).

Neoconservative values are also gaining influence (Rolph 2023), seen in the way that education is used not to liberate but to maintain class

positions and to impose order, and the increasing use of 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies, based on high levels of control, punishment and reward (Prendergast, Hill and Jones 2017). Such systems fail to offer relevance or equality of opportunity to marginalised groups and instead serve to reproduce or even deepen existing structural inequalities. This is reflected in the school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a), which show that young people from marginalised groups are consistently more likely than their peers to be excluded from school.

In this school system as described, young people from marginalised groups have limited access to high quality education to meet their needs. But the young people are not passive in this process. Despite their marginalised position, school-excluded young people act with agency in interpreting and responding to their experiences of school. The young people in this study described feeling hostility both from and towards school and teachers in particular. These young people tended not to regard their exclusion from school as either unexpected or unwelcome, as their relationship with school had been tenuous and challenging from the outset.

In this analysis, I suggest that some elements of 'working class counter-school culture' (Willis 1977) remain, even after the industry has gone. In this way, these young people make active choices to pursue working class jobs which require little formal education and few qualifications. 'The lads' (Willis 1977) made similar choices, but in a context of high demand for manual workers in the factories. This meant that 'the lads' left themselves with limited options, but were mostly able to find regular work of the sort they had aspired to. School exclusion is linked to poor outcomes, including unemployment (Timpson 2019), and this study is based in a place which has experienced a major loss of industry, and so there are few reasons to be optimistic about the opportunities available to the young people in

this study when they begin to seek work. I use the morphogenetic approach (Archer 2016a) to suggest that cultural and economic structural factors have changed over time at different rates, which has allowed industrial working class cultural values and expectations to continue despite the changing landscape of work.

Agency is an important element of the morphogenetic model (Archer 2016a), and I show that these school-excluded young people act with agency, but within a context of structural inequalities that limit both their opportunities for action and the likelihood of their making an impact on wider social structures. They remain primary agents (Archer 2000) and so do not have the collective power of corporate agents to make common cause and bring about positive change. Because of this, much of the agentic action of these young people is shown through a rejection of school. School structures and structural inequalities combine to make school seem hostile and irrelevant to young people from marginalised groups, and so the actions of these young people are interpreted in this analysis as a symptom of a school system that does not fit. As young people react to their experiences of school, they become subject to school disciplinary processes which ultimately result in exclusion from school.

This analysis raises questions about the role of school in challenging or reproducing social inequalities. There are also important questions about the relevance of school and how schools could be reformed in ways that respect and engage with young people from marginalised groups. Findings from this data reflect wider literature that show the importance of respectful relationships and a sense of belonging (Allen, et al. 2018) for educational success. A whole school ethos of care (Warin 2017), and a professional love (Johnston and Nolty 2023) for students help to cultivate these necessary elements. However, this analysis also shows the importance of wider social and cultural structures that predate and help to shape the school experience. To

move away from a school system that reproduces these structural inequalities requires a challenge to neoliberal and neoconservative values and an education based on engaged citizenship and human flourishing.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has brought together the lived experience of some of the young people in the East Midlands of England who have been officially or functionally excluded from school. Interviews were conducted for this small-scale qualitative research over a period of time spent at an alternative provision (AP) where the young people were educated following exclusion from school. Drawing on critical realism enabled the analysis to place these experiences into a wider context of social and cultural structures. Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) was used to draw comparisons with the attitudes of working class young people in an industrial town in the 1970s. Using this theoretical framework allowed me to answer the research questions, outlined below.

Research questions:

How do young people experience school exclusion?

1) How do school-excluded young people narrate their journey to school exclusion?

2) How do school-excluded young people reflect on their experience of school and school exclusion, post-exclusion?

3) How is the experience of school exclusion shaped by the marginalised identity of the young person?

4) Were there factors (key moments, types of support) that could have avoided exclusion from school?

Each of the research questions are addressed separately below.

Literature suggests that often young people began school with positive expectations and early experiences (Levinson and Thompson 2016; Farouk 2017; Martin-Denham 2022), and this was mirrored in the findings of this study. Over time, experiences of difficulties in school and a sense of disconnect between home and school values led young people to become disengaged from school. However, as outlined in theme 3, often the young people in this study were vague about the details of their school experiences and were not able to narrate stories of early school successes.

