An Exploration of an Out-of-School Therapeutic Education Programme through the Perspectives of its Students, Parents, and Carers

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful wife Gill and our children, the joy of our lives, Emma, Christina, Laura, Suzanna, and Christopher. They have all given their love in supporting my selfish and indulgent efforts when more pressing family matters often needed my attention. I trust that we will all reap the benefits and future opportunities from the sacrifice that has been made.

Abstract

This study is an exploration of the perspectives of students on an Out-of-School Therapeutic Education Programme (hereinafter referred to as ‘OOSTEP’) and is supported by their parents and carers. These bespoke programmes are innovative and student-centred; they cater for individual interests and use out-of-school alternative education provisions including vocational settings. The students are 14–16-year-old boys and the programme prepares them for post-16 transition. The researcher is a practitioner who manages OOSTEP in a therapeutic school. Through a reflective insider-researcher position, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven students with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs and their parents and carers.

This exploration identified that student voices can recognise the worth of their education in schools and on OOSTEP. The parent and carer voices provided validation, clarity, and depth to the student perspectives. The findings confirm previous literature that identify negative elements of the school experience of students with SEMH issues. A key finding is the respite issue that identifies the out-of-school programme as a welcome break from previous schooling, transition, and exclusion processes. The research states that OOSTEP incorporates choice, provides opportunities, builds positive relationships, and assists in the growth of personal development.

The research contribution explores the insights of students, parents, and carers; their stories offer clarification and understanding of the school experience of students with SEMH issues. The voice research reveals the barriers faced by these students and identifies the support that families need. It gives guidance for policy and describes how bespoke educational practice can provide positive outcomes for students who are at risk of exclusion.

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Abbreviations

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
AERA	American Educational Research Association
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AP	Alternative Provision
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BERJ	British Educational Research Journal
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CofC	Community of Communities
CD	Conduct Disorder
DCSF	Department for Children, School and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfESc	Department for Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EO	Education Otherwise
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
HCEC	House of Commons Education Committee

IEP	Individual Education Plan
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
MRQ	Main Research Question
NAEA	National Alternative Education Association
NASS	National Association of Special Schools
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OOSTEP	Out-of-School Therapeutic Education Programme
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
SMEH	Social, Mental and Emotional Health
SRQ	Sub Research Question
TC	Therapeutic Community
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
YISP	Youth Inclusion Support Project
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction and Rationale

This study explores the experiences of seven students aged 14-16 who attend an out-of-school therapeutic education programme called OOSTEP. The students have significant social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. They are all registered at a therapeutic school and have been educated in both mainstream and special schools. Each student in this group has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for SEMH difficulties and were at risk of permanent exclusion from the school. Due to their extreme behaviours and disengagement in a therapeutic school, I developed OOSTEP to meet the educational needs of these students. OOSTEP is an innovative response to a current need for specialised, alternative education that takes place outside a school environment. During this doctoral work, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, set out in the Children and Families Act (2014) and detailed in the Department for Educations Code of Practice (DfE, 2015a), promised the most significant changes in a generation.

The study focused on the voices of one cohort of students who were on the intervention programme (2015-2016). In order to gain greater understanding, clarification, and insight into the real-life education experiences of their student journeys, the students themselves, along with their parents and carers, were invited to share their associated stories through interview. This exploration embodies their values and the worth that they place on education. Pring (2004, p.164) identified that education is ‘a view about what is a worthwhile form of life’. The worth of education for young people with SEMH difficulties is central and have been positioned as the principal informants of the exploration. The students were considered a reliable witness to their own experiences (Trotman, Enow and Tucker, 2019) and their ‘voice’ was based on their well-being and ability to share. The research sought to cast a new light on the students’ journey with SEMH issues, recognising and identifying their perceptions of past school life and their OOSTEP experiences. From a practitioner and insider-researcher’s position, I have had first-hand experience of the students, their parents, and their carers. This position of trust has enabled me to establish and develop a positive relationship with each participant within the Therapeutic Community (TC). This study contributes to the limited

research on students, therapeutic education, and a unique programme in the form of OOSTEP. The experiences shared and the themes identified by the students and their parents and carers will make an original contribution to knowledge within the field of SEND.

The rationale for this study is based on my own experiences, including my particular worldview of how marginalised groups might be better educated so that they are able to function within society and lead healthy, fulfilling lives. Reflecting on my personal contribution requires some consideration and justification of my position before identifying the context, structure, and arguments of this thesis.

1.1 Personal Experience

As I analyse and evaluate my life experiences, I can identify the detail and nuanced encounters that have led to my vocation in education and the consequent development of this thesis. My personal philosophy has been to make a difference and a positive contribution to the lives of young people. My career includes a depth of experience, starting in 14-18 mainstream school before leaving the profession for a sales career. Sales and marketing developed my skills and allowed me to approach all manner of business organisations, thereby gaining invaluable vocational experience that was later to be the focus for my teaching career and subsequently OOSTEP. I returned to education after experiencing several SEND environments as a supply teacher which provided valuable experience for a career in SEND and the requisite preparation for OOSTEP. I have extensive experience of SEND, beginning with teaching students with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) before shifting my focus to challenging behaviours in Secure Education, Pupil Referral Units (PRU), Behaviour Support Services and, finally, to a Therapeutic School. My training as an Ofsted inspector and the acquisition of Headship (NPQH) status has helped me to understand all facets of education management, the importance of leadership, and the incorporation of differing perspectives, all of which played a key role in my ability to establish OOSTEP. On reflection, I recognise that my experiences, passion, and joy have culminated in motivating and engaging young people with SEMH issues in education, training, and work-related learning. These skills and experiences have enabled me, along with my staff team, to establish, organise, and manage OOSTEP as an innovative educational

experience. The exploration was prompted by the need to give a voice to a minority group of students with SEMH issues, a group that I have observed for many years as a teacher in school. I recognised that students appeared troubled by their difficulties and were often referred to as having troublesome behaviours (Cornwall and Walter, 2006). I have perceived that these students have struggled through their schooling and have often felt ashamed of their personal difficulties and challenges.

1.2 Context for National Concerns

Students who are not actively engaged in compulsory education are often observed as being disaffected (McKendrick, Scott and Sinclair, 2007). Pupil disengagement and disaffection from school is a national concern. Wetz (2009, p.9) identified that there is a need for the education of an 'underclass' who are not attending school. He explained that:

> there is a widening gap between young people who are achieving in our schools and the growing disaffection, alienation and anger of a significant and increasing underclass who leave with few qualifications, little chance of worthwhile employment, and no stake in our society.

Gove (2011) highlighted the issue of juvenile disengagement politically, after the social and civil unrest that had culminated in rioting on the streets of several major UK cities during the summer of 2011. Following the riots, the young people involved were controversially perceived as a 'feral underclass', an uncontrollable group on the edge of society (Newman, 2012). Ministry of Justice (2012) statistics show that juvenile grouping, between 10 to 17 years of age, accounted for 27% of arrests made during the riots. In relation to the young rioters, a report entitled 'After the Riots' (Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, 2012) identified 66% of the juveniles as having some form of SEND, compared with 20% in mainstream secondary school. There is a clear implication that this disproportionate number of young people with SEND, involved in anti-social behaviour, is a national concern.