Some who had been excluded from school very young had no real positive recollections of school. More commonly, a gradual disengagement from school was described (theme 3). This came from a combination of difficulties at school, emotionally or with the social and academic demands of the school day and often there was a lack of support in particular for those with family adversity and SEND (theme 2). The young people in this study tended to accept the neoliberal framing of school as accreditation for work, but did not see themselves either as succeeding academically or as pursuing the kind of work that would require qualifications (theme 5). Like Willis' (1977) 'lads', these young people chose 'working class jobs' based on manual labour and so saw academic work as unnecessary or irrelevant for their own futures.

A sense of belonging has been shown to be a key factor for school success (Allen, et al. 2018), but the young people in this study tended not to feel that they belonged or had a purpose in school. SEND, home and family difficulties, hostility from teachers and future plans all combined to lead to disengagement from and hostility towards school (theme 4). The young people in this study often

blamed themselves for their difficulties at school and tended to frame explanations for school exclusion as individual rather than societal (theme 1).

Some young people in this study were able to recollect positive experiences at school and it was clear that relationships were key to how they had felt about school and about their own place there. Often, there was a sense of hostility both from and towards teachers which led young people to push back against or disengage from school.

2) How do school-excluded young people reflect on their experience of school and school exclusion, post-exclusion?

When composing the research questions, I knew that I wanted to talk to young people who had already experienced exclusion from school and no longer attended mainstream schools. With this in mind, I anticipated that the views and feelings of the young people about their school experiences may have changed over time. For example, the literature shows that whilst outcomes for those attending AP are generally poorer, young people attending AP tend to prefer or feel positive about their experiences in AP (Timpson 2019). For this reason, I had anticipated that some young people might reflect differently now that they were settled in AP than they had felt at the time of exclusion.

Often, when asked about their experiences of mainstream school, the young people in this study answered by making comparisons to AP. For example, when explaining why they had found the work difficult in school, they would describe how they preferred the approach to work in AP. When talking about school staff and the perceived hostility of teachers (theme 4), the school-excluded young people

would often compare schoolteachers to the AP staff, who they found to be more relatable or less judgemental. In this way, a different experience of education post-exclusion had given the young people a point of comparison and a way to suggest what they found had worked better for them.

However, it became clear that the young people in this study were still working through the realities of exclusion from school and may not yet have had the opportunity for reflection or life experience that would constitute being 'post-exclusion'. Often, there was a sense of relief at having got away from school (theme 3), rather than a full consideration of what had been lost or the long-term impact of that loss. When thinking about their futures, at this point the young people were mostly optimistic about their opportunities for work and did not see exclusion from school as a barrier to employment (theme 5). This was in part because the kinds of work that they hoped to do was tailored to their circumstances and so they had all chosen jobs that would not require further study or high levels of qualifications or skills.

Arguably, another factor in this optimism was that they had not yet entered the world of work or recognised the precariaty of the kinds of work they hoped to pursue. In contrast, when I interviewed staff at the AP who had been excluded from school themselves, they spoke with more distance, could see how the school system had played a part in their own difficulties and understood the ways in which an incomplete school education could limit options later in life. It would be valuable to undertake further research which allowed for school-excluded young people to be revisited as they entered adult life, to see how life and work experiences may change their perceptions of, and ways of narrating their school journeys.

The young people in this study gave little sense of agency about their exclusion from school, tending to see it as a fact of life, something

accepted or even welcome (theme 3). As in the literature (De Friend 2019), there was a sense that schools could 'do what they want' and that the young people and their families had minimal roles to play in advocating for themselves to keep their school place or gain more support in school.

For some young people, being removed from mainstream school also removed from them the requirement to keep attending and this was a welcome change. There was a hostility towards school and to teachers in particular (theme 4). This had perhaps become more generalised in the period following exclusion – rather than being about particular incidents or individuals, many of the young people looked back on school as having been a generally negative experience. Whilst I did not find the anger or sense of injustice I had anticipated might be there, I did find that the young people had negative views of school as lacking support or relevance. Broomhead (2014) describes a 'clash of two worlds' between school and home, and this appeared to be evident both in how the young people felt about school, but also in how they perceived that school staff felt about them (themes 3 and 4). There was a sense of mismatch, misunderstanding and lack of respect on both sides. This might be compared to the 'class insult' described by Willis (1977) that 'the lads' felt.

3) How is the experience of school exclusion shaped by the marginalised identity of the young person?