In the UK, alternative forms of education have been recommended in an effort to prevent pupil exclusion, disaffection, and anti-social behaviour. Indeed, the 'After the Riots' report (Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, 2012, p.3) stated that the solution 'starts in school with attainment in literacy and numeracy, improving attendance and avoiding exclusions'. The report recommended that schools 'take steps to use exclusion

as a last resort and transfer pupils to quality alternative provision' (p.8). For many children, alternative provision (AP) can provide opportunities and make a real difference to their lives. AP is a broad term and describes a wide variety of types of educational settings delivered by charities and other organisations, both independent and unregistered. The challenge is to ensure that children are receiving high quality AP and are placed for the right reason and at the right time. The House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC, 2018, p.5) stated that:

> For many children alternative provision can be transformational, and has made a real difference to students' lives. However, the challenge appears to be ensuring that the right children are receiving high quality alternative provision and entering for the right reasons at the right time.

There is a contemporary need to provide for young, disaffected people with SEMH issues in school, while others could benefit from out-of-school education in AP. The Education Act 1996 states that parents have a duty to organise full-time education at school or otherwise. The proposition is that education, rather than schooling, is compulsory in this country. It is reasonable to consider the out-of-school education alternatives that are available for students. This research explores alternative education. It is not to be confused with elective home education that is often referred to as Education Otherwise (EO, 2019).

1.3 A Local Response: The Therapeutic School and OOSTEP

Within this study, I explored the worth of a local response to disengagement through an alternative education programme. All the students were at risk of exclusion due to either their troublesome, anti-social behaviour in school or refusal to attend school due to their personal troubles. Either way, they were at risk of being returned to their respective Local Authorities (LAs). These LAs had entrusted The Therapeutic School (a pseudonym) with their care because they could not provide for their educational needs. I identified that out-of-school education may be a way of avoiding permanent exclusion, thereby giving pupils a final opportunity to remain in full-time education. The school provided the appropriate support for the programme to maintain education agreements with the LA and enable students to remain on the school roll. A benefit to those in school was that disengaged students did not distract them. The commissioning LA to The Therapeutic School welcomed the alternative programme as it would keep their

students in education.

The Therapeutic School provides education for boys with SEMH difficulties who are 8-16 years old and has a strong emphasis on the care and welfare of its students. It provides a varied curriculum designed to meet the needs of students. Many have secondary needs of ASD and ADHD. The vulnerable young people experience a wraparound care, therapeutic, and education service. Therapy is an integral part of the timetable to meet SEMH needs, and support is provided through a range of therapeutic interventions. An on-site multi-disciplinary team includes psychotherapy, counselling, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and psychological assessments. The therapeutic principles and child-centred approaches are based on empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard. Greenhough (2018) identified a similar therapeutic climate for learning where students develop self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

Since OOSTEP was established in 2012, students at risk of school exclusion remained on the register at The Therapeutic School. However, they were taught off-premises on a bespoke education programme. OOSTEP provides for extreme individual learning needs for students who could not or would not access the curriculum at the school. The objectives of OOSTEP are to facilitate learning and enable the individual student to fulfil their potential in all areas of their development: socially, emotionally, mentally, and educationally. To facilitate this initiative, a therapeutic Individual Education Plan (IEP) is negotiated with the students to overcome barriers to engagement. By talking with students about their educational experience, OOSTEP staff provide alternative ways of catering for their core education needs on a one-to-one basis. Alternative provisions enhance education opportunities and group activities in supporting the programmes. McLellan (2012) maintained that a creative curriculum should provide choice, opportunities, and a programme suitable for the needs of the individual. The OOSTEP approach is creative and negotiated individual timetables provide for personal needs as identified in Appendix 1. The curriculum includes a wide variety of subjects depending on personal interests. These have included theatre art, music production, farming, and driving cars, along with other vocational and academic opportunities. The OOSTEP staff team enjoy working with young people and complement one another with regards to

their personal qualities, resilience, and providing motivation.

The OOSTEP intervention programme engages young people in education to achieve worthwhile learning outcomes. A holistic approach is utilised to enable young people to create a bespoke programme based on their individual personality, desires, and aspirations. The framework criteria for the success of OOSTEP education is:

1. Identifying the worth of past and recent education strategies and provision.
2. Negotiating and implementing a bespoke programme based on interests, desires, aspirations, and wants of the student.
3. Achieving worthwhile personal, academic, and vocational outcomes and developing future pathways.
4. Identifying a mentor to develop a rapport with the student.
5. Encouraging the student to have fun, enjoy their education, and explore further options.
6. Communicating with parents and carers and listening to their experience and intuition.

The above framework encourages student success according to individual need. Up to the present time, 39 young people have participated in the programme and each student has negotiated their own education pathway. Students have shown tremendous success in being able to improve their own personal behaviours. From exhibiting troubled and troublesome behaviours that included regular restraints in school, no restraints have been reported on OOSTEP. Improved behavior and relationships were also identified in the home. OOSTEP has enabled academic success and all disaffected young people have engaged in education programmes. Many students have excelled beyond all expectations in photography, farming, construction, mechanics, and welding. All students in the past have achieved education outcomes and identified post-16 education, training, or employment opportunities. Parents and carers have recognised OOSTEP as being the key to guiding students away from a future life of crime. This research focuses on all seven students of the 2015-16 cohort who were completing their formal education journey on OOSTEP. The sample framework of seven students with SEMH issues and their parents and carers were asked to give their insights into the worth of the school experience and individualised OOSTEP involvement. The OOSTEP success criteria will be measured against the research responses from students,

parents, and carers.

1.4 Thesis Structure

A clear structure has been identified for this thesis based on the main research question (MRQ) and an approach identified by Bottery and Wright (2019). The MRQ was constructed as a result of my interest in education for students with SEMH issues and the development of OOSTEP. The MRQ asks:

> What is the worth of school and the Out-of-School Therapeutic Education Programme (OOSTEP) from the perspective of students at risk of exclusion and their parents and carers?

The elements that constructed the MRQ are related to key words or phrases: (1) student voice, (2) identifying SEMH issues, (3) disengagement and risk of exclusion, (4) perceptions of school, (5) perceptions of AP and therapeutic education, and (6) research methodology. From these elements, Sub Research Questions (SRQs) have been created, adjusted, and developed to capture the full meaning and scope of the MRQ. The SRQs are as follows:

- SRQ: 1. What is the significance of student voice and what does it entail?
- SRQ: 2. What are the features of the category relating to SEMH issues?
- SRQ: 3. What is the implication of students being at risk of exclusion?
- SRQ: 4. How do students perceive school?
- SRQ: 5. How do students perceive AP and therapeutic provisions?
- SRQ: 6. What is the most appropriate research method to capture the perspectives of students with SEMH issues and their parents or carers?

As a result of this approach, I have been able to arrange SRQs: 1-5 into sections within Chapter 2. SRQ: 6 is answered in Chapter 3. However, it is recognised that answers will overlap and will be developed throughout the thesis (Appendix 2).