The fieldwork setting for this thesis was a small AP based in a former mining village. The area is littered with reminders of the coal mining heritage, with old coal trucks and pit heads at the entrances to villages and a disused coal mine regenerated as a country park.

Whilst none of the young people in this study mentioned any direct connection to coal mining, they were all growing up in a place which had been dominated by heavy industry that is now gone. The legacy of industry and the working class community around it remains as a "social haunting" (Simpson 2023, p.425) and continues to influence the lives and expectations of new generations.

Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) explores why working class kids get working class jobs and follows a group of young people at a time of plentiful factory work which had some status and provided a reasonable income for employees. 'The lads' rejected school in favour of a valorised masculinity linked to manual labour. The school-excluded young people in this study (mostly male) also saw their futures as working in labouring jobs (theme 5). Whilst they accepted the neoliberal view of school as preparation for work, these young people did not aspire to jobs that would require formal qualifications and so, like 'the lads', rejected school. In this way, the working class identities of the young people in this study shaped their ideas about their own futures and about school. School was not seen as important or relevant to their lives and so the loss of formal education through school exclusion was often welcomed (theme 3).

The intersectionality of class, SEND and other aspects of identity is complex. Whilst the young people in this study did not express a sense of class consciousness or place their own experiences of school exclusion in the wider context of structural inequalities, they nonetheless tended to conform to the national profile of those excluded from school (Department for Education 2023a). They were mostly male, from low socio-economic backgrounds, with SEND and with experiences of family adversity which meant some were classed as LAC or had social services involvement (theme 2). The nature of the fieldwork setting meant that most of the participants in this study were white British and so, whilst it is acknowledged that ethnicity is

an important and consistent indicator in school exclusion, this research is not able to draw conclusions on the relationship between race or ethnicity and school exclusion.

Whilst family difficulties such as bereavement may not be directly linked to social disadvantage, the impact on families who may have fewer support networks or be facing other challenges such as unemployment and poor housing means that family adversity is compounded by poverty (Calder 2016). Similarly, neoliberal marketisation of the school system which makes parents into consumers has been shown to disadvantage those parents who belong to marginalised groups (Prendergast, Hill and Jones 2017). The young people in this study came from disadvantaged communities and families which had experienced loss and adversity. Exclusion from school both reflects and compounds these identities.

This disadvantage is also reflected in the SEND system which means that the identification of SEND, the types of SEND identified, and the level of support for SEND are all affected by the social status of the young person and their family (Department for Education 2018b; Hutchinson 2021; Nevill, Savage and Forsey 2022). In this way, it is of significance that several of the young people in this study discussed how having SEND (theme 2) had been a barrier to success in school and had become a contributing factor in their eventual exclusion from school. Whilst some had been successful in gaining diagnoses or EHCPs, it seemed that there had been a lack of support or adjustment in school to meet the needs of these young people. Instead, they became known for their behaviour and experienced the sometimes punitive school disciplinary systems which lead to exclusion from school.

Neoliberal school systems focus on the individual in a competitive environment and neoconservative behaviour policies further promote the notion of individual responsibility (Prendergast, Hill and Jones

2017), without the context of social and cultural inequalities. This was reflected in the way that the young people narrated their stories of school exclusion and further developed in theme 1. However, there was a hostility to school and to teachers in particular that revealed a sense of 'us and them' (theme 4). Whilst this was not articulated in the language of class, the 'class insult' identified by Willis (1977) is still in evidence in the way that these school-excluded young people experienced hostility from and towards school.

4) Were there factors (key moments, types of support) that could have avoided exclusion from school?

The young people in this study were able to identify education professionals who had been significant in their lives: teachers, TAs and AP staff. It was clear that the relationships that were fostered between young people and their school staff made a significant difference to the way that they felt about school and their place in it. This was true in both positive and negative ways, as teachers who they felt judged or disrespected by also helped to cement the view of teachers as "not people" (theme 4). As reflected in the literature (Hart 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016), building positive and respectful relationships has been key for the young people in this study.

Very few key moments were mentioned. Although some exclusions had arisen from specific incidents, there was generally a sense that the young person had been known for their behaviour prior to the incident and some felt that they had been treated unfairly because of this. This was also reflected in the literature (Hart 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016; Caslin 2021). The gradual disengagement (theme 3) from school was often linked to a

combination of factors. Relationship breakdowns and experiences of school discipline systems which culminated in a de-sensitisation as the young people began to see themselves as 'naughty' and expected punishments (theme 1). The neoliberal focus on outcomes and neoconservative school behaviour policies combined to reinforce for young people the view that they neither belonged in school nor expected to achieve there.