1.5 Summary

This exploration into schooling and a therapeutic intervention programme (OOSTEP) is an original study into a marginalised group with SEMH issues. New light will give a clearer understanding of the student with SEMH journey through education. The research is based on my personal ontology and extensive experience of SEMH as a teacher-practitioner. The local initiative is in response to national concerns for the well-

being of students at risk of exclusion. In the academic tradition of giving more weight to a minority and marginalised group of people, perceptions are sought through the students' voice. The participants' responses will be an original contribution to knowledge in the area of SEMH. The findings will be structured through six separate SRQs that together will answer the MRQ. The research will provide guidance for an educational appreciation of students with SEMH issues and recognition of alternative educational opportunities. Although this study is phenomenological in nature, the aim of the research is not to describe education for SEMH issues, but to be interpretive according to the perceptions of those participating in the exploration. As a researcher and practitioner, I needed to know from the students whether their education experience was conducive to their personal learning. It was important to capture and understand the students' insights and the worth of their education experience. Knowledge of student perceptions is an essential prerequisite to improving the OOSTEP project. I required staff members, including myself, to be able to teach in a way and in a place where the young people with SEMH issues could engage. The findings from this research will be informed by the literature review in answering the MRQ.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The fast-evolving political agenda has driven policy and the development of education for students with SEMH issues. The core reading was gradually and systematically established through a wide range of commentators on policy and practice. Noteworthy initial research by Cooper, Wise and Pomeroy has been supported by the education theory of Pring. More recent work by Hajdukova (2014), Casey (2015), Cole (2015) and Trotman et al. (2019) have been invaluable in the field of SEMH and exclusion. More recently, the criteria for selection have been centred on peer-reviewed journals, most notably SEBDA's Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties journal and the British Educational Research Journal (BERJ), that ground the study in contemporary issues. The overriding focus has been research based on pupil voice that both reflects on and informs current education practice. There has been recent national legislation with regards to education that requires the involvement and influence of pupil voice. Consequently, it was compulsory that students contribute to future policy, procedures, and practice.

This study is based on the perceptions of vulnerable young people, and it was their voice that was the focus of this study. The themes developed throughout the literature review identified key barriers to students. Following each section, literature was selected that identified the key findings. The review initially focused on student voice and well-being (SRQ: 1). The label for students with SEMH difficulties was then placed in context of SEND categories and there was an analysis of social, emotional, and mental health (SRQ: 2). SEMH issues can lead to learning difficulties, disengagement, and being at risk of exclusion (SRQ: 3). The literature review was then widened to include perceptions of schooling (SRQ: 4), along with OOSTEP and the use of Alternative Provision (SRQ: 5).

2.1 Student Voice and Well-being

In order to answer the question 'What is the significance of student voice and what does it entail?' (SRQ: 1), there was a need to place student voice in the context of the development of child well-being. The need for pupil well-being and effective functioning

is a major international concern. A state of well-being is described as the ability to realise one's own abilities in developing towards self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) was pivotal in developing the experience and the right to education for students with SEND. The issue of child well-being has become a recurring theme in recent years, and this is reflected in both national and international reports (Appendix 3). The standards relating to well-being are now being extended into the realms of mental health and all aspects of human life, as identified through the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2013). The SEND Code of Practice (2015) mandates that students must be involved in making decisions about their education. Child well-being is now a legal consideration, and the expectation is that children's voices are heard, listened to, and acted on. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in a survey entitled 'How Children Say the UK is Doing' (UNCRC, 2014, p.4), identified that 70.6% answered positively to the following statement:

> If you are old enough to understand, you have the right to have your views taken into account by people making decisions about you.

This report presents great cause for concern as nearly 30% of the children asked did not believe that they had the right for their views to be considered by people making decisions about them, despite being old enough to understand the implications. The consequences of the law being changed has not altered the perceptions and reality for many young people.

Pupil voice is now enshrined in national and international law. However, the selectivity of voices of students with SEMH issues in practice and the effectiveness of pupil voice in bringing about change are areas for concern. Nind, Boorman and Clarke (2012) identified that there is an oversimplified notion of pupil voice. As far back as 1993, Cooper observed that a key problem at the heart of the education process was the persistent need for teachers to make judgements about pupil knowledge and experience. Students who are recognised as more vulnerable and marginalised have their concerns identified by others and not by the pupil in question. Whilst the importance of allowing teachers to be able to share their perceptions (Alejandro, Blythe and Fite, 2014) is acknowledged, it is also recognised that those perceptions must not take priority over pupil perceptions. Cefai and Cooper (2010) significantly wrote

‘Students without voices: the unheard accounts’ and expressed their concern for secondary school SEND students whose voices are overlooked. They explained that it is often the authoritarian and rigid nature of schooling that has contributed to a lack of pupil voice. A common critique of initiatives to engage student voice is the limitations of certain voices that are heard, favouring those who share the values and ethos of the organisation. It was also suggested that only students who were willing and able to articulate their views in ways acceptable to the existing powers were listened to (Nind, Boorman and Clarke, 2012). Hartas (2011, p.104) highlighted how power relationships exist in the pupil-teacher relationship:

> In some cases, participation can function as a tool for social control. One of the concerns of students are pupil - teacher relationships and consequently pupil - teacher power relationship.

Sellman (2009) pointed out that enabling students to have their say is not the same as empowering them, emphasising that empowerment can only come about if the information elicited from students brings about a resulting change. Sellman (2009, p.35) suggests that mechanisms and forums such as councils, focus groups, and forums can be viewed as a

> Trojan horse, a surreptitious means of inserting adult middle-class values and preferred means of communication into provision…in the name of pupil empowerment.

Sellman found that many mainstream teachers ‘resisted pupil empowerment initiatives as they are uneasy about conceding power and control to students’ (2009, p.34). He asserted that the degree of cultural change necessary in schools to truly empower students, rather than simply focusing on litter-picking schedules, is often underestimated. A number of researchers have challenged the simplistic assumption that the inclusion of student voice would challenge the status quo and cause a power shift towards students through their participation. Fielding (2001) identified that conventional power is built around adult agendas. Empowering voice research for pupils with SEMH difficulties and initiatives in school is often compounded by the complexities of additional obstacles. Nind, Boorman and Clarke (2012) outlined some of the obstacles to meaningfully hearing the voices of disaffected and marginalised young people. Other researchers including Cooper (1993a), Curtis et al. (2004), Riley and Docking (2004), and Ravet (2007) have also highlighted this concern in significant contributions to this research area. The

obstacles include the fact that ‘their communication is often unconventional and their social status marginal’ (Nind, Boorman and Clarke, 2012, p.644). The facts are that students in this study have been often hard to reach, disengaged, suspicious, and rejecting of support. However, they still have the right to engage, be listened to, and make a contribution in schools and within the community.

This study has endeavoured to engage students and identify their perceptions. It has sought to overcome the barriers identified and engage students in sharing the worth of their education. Valuable lessons must be learnt from the students in identifying appropriate teaching and learning for the future. On a positive note, there is evidence that researchers are authentically seeking empowerment as an outcome of student voice. One example is the seminar series funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in England, which occurred between 2004 and 2006, entitled ‘Engaging Critically with Pupil Voice: Children and young people as partners in school and community change’ (ESRC, 2006). Ravet (2007) and Coates and Vickerman (2010) focused on exploring effective methodologies for engaging and empowering young people. One of the intended outcomes of this research was to capture the opinions of students in order to assist teachers in their learning and teaching practice through the contribution of pupil voice. Furthermore, research has been identified that reflects the pupil voice and the development of their crucially important contribution to education. Davies and Ryan (2018) identified the school experience of students, whilst Prunty, Dupont and McDaid (2012), Davison (2013), Hajdukova (2014), and Sheffield and Morgan (2017) looked specifically at SEMH/BESD views with regards to their schooling and education experience. Thacker (2017) and Tellis-James and Fox (2016) exclusively identified research concerning excluded students and shared their aspirations and perceived future opportunities. An aim of this research is to identify pupil voice in helping to inform policy, procedures, and teaching practice in conjunction with parent and carer voices.