As noted by McCluskey (2014), the more often young people were involved in school disciplinary procedures, the less of a voice they had within them. The young people in this study tended to be vague about the details of their schooling and exclusion and often expressed a passive sense of being 'done to' (theme 3). They often did not engage in the exclusion process, with some never formally excluded from school but removed from mainstream and educated solely in AP. There was little sense amongst these young people that they perceived a role for themselves or their parents in the exclusion process, that they had a right to question or appeal decisions or that they might be agents in determining what would happen to them post-exclusion.

The young people in this study had valued moments in school when they felt cared for, respected and included. Solutions such as a whole school ethos of inclusion as described by Warin (2017) would help to improve the school experience of these young people. The young people in this study had appreciated opportunities to leave the classroom or do vocational activities. It must be acknowledged though, that a focus on vocational education can lead to a greater use of AP for those from marginalised groups leading to a segregated school system (Perera 2020) that exacerbates the social divisions in school experience and achievement.

Undiagnosed or unmet SEND were also a common element in the stories of the young people in this study (theme 2). A greater

understanding of additional needs and a more truly inclusive school environment would have improved the school experience for some of these young people. However, a deeper structural and cultural analysis of the barriers to school success for young people from marginalised groups would suggest that the very nature of the school system needs fundamental reform if it is to be truly inclusive and engaging for young people at risk of exclusion from school.

Limitations and further research

This is a small-scale study which took place over six months in an East Midlands AP. The location and nature of the AP meant that young people interested in practical and outdoor activities were more represented and that the ethnic profile of the school-excluded nationally (Department for Education 2023a) was not reflected in the participants. Future research could repeat the interviews in a variety of locations with a broader range of young people.

I drew on my experience as a former teacher and youth worker to make relationships with the young people in this study and I was able to spend time in the AP and with the young people over the fieldwork period. Nonetheless, other approaches may yield opportunities for deeper reflection. For example, use of creative methods could be considered as a way to open further conversations and support communication not relying solely on verbal articulation of ideas. A combination of individual and group work may also give different insights.

The research questions framed this as 'post-exclusion' but it was found that some young people in this study did not yet have practical or emotional distance from their school experiences. Further research could revisit school-excluded young people over a period of time

which might support them to more fully articulate the impact on them of being excluded from school. However, there are considerable practical difficulties with this approach. Once the young people leave education, there is no longer a gate-keeper to act as a point of contact and the poor outcomes often experienced by young adults who had been excluded from school may make maintaining contact in a research context challenging.

Contribution and implications of this research

There is concern about the negative outcomes of school exclusion in government and policy-making and in education research. Numerous reports have outlined the poor outcomes for those excluded from school, the links to poorer life chances including in health, housing, employment and the criminal justice system (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift 2017; Education Select Committee 2018; Timpson 2019). This thesis deepens understanding of the lived experience of school exclusion and offers a novel use of theory to critique the English school system and its role in reproducing marginalisation. The second part of the literature review (chapter 2) focuses on published research into experiences of school exclusion. This thesis adds to that body of research. It shows how young people who have been officially or functionally excluded from school narrate and reflect on their experiences of school and exclusion from school. It also describes the aspirations and future plans of those young people.

As reflected in the literature (Hart 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013; Levinson and Thompson 2016), the young people in this study tended to report a more positive experience in AP than in school. SEND and family adversity were compounding factors in these young people's experiences of school and school exclusion, as reflected in

the school exclusion statistics (Department for Education 2023a). Platforming the stories and perspectives of school-excluded young people, respecting their agency, this study offers insight into the "internal conversation" (Archer 2007, p.2) by which they make sense of their experiences of school and school exclusion.

In drawing on critical realism to focus on structure, agency and culture, this thesis shows the interplay of factors, societal and personal, which lead to exclusion from school and the process by which school exclusion is both a cause and a symptom of marginalisation. Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) is also used as a counterpoint for analysis. Key ideas such as the "working class counter school culture" (Willis 1977, p.3) that valorised masculine manual labour and rejected formal education and 'mental work' and which led 'the lads' to disengage from school and to choose "working class jobs" (Willis 1977, p.1) are considered in the context of contemporary experiences of school and school exclusion.