2.1.1 Parent and Carer Voice

Parents and carers have been recognised as a significant resource, particularly when the well-being of students is being discussed. Cole and Knowles (2011, p.201) stated that ‘the benefits of establishing a helpful relationship with parents of children with

BESD have long been recognised'. Cooper (1993a) maintained that the family is a major source of experience for most people. He acknowledged that the precise relationship between family circumstances and school situations are not easily defined, especially as family support and problems may come in very different forms. Daniels et al. (2003) highlighted the benefits of encouraging a more proactive approach with parents by school staff. They further recognised that common practice with certain parents was genuinely more difficult; a small number of parents have social and communication difficulties along with emotional and mental health problems of their own. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) stresses the importance of partnership working and fostering a culture of co-operation, which includes the voice of the pupil, parent, and carer. However, as is the case with pupil relationships, trust needs to be developed and maintained between staff, parents, and carers (Waters, 2014).

In summary, this section places pupil voice in the context of national and international policy. Pupils with SEMH issues are now supported by legislation which safeguards their well-being and ability to share their perspectives. However, barriers to their voice continues and this remains a major obstacle for the students with SEMH difficulties at the centre of this study.

2.2 Categorisation of SEND and the SEMH Label

There has been a long-standing debate with regards to categories of SEND and how students with SEND should be supported in education. Government policy and publications heavily influence the development of SEND education and places SEMH in context. The category in this study was formerly Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD); Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD); and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD), before being re-categorised as Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) more recently. SEMH are special educational needs in which a young person has severe difficulties in managing their emotions and mental health, often showing inappropriate responses and feelings to situations. This means that they have trouble in building and maintaining relationships with both peers and adults; they struggle to engage with learning and to cope in a classroom environment without additional strategies and interventions. Children with SEMH issues will often feel anxious, scared, and misunderstood. The ambiguity and diverse use of these terms is

due to an ongoing confusion over their definitions (Norwich and Eaton, 2015; Childhouse, 2017). This is part of a range of education debates that consider the degree of: nature or nurture, rescue or community care, disciplined conformity or individualised child-centred approach, and education, care, or therapy. These debates were influenced by prevailing philosophies and contemporaneous research. They were implemented into UK government policy at various times throughout the 20th century and up until the present day.

The Education Act 1944 was a significant piece of legislation as it required all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to identify and provide for all children in need of special educational treatment. It described those children as 'maladjusted', a term in widespread use at the time. However, the Underwood Report (1955) identified 'maladjusted' not as a medical term diagnosing a medical condition, but as a product of the circumstances which make up the environment. The government altered assessment procedures (Circular 2/75, DfESc) in 1975, taking some power away from school medical officers and passing it to school psychologists. This was identified as the ascendency of an 'educational' model over a 'medical' one (Laslett, 1983). Behaviour modification was in vogue and limited attention was paid to the psychodynamic approach. The Education Act 1981 replaced the category 'maladjusted' with the more appropriate term 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' (EBD). The government further explained that 'children with EBD are on a continuum…yet not so great as to be classed as mental illness' (DfES, 1994, p.4). The promotion of inclusion was reflected in the Education Act 1996, yet provisions for segregation of BESD students continued. However, concern for the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) became a significant contribution of the Labour government in the first decade of the 21st century. Mental health has more recently been identified as a major concern and this has revolutionised SEND policy and practice.

The special needs reforms were set to be introduced to Parliament during 2013 and to gain Royal Assent in 2014. However, in November 2013, a SEND change form was submitted to the DfE (2013) regarding Pupil SEND Type. The application requested a replacement of the code 'BESD' and the creation of a new code – Social, Mental and Emotional Health (SMEH) – to be approved for September 2014 for the Autumn School

Census. The new SMEH code was undoubtedly significant, as any reference to 'behaviour' had been removed from any type of SEND. In April 2014, an additional update to the code set was requested (DfE, 2014). A further name change was made from 'SMEH' to 'SEMH', and this was required for May 2014 so that it could be in the system from September 2014. The word change was brought about for presentational reasons because 'mental health' is preferable to the word 'mental' on its own, which 'could have negative connotations' (DfE, 2014, p.3). Referring to the SEND Code of Practice, Nash (2014) stated that there is a growing momentum around SEMH needs that reflects professional concern. Nash (2014, p.1) explained that:

> There is a clear emphasis on understanding the nature of individual need in order to work out what action the school needs to take, not to fit a pupil into a category.

The changes indicated a shift in emphasis within education for SEMH issues. There is now a focus on child-centred disabilities identified by assessments and the underlying causes of what their behaviours are communicating. The Code of Practice (DfE, 2015a) in section 5:32 identified four broad areas of need and support:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH)
- sensory and/or physical needs

These SEND areas replaced all the previous categories in schools. Children are now classified as having SEND; however, an individual student may not be confined to only one of these areas of need. The Code of Practice has brought about a change in recorded statistics. It is difficult to compare statistics pre- and post-2015 reform. Reeve (2016) stated that because the system changed from a method of classifying children in 2014 to a new designation in 2015, it is challenging to draw direct comparisons of SEND figures. However, when identifying SEMH specifically, Reeve rationalised that the best comparison is the 2014 numbers for children identified as having BESD. Reference to BESD and SEMH have been treated as comparable clientele for the purposes of this study.

According to Nasen (2017, 1), the recent policy change has had a profound influence on the future understanding and education of children with SEMH issues:

> The SEND Code of Practice 2015 has been the catalyst for the biggest changes in provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs (and now Disabilities too) in a generation.

There is now a changing national focus; the emphasis is not on behaviour in schools but, rather, on mental and emotional health. Behavioural difficulties have long been a label that has set many SEND students apart. A greater understanding of mental health issues is now influencing the changing education environment and an associated label (SEMH). However, the DfE (2016a), in their 'Behaviour and discipline in schools: advice for headteachers and school staff', puts forward different approaches for managing behaviour in schools. Significantly, it appears as though the DfE maintains its focus on behaviour despite the policy changes, only the responsibility has now shifted and is placed directly onto schools to manage. The DfE (2016a) stated that schools should consider their responsibility for the behaviour of young people and that they should identify disruptive behaviour in the light of unmet educational needs. To support their initiative, the DfE developed and distributed advice for school staff in 'Mental Health and Behaviours in Schools' (DfE, 2018a). Behaviour is viewed as a disruptive action, but it is acknowledged that it may be related to an underlying cause or mental health issue in addition to social difficulties. It further identified other behaviours including being withdrawn, anxious, depressed, or similar. The DfE acknowledged that schools find this area challenging and that they need to be able to support and manage disruption that may be related to an unmet mental health need. In essence, behaviour is considered an outward expression of an inner personal problem or concern. The 'mental health' classification is a recognition of, and a return to, a medical model which requires additional support for young people with SEMH issues (DoH and DfE, 2017) in schools.