Findings suggest that relationships are central to how young people experience and make sense of their time in school. A whole school ethos of care (Warin 2017) that includes the whole school community and a professional love (Grimmer 2021; Sellars and Imig 2021; Heffernan and Mills 2023; Johnston and Nolty 2023) that allows vulnerable young people to feel safe and cared for are powerful tools. Alternative, collaborative ways to evaluate provisions as suggested by Johnston and Nolty (2023) may help to move away from mechanistic neoliberal approaches and towards systems which more fully recognise the value of the work done in AP. However, reforming AP must accompany parallel reforms in mainstream schools if we are to move away from a model where only after exclusion from school can young people access the support and education that they need.

Additional needs arising from adverse childhood experiences, poverty, family adversity and SEND are common amongst the school-excluded

(Department for Education 2023a; Timpson 2019). Young people in this study described having difficulties at school related to these challenges and feeling unsupported or penalised. This demonstrates that schools need to find ways to better identify and support young people who are facing challenges, especially those from marginalised groups. The tendency to individualise responsibility for behaviour in school (Parsons 2005) allows these structural inequalities to be overlooked. Awareness and monitoring of the profile of students in a school who are identified as requiring additional support and of those who are subject to school disciplinary systems would help schools to track and then address these trends. For example, recording the proportions of students who are eligible for free school meals, have SEND, are care experienced or belong to ethnic minority groups who are held in detentions, sent to internal exclusion units, excluded for fixed periods and permanently would highlight where schools are reproducing these inequalities through disciplinary systems. A recalibration of school support and disciplinary systems may help to redress the balance. However, findings suggest that a more fundamental reform of the English school system will be required in order to remove these structural inequalities.

Alongside reforms of the school system to offer a more relevant and equitable educational experience, the sources of inequalities and social disadvantage must be addressed. Schools are being increasingly asked to extend well beyond the classroom in order to address social problems such as poverty (McKinney 2014), mental health (Department for Education 2018a) and crime prevention (Henshall 2018). Those schools based in communities more affected by such social challenges are more impacted, and there seems little reason to anticipate that social factors will cease to influence the educational experiences and outcomes of their students. Thus, if

school exclusion to be effectively addressed, so too must the wider structural inequalities that it both represents and reproduces.

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Figure 2: Causal diagram, Theme 2: Marginalised groups

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Appendix 1: Table of communication with fieldwork setting

Date	Type of Contact	Who?	For what?	Notes
29.06.21	Email	To Bob	Initial contact	
30.06.21	Email	From Bob	Response	Suggested a phone call
30.06.21	Phone	To Bob	First talk about the research	Positive call, agreed to have a look
01.07.21	Email	To Bob	Follow up from phone call	Sent initial research plan outline. No Response
21.09.21	Email	To Bob	Asking for a chat	Can make some plans now ethics approved
16.12.21	Visit Float	Bob	Talk over what I want, how it might work	Bob made a list regarding e.g. safeguarding, references, etc.
21.12.21	Email	To Bob	Follow up on visit	Follow up, I sent a one page profile of the project for schools. Asked about a date to go in to talk to staff team. No Response
Jan 22	Phone	To Bob	Arrange to go in	Set a date to go on 25th Jan
25.01.22	Phone	From Mick	To rearrange	Rearranged for 31st Jan

31.01.22	Visit Float	Ryan	Talk to staff team	Spoke to two staff members, seemed positive
01.02.22	Email	To Ryan	Follow up	No response
15.02.22	Phone	To Bob	Can I begin fieldwork?	Said to arrange going in with other Ryan, gave me his number. Wants to go over paperwork with me, wants new DBS
15.02.22	Phone	To Ryan	Arrange start	Agreed start date of 28th Feb
16.02.22	Text	To Bob	Follow up	Suggested I go over, meeting agreed
16.02.22	Visit	Bob	Paperwork	Sorted DBS ID, agreed some details about safeguarding etc. Met Jess, admin staff
16.02.22	Email	To Bob & Jess	Follow up	Sent copies of ethics and consent forms.
16.02.22	Email	From Jess	Reply	She will set up the DBS check
17.02.22	Email	From DBS	Application	Completed my application
18.02.22	Email	From DBS	DBS	Now being processed

25.02.22	Text	From Bob	Next week	Asking if I was OK for Monday. I answered that I was looking forward to it
28.02.22	FW		Fieldwork	First full day Monday
01.03.22	Email	To Bob, Ryan, Jess	Consent	To thank for this week and ask info to be sent home/ to schools

Table 1: Communication with fieldwork setting

An exploration of school exclusion

I am Stephanie King, a PhD candidate from Nottingham Trent University, and I am working on a research project which aims to explore experiences of exclusion from school. I would like to invite you to be part of the project.