The Children and Families Act 2014 replaced a SEND 'statement' with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). These plans were an attempt to provide combined support for students with SEND up to the age of 25. There has been ongoing concern over many years with regards to the conferring of 'labels' associated with supporting needs. Hargreaves, Hester and Mellor (1975) identified that teachers wrote reports based on their assumptions of pupil need. Aronson and Mettee (1968) shared an attribution theory which proposed that perceptions and interpretation of difficulties and behaviours could often be credited to individuals. They explained that behaviours and needs attributed to individuals can often be embraced by the individual, setting in

motion a self-fulfilling prophecy of enacting that which is ascribed to them. Kelly and Norwich (2004) recognised the dangers of ascribing perceived negative labels to young people as the label will often become part of the perception of themselves. Algraigray and Boyle (2017) identified that terms or labels used by societies play a fundamental role in subsequent stigma and discrimination. However, they concluded that the application of labelling theory provided support for students with SEND. Whilst Algraigray and Boyle (2017) did not go as far as Perry and Szalavitz (2017), who suggested a system of no labels, they did advocate for a softer approach. In Scotland, the practice of 'learning support' provides for student needs but does not directly identify the reason for this support.

In summary, SEND categorisation has identified the label of SEMH and the implication of the voice of students with SEMH issues that is the central focus of this study. The following sections will identify individual areas of SEMH concerns related to social, emotional, mental health and comorbidity matters.

2.3 Individual Areas of SEMH Concern

The main issues leading to the SEND and SEMH categorisation have been highlighted and explained in section 2.2. This section answers the question: 'What are the features of the SEMH category?' (SRQ: 2) and identifies individual areas of concern. Research that relates to the three elements that constitute SEMH and the interrelated factor of comorbidity will be discussed. The aim of this study is to listen to the voice of students, parents, and carers in identifying their interpretation and responses to their related SEMH challenges. The acronym SEMH relates to students who are identified as having social, emotional, and mental health difficulties. These difficulties are complex and will be discussed separately; however, they are interrelated and comorbid. Concerns will be highlighted with regards to the issues relating to each element of SEMH. The Childhood Local Data on Risks and Needs (CHLDRN, 2021) identified 100 indicators that explore types of risk for children in England. The purpose of this literature review is not to identify the full range of risks and disadvantages faced by children, but to highlight the many different factors that contribute to SEMH issues which affect children. The Children's Commissioner Childhood Vulnerability Report (2019a) estimated that there are approximately 2.3 million vulnerable children and that, within this group,

approximately 3 in 10 are currently receiving help through national programmes of support, whilst over half are invisible to services.

2.3.1 Social Aspects of SEMH Concerns

Schools play a critical part in shaping a child's identity. The history of school identifies how it has been used for the socialisation of children (Appendix 4). Teachers utilise labels that help to define student identity, although each student is a unique and multifaceted individual. Concern arises because labels and student conditions are 'ill-defined' and often not understood. Wearmouth (2017, p.191) stated that

> Interpretation of and responses to behaviour perceived as challenging or concerning at home and/or in school often generate a great deal of heated debate.

Appropriate social behaviour and the notion of anti-social behaviour is a matter of interpretation, as are the possible causes for behaviours that disrupt the perceived norm. Behaviourists state that behaviour is learnt, can be modified, and that students should 'own' their behaviours. This is based on the assumption that there is a conscious choice made by the student and that teachers understand and are capable of supporting individual needs. Perceived anti-social behaviours are open to interpretation and may be due to neurological disorders. Autism may cause barriers for communication, learning, and socialisation. Signs of autism are often not recognised or understood and consequently, an individual might not be referred and then diagnosed in preference to other diagnosed learning difficulties.

Issues related to families, the home environment, and the personal qualities of the parents are also often attributed to the failing of the individual in a social sense (Cole and Knowles, 2011). Students who are socially marginalised may also have associated issues. Much has been written about the grooming of vulnerable young people for gangs (Henshaw, 2018). Disaffected young people have been targeted and pressurised to transport drugs in 'county lines' crime (Speck, 2019). The need to be wanted and to be party to a social group can lead young people into gangs and the increase of knife crime. Brennan (2018) identified that weapon carrying is more driven by being involved in violence than a fear of past victimisation; cases can be made for both viewpoints. This study asks students, parents, and carers about their understanding of belonging, self-control, and the sense they make of the student's social world.

2.3.2 Emotional State of SEMH Concerns

Long (2004, p.68) observed that children's behaviour can only be achieved through an understanding of both their emotional needs and the context in which they are placed. He further explained that negative relational experiences in life can have a dramatic impact on a child's self-esteem. Cooper (1993a) recognised two main categories of difficulties: external and internal. External difficulties may present themselves as disruptive, anti-social, and confrontational behaviours, including disaffection (opposition to formal values), conduct disorder (aggressive and destructive), delinquency (lawbreaking), and oppositional defiance (disobedient attitude). Cornwall and Walter (2006, p.49) stated that these external difficulties can be 'attributed to environmental causes' such as family conflict, inconsistent care, and abuse in the form of excessive punishments.

The second category identified by Cooper (1993a) are internalising difficulties which manifest themselves in the form of truancy, anxiety, withdrawal, and selective or elective mutism. A defensive internal reaction by the child may result in different emotional reactions, including denial and escapism through such distractions as computer games. Cornwall and Walter (2006, p.50) identified substance misuse and anxiety that they attributed to negative or stressful social circumstances or life experiences. Many students exhibit these characteristics and reveal complex emotional challenges. It is not surprising that recent studies have reported on the effects of emotional health and related issues of self-harm (Iob, Steptoe and Fancourt, 2020), abuse, and neglect (Kumari, 2020).

Recognition of increasing emotional concerns in young people include anxiety and intense fears of specific situations. Students may experience phobias and panic disorders related to school. Attachment disorders can have a profound effect on young people and give an understanding of the insights of damaged relationships and the need for nurture and support. Casey (2015) highlighted the theory of attachment as identified by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) in a significant study. Attachment difficulties are increasingly being identified and are now of particular relevance when considering how it affects students' education.

2.3.3 Mental Health of SEMH Concerns

Mental health is the third aspect of the trio of SEMH difficulties. Young Minds (2019) stated that 1 in 8 children have a diagnosable mental health disorder. Half of all mental health issues manifest by the age of 14, with 75% by the age of 24. Cole and Knowles (2011, p.71) stated that 'Clearly many children with BESD have mental health problems and some have disorders' that take the form of: school phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, conduct disorder (CD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism (impaired social interaction), Tourette's syndrome (motor and vocal 'tics'), and anxiety. Depression includes depressed mood, depressive syndrome, and depressive disorder (psychiatric illness). Obsession with body image can often lead to eating disorders and anorexia. All these mental health disorders can lead to self-harm and/or suicide.

In 2011, the government announced investment in the area of mental health (DoH, 2011a), with 25 projects set to introduce therapeutic interventions in schools for students at risk of mental ill-health along with increasing investment in CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). 'No Health without Mental Health: a cross-government mental health strategy for people of all ages' was published to support personal well-being and the ability to manage personal care, stating:

> Good mental health and resilience are fundamental to our physical health, our relationships, our education, our training, our work and to achieving our potential. (DoH, 2011a, p.5)

In a supporting document entitled 'Talking Therapies', the Minister of State for Care Services stated:

> Following the recession, it is clear that we need to heal emotional wounds, which means that we are looking for a psychological recovery alongside our economic recovery. (DoH, 2011b, p.2)

The coalition government approach was to invest 400 million pounds over four years, starting in 2014/15, into 'talking therapies' (DoH, 2011b), with the aim of providing psychological therapies to treat anxiety disorders or depression in every adult that required it. Burstow (2011, p.2) reported that the government states 'Our ambition is to make the same step forward for children and young people as we have for adults'. The agenda for mental health is now very much coming to the fore with greater responsibilities being placed on education to manage this increasing

demand. Weare (2015) explained that schools have a responsibility, are part of the response, and need to have a clear awareness of the extent and nature of mental health problems. Indeed, it is clear that 'statistics on mental health problems are alarming' (Weare, 2015, p.2). At least 10% of children and young people are thought to suffer from issues such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, or other mental health conditions. Recently, the agenda on mental health of young people has come into focus (DoH and DfE, 2017). Plans are based on three key elements: a designated lead teacher in every school for mental health, help from new health support teams, and guaranteed help within four weeks. The role of education, specifically schools for SEMH issues, is now part of an integral partnership with the National Health Service (NHS).

The Therapeutic School has its own therapists and counsellors who, in addition to other mental health professionals, work with students and families to help understand mental health issues. Mental health concerns will often necessitate the involvement of Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Severe SEMH disorders are the responsibility of the GP working with CAMHS who can help through therapy and counselling, often with cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and the use of medication.

Bereavement and loss, especially when experienced at a young age, can have profound effects of unresolved grief and can cause long-term special educational needs. The deep distress caused by bereavement is often not determined or resolved and resources are not forthcoming (Costelloe, Mintz and Lee, 2020). Young Minds (2021) identified the multitude of emotions with regards to grief and loss, highlighting the support required for young people.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused major economic and social disruption worldwide producing a cocktail of risks and stresses. Such a seismic event has raised deep-seated issues of inequality and shown that the system does not have the capacity or flexibility to respond to mental health needs in a time of crisis. Brand (2020) reported that there has been a 50% rise in children being referred to care homes during the pandemic. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (2021) reported a rise in contact of over 50% compared to pre-lockdown figures.

2.3.4 Comorbidity

A paper by the Children's Commissioner (2019b) explored how a combination of risks can complicate and multiply concerns. Social, emotional, and mental health issues are highlighted as a 'toxic trio'. The Commissioner identified the specific combination of domestic violence/abuse, substance misuse problems, and mental health problems. This study recognised the issue of comorbidity as being one of real concern when educating students, especially those in the study cohort. Students are usually diagnosed with one disorder and possibly an associated disorder, but the complexity of individual cases are often not recognised or fully understood. There is a need to challenge the existing diagnoses of disorders in the context of potential comorbidity or multimorbidity, alongside other burdens that add to the complexity and uniqueness of the individuals in this study. Moran (2014) asserted that the problem with autism assessments for pupils is that they tend to provide a list of behaviours that could be symptoms of both ASD and significant attachment problems. Both are significant in education for SEMH issues. The 'Coventry Grid', developed by Coventry CAMHS team, produced a diagnostic tool which attempts to identify the differences between ASD and significant attachment problems using clinical knowledge and observations. Furthermore, dyslexia and ADHD is often comorbid alongside SEBD. Moran (2014) explained the issue of differential diagnosis in children who present with SEBD and subsequently SEMH. Moran stated that some of these children will be on the autism spectrum and some will not, their difficulties being attributed to attachment disorders (Bowlby, 1969) and associated problems. There will be children who will have multiple and complex issues, including both attachment problems and autism.

Some students may be far more complex than their initial diagnosis identifies. Although neuroscience is not part of the brief for this study, it is acknowledged that ongoing scientific research in this area will contribute to a greater understanding of SEMH difficulties. The increasing need for understanding child development and the biochemistry of the brain appears to warrant a greater association with health professionals, psychiatrists, and psychologists. Working in partnership, education staff could gain a greater understanding and knowledge of effective interventions and the support required.

Cooper (2004b) identified the biopsychosocial model as a useful way of explaining pupil behaviour development and child SEMH issues. Cooper described the biopsychosocial model thus:

- Bio is the genetic inheritance and imbalances in the body's biochemistry
- Psycho is the distorted thought patterns of emotional damage caused by abuse or neglect
- Social includes attachment difficulties and parental separation

The three elements continuously interact within the child and with the different environments in which children find themselves. Cole and Knowles (2011, p.47) stated that:

> Practitioners need to consider children's experience at home, at school among family, peers and professionals and both inside and outside themselves.

Cooper, Smith and Upton (1994) clarified that there was a need to take into account all the factors that make up the child's world in their research study. A key component of this perspective is that positive change in one part of the child's ecosystem can have a positive effect in the other areas. Cole and Knowles (2011, p.48) stated that, in light of recent scientific research, 'People are clearly products of both nature and nurture in constant interaction'. Temperament, aptitude, and behaviour are influenced by inherited family traits going back generations. Genes are likely to explain speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN).

In summary, this section has investigated the complex concept of SEMH. The literature has identified several areas of concern facing students.

2.4 Exclusions and the Risk of Exclusion

This research will provide evidence and exploration of the barriers facing students who are at risk of exclusion. It will seek to answer the question: 'What is the significance of the risk of exclusion to students?' (SRQ: 3). It will contribute to the established knowledge base with regards to what is already known about the problems associated with exclusion (Paget et al., 2018). Through the perceptions of students and their parents and carers, the research was analysed within the wider context of literature relating to the risk of exclusion. Cooper et al. (2000, p.9) observed that:

> Exclusion from school is the active process of barring or shutting out the pupil from the activities that take place within the premises.

They also recognised a broader concern as the concept of exclusion can be considered a central human rights issue due to the loss of statutory education entitlement. Cooper et al. (2000) referred to the Education Reform Act 1988 that defines the purpose of education as for the development of all students. Furthermore, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) asserted that every child has a right to education. Cooper et al. (2000, p.6) affirmed that LAs are required, by law, to provide education when a school placement cannot be secured. However, in practice, this may only entail home tuition for a few hours a week. Home education or Education Otherwise (EO, 2019) is education that takes place in the home and may be viewed as a positive alternative to school-based education. However, for many parents and carers, it is seen as a last resort, often perceived as students having been abandoned by the LA either on a temporary or permanent basis.

There is a growing concern, especially in England, that there is a trend change with regards to exclusion from schools. Government statistics show that the overall rate of permanent exclusions across all state-funded primary, secondary, and special schools has increased since 2012/13, following a downward trend from 2006/07 when the rate was 0.12% (12 pupils per 10,000). Since 2012/13, permanent exclusions have been rising: to 0.07% of pupil enrolments in 2014/15 (DfE, 2016c), to 0.08% in 2015/16 (DfE, 2017c), and to 0.10% in 2016/17 (DfE, 2018c). Figures show that this trend has plateaued in 2017/18 (DfE, 2019c); however, fixed-term exclusions continue to follow an upward trend (DfE, 2019c). This has been a concerning trend since the effects of exclusion have proved to be long lasting. Each of these students had their own stories to tell and all with considerable personal problems (Walsh, 2017). Hayden (1997) identified that excluded children experienced personal, school, and family difficulties. These difficulties included low self-esteem, few or no friends, and behavioural issues. The act of exclusion brings anxiety, feelings of rejection, isolation, helplessness, and no direction. Their families often experienced relationship problems, violence, abuse, family trauma, illness, and bereavement. A policy document entitled ‘Excellence for All Children’ (DfEE, 1997) acknowledged that exclusions may often be a symptom of unmet pupil need.