This is voluntary and you are under no pressure to take part, but before you decide whether to be involved or not, I hope this sheet answers any questions that you may have.

What will I have to do?

I would like to ask you some questions in an interview about your experiences of school, and exclusion from school.

There will be a chance in the interviews to use drawings or other creative activities to help you to answer some of my questions, if you choose to.

During every interview, you can ask to stop the interview if you want to. You can also choose not to answer any of my questions, but carry on with the interview, if you want to.

How long will it take?

I will be in your school for the next school year, from March 2022 to July 2022. I hope this will not have too much of an impact on your usual daily activities. I will ask you to talk with me in an

interview up to 3 times over the year. This will take no longer than an hour each time.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Although there are not any guaranteed benefits to you, you may find that you are able to talk about your experiences of education that you have not been able to discuss before. You may also gain some satisfaction from taking part in the project and you will be helping people to understand more about school exclusion.

Are there any disadvantages?

Although this research is not intended to cause you any upset or distress, some of the discussion could be about your negative experiences of education. However, you will be offered contact details of a people who can support you, if you wish to discuss these feelings or issues further.

What if I want to leave the project?

If you decide at any stage that you no longer want to be part of the project, you can either let me know – or any member of staff at FLOAT - and I will make sure any information you have given me is destroyed. You will be able to withdraw up until the point that the information is being used in my work (so this would be July 2022). I will remind you of this before each interview.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

I will follow ethical rules and keep all information about you confidential. Some FLOAT staff may be aware that you are taking part in the study, but will not have access to any of the information you give to me.

I will not tell other people what you say to me, unless there is a risk of harm to someone. If at any time during the project, you suggest harm to yourself or others, or you disclose a previously *unknown* offence, then I will need to break confidentiality and inform the safeguarding officer.

As well as recording the interview on a secure device, I will take notes during our discussions and use these for information to think about at the end of the project, but I will not record any information that identifies you. If you choose not to agree to recording the interview, I will take notes as above. My notes will be typed up and stored securely. I may like to use some direct quotes that you share with me in the report, but these will remain anonymous.

I will take care not to identify you, but there is a small risk that if someone who knows you reads the report, they might be able to identify you.

What if I want to complain?

You can contact my supervisor (details below) or someone at FLOAT, who will then directly contact Nottingham Trent University, where your complaint will be dealt with formally. They will make sure your complaint is dealt with in line with the

University policy. You will be reminded how to complain by a debrief sheet given to you when the project ends.

Your participation in the research project is voluntary and it is important to understand that this study is carried out with the agreement of FLOAT, but is <u>NOT</u> being carried out on FLOAT's behalf. Participating in this research will not affect your future relations with FLOAT or any other part of the school system.

I will use the information I collect to write a report called a thesis which will be available in the university library. I also plan to use this research to do more work in the future, like making speeches or writing blogs or articles that will be published. I hope to share this work with people who make decisions about education, for example teachers or staff at the Local Authority or in government. Wherever I use the information you have shared with me, your name and identity will stay anonymous.

The information I collect, with all names and details removed, will be stored securely by Nottingham Trent University and may also be available to other approved researchers in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you are happy to be part of this project, please complete and sign the consent form below.

Stephanie King

Nottingham Trent University

Email: stephanie.king2020@my.ntu.ac.uk

> *Contact details for supervisor and Float Manager given here*

An exploration of school exclusion.

If you would like to take part, please read the following information and tick to confirm that you agree with each statement.

Consent statement	Please tick
I have had the opportunity to discuss the project	
I have enough information to decide whether or not I wish to take part in the project	
I understand that I am free to stop taking part in the project at any point without consequence. I understand that I can stop an interview at any time, and that I can choose not to answer any questions if I want to.	
I understand that interviews will be recorded on a secure device. Recordings will be transferred to the NTU data store and then destroyed after use. Transcripts will be kept securely in the NTU data store	
I understand that I can remove any of my contributions to the project up until writing up (July 2022)	
I understand that the information I give will be treated in the strictest confidence, but if I talk about something that is a risk to myself or others, this will be reported to a safeguarding officer	
I agree to 'direct quotes' which do not identify me being used as part of the final project report	
I agree to take part in the study	

Full Name   _____

Signature   _____

Date   _____

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

1 How does your week look now?
How many days do you attend AP?
Where do you get core subjects?

2 Tell me about how school was for you at the start
How was primary school for you?
How did you feel about school at first?
Did that feeling change over time?

3 When did things at school start to change for you?
When did you start to struggle at school?
When did you start to get into trouble at school?

4 What did you struggle with at school?
Did you find the work difficult?
Did you find managing the classroom difficult?
Did you find managing relationships with others difficult?
How did school support you with this?

5 Tell me how you came to be excluded from school.
Was it one thing, or a build up of things?
Did you know that exclusion was likely?

6 When did you realise that you were likely to be excluded from school?
Did you feel by then that there was anything you could do to stop that happening?

7 Were there key moments that something changed?
Why do you feel that was an important moment?
Do you feel that if something different had happened in that moment, you might not have been excluded?

8 How did you feel at the time about being excluded from school?
Was it expected?
Was it disappointing / welcome?

9 How did people around you react to your exclusion from school?
How did your family react at the time?
Has that feeling changed?

10 How do the people around you feel about school / exclusion?
Do you have people in your family who did not complete school?
Do you have friends who were excluded from school?

11 How was the process of exclusion managed?
How were you / parents informed?
Did you attend meetings?

12 How were decisions about your education made?
How was this AP chosen?
How involved are you in deciding where you go for education?

13 I was just reading something and the title was 'people like me don't so well in school'. I wondered if that's how you have looked at it?
Is your experience of school exclusion something that you see as happening to people like you?

14 In England, every year people who get free school meals, people with SEND or people who live in poorer areas are more likely to be excluded from school. I wonder what your thoughts are about this?
How might this be explained?
Why might school experiences be different for these people?

15 Was there anything that you think could have kept you in school?
Were there things that helped you stay at school before exclusion?
Did you feel that you had the support you needed at school?
What else might have made a difference to you, do you think?
Were there things that you could have done to make a difference?
Why didn't that happen?

16 I have been reading about some young people called 'the lads' who just didn't feel that school was for them, they saw it as wasting time with their friends until they get to go to work. I wonder what you think about that?
Do you relate to this feeling about school?
What do you see as the point of school?

17 How do you feel about your education since you were excluded from school?
How does it compare with your previous school?

18 Are you concerned about the qualifications you will leave school with?
You might have had the chance to take several GCSEs in school, was that a concern for you?
How do you feel about having only a few / low level qualifications instead?

19 What are you plans for when you finish school?
What are your next steps?
Do you know what you need to get to that next step?

20 Longer term, what are your plans for your future?
What are you hoping for in life?
What kind of work would you like to do?

21 Do you think that having been excluded from school will affect your future in the long term?
How?
How might this have been different if you'd stayed in school?

22 How do you feel about your exclusion now, looking back?
Is that different to how you felt at the time?

23 Looking back, are there things that you wish you'd done differently at school, to keep your place there?
How much did you really want to be there at the time – did you want to move on?

24 I recently met a man from the Education Select Committee. If I had the chance to meet him again, what would your message to the government be?
What do you think people in government should know about school?
What do you think the government could change to make school better?

25 Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?

Follow up questions if relevant:

If family adversity is mentioned: how did that affect your experiences of school?
How did school support you with this?

If SEND is mentioned: how did that affect your experiences of school?
How was the process of getting support / a diagnosis?
How did school support you with this?