Of the most vulnerable excluded children, government statistics (DfE, 2017c) show that 60% of the total students excluded in 2015/16 have SEND which will have an impact on their learning. There is a large body of research on exclusion and its long-term impact. However, there are challenges that surround the understanding and impact of exclusion, including conducting research in this area. Cole and Knowles (2011) identified a relationship between government policy and the increase in school exclusions in the 1990s with the introduction of the National Curriculum (NC). They stated that the 'resulting practice would seem to have contributed in part to the four-fold increase in the numbers of school exclusions in the 1990s' (2011, p.38). By 1999, there was an acceptance that 14–19-year-olds needed the NC to be modified to allow for a broader and more vocational education. It is this broadening of the curriculum that provides the opportunity for alternative forms of education to serve the best interests of the pupil. Exclusion from one system of education may lead to inclusion in another. Cooper et al. (2000, p.9) identified that 'the process of inclusion ... will also involve the dismantling or reshaping of work already done by the exclusionary process'. Lady Warnock (Warnock, Terzi and Norwich, 2010) revisited her report on special educational needs (The Warnock Report, 1978) and on the inclusionary Education Act 1981, sharing her regret that some children with SEN who were subsequently educated in mainstream schools had experienced a painful kind of exclusion. Cole and Knowles (2011) explained that exclusion levels remained high in 2010:

> ……indicating that either more children were pushing teachers beyond reasonable limits or that schools had become less tolerant places for students labelled disruptive.

The increase in the number of exclusions in recent years may also be identified in the context of policy changes. Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009, p.14) revealed four recent phenomena that brought about change:

- the introduction of national tests for 7-, 11-, and 14-year-olds in addition to GCSEs for 16-year-olds
- the publication of league tables regarding the results of these tests
- the publication of inspection reports from the newly formed Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)
- increasing financial independence and autonomy for schools

Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009, p.15) stated that the pressure to improve school rankings ‘led to a conflict of interest’. They explained that the pressure to select successful exam candidates corresponded with the pressure to exclude those who threatened that success.

The introduction of Academy Schools appears to have exacerbated the difficulties for SEND learners. An Academy receives its funding directly from the government and is accountable to the Department of Education (DfE). It has the freedom to adjust the curriculum and develop its own pathway, although it remains subject to DfE guidance on safeguarding, exclusions, admissions, and SEND. However, Evans (2010, p.19) stated that students are nearly 10 times more likely than others to be permanently excluded and Academies were described as permanently excluding at almost twice the rate of local authority maintained secondary schools. Furthermore, Adams (2018) reported that 19,000 students who were in year 10 in 2016 had vanished from the school roll by the start of year 11, prior to sitting their GCSE exams. This ‘off rolling’ practice has been used to prevent GCSE results being compromised and affecting school performance league tables. Adams (2018) explained that half of the students reported dropped out of school altogether, whilst others reappeared on school rolls elsewhere. Britain’s Invisible Kids (HCEC, 2019b) identified that many of the 60,000 school-aged young people who are out of school are not being monitored by education. Local Authorities now only keep a register of children who are withdrawn from public education. Children who have never been to school are not required to be registered. The Children’s Commissioner (2019b) deemed this a national concern, suggesting that all children who are unknown and invisible to their respective Local Authorities should be placed on a register. Furthermore, for those registered in school, there is a need to develop a flexible system whereby a curriculum according to individual student need can be presented and utilised for the most vulnerable children. The serious nature of juvenile disengagement and students at risk of exclusion is compounded by exclusions from school (Walsh, 2017). Mession and Jones (2015) and Davies and Ryan (2018) identified how students perceive the challenges they face when they are off-rolled and have to change school. Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) recognised that exclusions have a powerful effect on young people’s lives and their mental health.

2.4.1 Students at Risk of Exclusion

Trotman, Tucker and Martyn (2015) recognised that social, emotional, and mental health difficulties in students may lead to instability and exclusion from school. Walther and Fox (2012) observed that schools are credited for creating, shaping, and developing negative stories. A development of the Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009) study is their use of chaos theory. They established an understanding of unstable systems, developing a theory of complex systems as they relate to the instability of child behaviour. Evidence is provided for the connection between instability and permanent exclusion from secondary school. Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009, p.19) identified a range of risk factors ordinarily linked with those who are excluded from school which also includes home life. Parent relationships and well-being are prominent risk factors in addition to SEN children's personal difficulties. School life is also identified as possibly increasing instability for students. Current educational practices that are designed to support children with difficulties could, in reality, be compounding the issue. These practices include increased adult support, being removed for support, and the differing expectations of the adults and agencies involved. In fact, agency responses can cause instability as health professionals including family doctors, school nurses, educational psychologists, and CAMHS can vary in their diagnoses and recommendations for treatment. Social workers can act rationally and identify problems within the child, home, and school but frame the response within someone else's field. The cases can be passed on and may not reach a satisfactory conclusion, in effect causing increased anxiety and instability.

Disruptive behaviour, physical assault, threatening behaviour, and verbal abuse are identified by Paget et al. (2018) as the major reasons for exclusion from school, along with drugs, alcohol, damage to property, theft, and bullying. Solomon (2009, p.33) argued that less obvious, but very powerful, influences lie behind school exclusion. Solomon cited Klein (1946) and a theory related to containment and the need to contain fragmented anxieties, ordinarily through a supportive adult. There is an ability to either tolerate anxieties or move towards a paranoid-schizoid position. Solomon argued that schools may not tolerate the animosity engendered by some students; they are unwilling to provide the appropriate resources in support and simply want to dispense with who they perceive as the problem. Furthermore, Steiner (1985) stated that society

often wishes to disregard and ‘turn a blind eye’ to the difficulties of vulnerable groups. Students associating with groups in danger of being excluded can be made invisible by staff in schools. Solomon (2009, p.42) identified the PRU as a secure base which provides the containment and help required by students and their families. He stated that ‘Exclusion is complicated……the capacity to tolerate and even embrace complexityis crucial to finding effective ways to make a positive impact….’ Solomon concluded that:

> …...emotional and psychic integration understanding is severely threatened when unconscious social pressure pull towards judging, splitting and evacuation. what underpins education …..

The challenge is to establish and maintain contained and containing spaces whereby anxieties can be managed (Bowlby, 1982). Winnicott (1971) spoke about a space for the child to think. The implication is to recognise that there should be appropriate placements that meet the needs of young people. Cooper (2005) emphasised that society needs to initiate engagement with young people offering containment, understanding, hope, and the possibility of transforming lives. In order to meet the diverse and ever-changing needs of students, it is vital that they are able to access a range of opportunities. Sheffield and Morgan (2017) identified that, by investigating the educational needs of students with SEMH issues and seeking their views on this subject, schools can provide teaching that is both relevant and engaging. In so doing, students will not find themselves at risk of exclusion and will have an educational experience that they consider to be of worth and valuable for their futures. Recognising the means of engaging those disengaged students who were at risk of exclusion was a worthwhile contribution to this research.