Appendix 4: Table of interviews, dates and locations

	Date	1st or 2nd	Pseudonym	School Year	Last in school	Location
1	07.03.22	1/1	Tom	Staff	n/a	Classroom
2	15.03.22	1/1	Rhys	Yr 12	Yr 5	Fishing lake
3	15.03.22	1/1	TJ	Yr 10	Yr 7	Fishing lake
4	21.03.22	1/2	Stacey	Yr 10	Yr 9?	Park
5	28.03.22	1/1	Eddie	Yr 8	Yr 7	Walking
6	28.03.22	2/2	Stacey	Yr 10	Yr 9?	Bench near Float
7	29.03.22	1/1	Lucy	Yr 10	Yr 7	Classroom
8	29.03.22	1/1	Ryan	Staff	n/a	Classroom
9	25.04.22	1/1	Jordon	Yr 11	Yr 8	Minibus (parked)
10	25.04.22	1/1	Joseph	Yr 9	Yr 7	Bench near Float
11	17.05.22	1/1	Finn	Yr 9	Yr 8	Old bus
12	24.05.22	1/2	Dan	Yr 10	Yr 7	Bench near Float
13	23.05.22	1/1	George	Yr 10	Yr 9	Bench near Float
14	06.06.22	1/1	Samuel	Yr 10	Yr 8	Minibus
15	06.06.22	1/2	Jack	Yr 10	Yr 9	Pool hall bench
16	22.03.22	1/1	Alex	Yr 11	Yr 10	Walking
17	13.06.22	1/1	Geeno	Yr 9	Yr 7	Minibus
18	04.07.22	2/2	Dan	Yr 10	Yr 7	Park bench
19	04.07.22	2/2	Jack	Yr 10	Yr 9	Country park
20	12.07.22	1/1	Dave	Staff	n/a	Minibus

Table 2: Interview details

Appendix 5: Sample of interview coding from NVivo

Appendix 6: Sample of codes from NVivo

DA 02 02.nvp - NVivo 12 Plus

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created By	Created On	Modified On	Modified By
academic	9	22	S	05/11/2022 12:06	02/02/2023 09:59	S
AP experiences	14	47	S	02/11/2022 11:40	01/02/2023 16:07	S
Behaviours	7	17	S	03/11/2022 12:54	31/01/2023 20:55	S
being at home	4	5	S	25/01/2023 14:33	31/01/2023 21:01	S
boarding school	1	2	S	26/01/2023 10:38	01/02/2023 15:54	S
bullying	3	5	S	25/01/2023 15:35	02/02/2023 09:50	S
change and personal growth	7	13	S	03/11/2022 13:03	31/01/2023 18:59	S
control in the moment	4	5	S	02/11/2022 11:43	26/01/2023 16:02	S
Covid	1	3	S	26/01/2023 11:56	26/01/2023 12:07	S
decision making	8	10	S	26/01/2023 11:05	01/02/2023 16:02	S
disengagement	3	9	S	24/01/2023 12:23	01/02/2023 16:02	S
do what I want to do	8	16	S	02/11/2022 10:49	31/01/2023 13:43	S
don't want to go back to school	4	3	S	03/11/2022 13:16	31/01/2023 10:19	S
Emotions attached to school experience	10	22	S	02/11/2022 09:57	31/01/2023 21:03	S
expectations of school	5	7	S	02/11/2022 10:43	31/01/2023 20:54	S
fairness	8	12	S	02/11/2022 11:46	01/02/2023 16:13	S
family stuff	12	39	S	03/11/2022 13:10	01/02/2023 16:09	S
feeling supported	6	10	S	02/11/2022 11:31	31/01/2023 13:42	S
Feelings about PX	5	6	S	23/01/2023 16:28	31/01/2023 18:53	S
feelings about teachers	11	26	S	02/11/2022 10:03	27/01/2023 10:48	S
feelings of loss or acceptance	13	21	S	02/11/2022 11:40	31/01/2023 15:48	S
finality	5	6	S	02/11/2022 11:12	31/01/2023 15:31	S
financial costs	4	5	S	24/01/2023 12:18	01/02/2023 16:30	S
friendships	10	23	S	05/11/2022 12:12	02/02/2023 10:30	S
future plans	16	28	S	02/11/2022 10:09	02/02/2023 09:55	S
gaps in schooling	10	20	S	23/01/2023 15:49	01/02/2023 15:59	S
gender in school	3	3	S	03/11/2022 13:02	23/01/2023 16:14	S
Group size	3	4	S	02/11/2022 09:57	23/01/2023 14:05	S
Health	4	7	S	09/11/2022 11:37	02/02/2023 10:32	S
he's like a second dad	6	9	S	27/01/2023 10:02	01/02/2023 16:07	S
how people learn	5	7	S	02/11/2022 10:05	30/01/2023 14:53	S
how people react to PX	5	9	S	05/11/2022 12:24	26/01/2023 14:44	S
how they describe each other	7	11	S	26/01/2023 10:19	02/02/2023 10:24	S
I didn't go to school anyway	2	3	S	27/01/2023 09:19	31/01/2023 13:24	S
I didn't wanna be at school	7	23	S	25/01/2023 15:03	02/02/2023 10:12	S

S 126 items