2.4.2 Parents, Carers, and Exclusion

Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009, p.31) warned that ‘The factors involved in exclusion from school are complex’. Daniels et al. (2003) focused on the exclusion of the child, the process of exclusion, and parents’ views with regards to how things could be improved, or exclusion avoided. Flitcroft and Kelly (2016) and Craggs (2016) also highlighted the fact that it is important to listen to parents’ insights into managed moves. However, Walsh (2017) observed that little appears to be known about the stories of parents and their children with challenging behaviour. She emphasised the lack of research in exploring parental narratives about their children with challenging behaviour

that has led to their permanent exclusion from school. Significant research (Grey-Elsharif, 2010; Broomhead, 2013) identified the need to understand parents' perspectives. However, there is a literature gap of parents' narratives of their children with SEMH issues who are at risk of being permanently excluded from school. This exploration gives parents and carers the opportunity to share their stories along with the students themselves. By the time students are at risk of exclusion, the relationship with the school has often broken down with the pupil, parents, and carers feeling that they do not have a voice (Walsh, 2017). Waters (2014) also recognised that parents and carers may feel that they are not listened to or supported by professionals. Creating opportunities for communication and mediation would enable students, parents, and carers to be heard so that students can be understood and remain in education or engage in a positive transition.

In summary, this section has explored student exclusion and the many barriers that students, parents, and carers face in this regard.

2.5 Voice of Students with SEMH issues: Research Themes

The question is posed: 'How do students perceive school?' (SRQ: 4). The answer can be found in a range of voice literature of SEMH issues that is based within several different educational contexts (Casey, 2015). Given the disparities of time, location, and the context of provisions, the commonalities in the emerging themes are very similar. Students routinely discuss very similar issues. Three significant studies presented by Cooper (1993a), Pomeroy (1999), and Wise (2000) contended that study on SEMH issues should involve an exploration of all factors and the interrelationship between these factors in order to better understand students' difficulties. Prominent and consistently related themes that have emerged from the voice literature related to students with SEMH issues will be reviewed as: School Environment, Learning Difficulties, Behaviour, Teachers, Peers and Bullying, and Family Life. The relevance of each of these themes will be discussed in the above order.

School Environment

A study by Wise (2000) revealed the subjective views of students who recognised a fear of the physical size and nature of the school buildings, school transition, and feeling unsafe in large classes. Wise (2000, p.26) explained further:

> The results presented ……. offer powerful support to currently developing beliefs that school themselves may actually contribute to students' problems.

The students interviewed perceived their mainstream school as contributing to their difficulties. Wise explained that too much focus on school effectiveness at that time may be overshadowing other significant factors. Due to the increasing complexity of students with SEMH issues, it was acknowledged that their different needs were not being met in mainstream settings, resulting in disaffection and a perception that school is not a good place to be (Cooper, 1993a).

Learning Difficulties

Research reveals that learning difficulties can be supported by positive relationships, understanding, and providing an appropriate curriculum. Wise (2000, p.48) identified that students want teachers to find the time to listen and get to know them as well as teach them. Wise explained that some students judged teachers based on their ability to meet their individual special needs. Unfortunately, students often felt let down and unsupported, often had support removed, and felt that they had no voice (Maddern, 2012). Staff members who were identified as supportive were those who found time to communicate, build relationships, and demonstrate real understanding of student issues. Wise described an appropriate and successful curriculum (2000, p.60) as one that considers all the wide-ranging needs of the student: social, emotional, and any mental health implications. The key to understanding these students is based on supportive diagnosis of their needs, as discussed in section 2.2. Other themes related to student learning were pupil resilience (Hart, 2013), motivation (Solomon and Rogers, 2001), and opportunities for participation (McCluskey et al., 2013).

Behaviour

Wise (2000, p.11) observed that the problems associated with students are diverse and, as such, the approaches and interventions utilised need to be eclectic and in accordance with individual needs. Wise (2000, p.12) stated that ‘Studying behaviour is certainly a complex task!’. Behaviours that are more commonly identified within school are the displays of outward conflict and anti-social activities. Behaviours, however, are identified as a manifestation of inner feelings and may be an objection to co-operate in the case of school refusers. A student’s personal reality is subjective and different interpretations construct their own views of life. Throughout this exploration, students were asked about their thoughts which may be the nearest and clearest insight into their

mind and behaviours. Students can often describe their behaviours but clarifying the reasons and motivations for them is often more difficult.

Teachers and Teaching

It is clear that no two students are the same and that students can also present with several different complexities. It is also clear that no two teachers are the same and that each has their own character and experience. The challenge for both teachers and students is to develop and sustain a relationship that facilitates an effective teaching and learning experience. There is an old adage that states 'if they do not learn the way you teach then teach the way they learn'. This assumes a degree of flexibility on the teacher's behalf as they identify how the student learns. Pomeroy (1999) and Hajdukova (2014) recognised that the student-teacher relationship is key to effective education. In Pomeroy's (1999) study, students identified both positive and negative perceptions of teachers, often referring to the same teacher. Wise (2000, p.39) stated that 'When describing in school factors which had either created or added to their difficulties, their teachers frequently took criticism and blame'. Wise explained that the pupil-teacher relationship is often identified as determining the behaviour of students with SEMH difficulties and their success in school. A consistent issue that is frequently described is the nature and success of the discipline and control techniques used by teachers (Osler, 2000; McCluskey, 2005). Teachers' personal control, shouting, consistency, judgement, and sense of humour are often questioned. Students often feel that they are singled out and negative relationships can considerably affect their attitudes and behaviour. Positive relationships, however, can significantly benefit students as they feel supported, respected, and having their individual needs met. Pomeroy (1999) identified that the greatest concern shared by excluded students was problematic relationships with teachers. It is an important factor in a pupil's perspective with regards to their own individual value and has a profound influence on their education. Pomeroy (1999) further identified that the hierarchy framework in schools amplifies certain imbalances and allows for staff members to occupy a privileged position within the adult-child construct. Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) outlined six principles, identified by students, that influence student-teacher relationships: respect, fairness, autonomy, challenge, support, and security. Pomeroy (1999) referred to these criteria in the creation of an ideal-model of the student-teacher relationship. Cole (2015) identified that the key for students is having 'link workers' who can provide

an effective interface with stakeholders. The Children's Commissioner has since focused on the needs of vulnerable children (2019a), safeguarding (2019b), advocacy for children (2019c), the need to improve outcomes (2021a), to listen to children with the 'Big Ask' (2021b), and to provide professional advocacy (2021c) thereby improving support and creating a joined-up vision. OOSTEP mentors are 'go-betweens' and advocates for students, parents, and carers. They are champions who advocate for and on behalf of students (Bradley-Levine, 2021). The literature illustrates that student-teacher relationships are central to a healthy education experience and can improve pupil outcomes.

Peers in and outside school

Social interaction with peers cultivates friendships which provide both care and support, but it may also encompass a variety of actions that can be identified as bullying. Wise (2000, p.64) acknowledged that bullying does not only occur in schools. It can involve both physical and mental abuse. Students are often identified as non-conforming with regards to their behaviour and are thus perceived as being different. A few are seen to be victimised, some carry a reputation as a bully, and then there are those who are both. Negative behaviours between peers and within peer groups is often identified in school and may lead to anti-social behaviours out of school. However, Pomeroy's (1999) study also identified that home life involving out-of-school criminal activity was a significant and problematic factor that influenced a student's school life.

Family Life

Wise (2000, p.85) quoted studies from Charlton and David (1979) with regards to the influence of families and life outside school on students' schooling. Wise (2000) gave students the opportunity to discuss anything out of school that had affected their school life and behaviour. The significance of family relationships, support, abuse, and conflicting goals and values in addition to the loss of a parent and/or sibling, whether through death or family separation, cannot be underestimated. Wise (2000, p.100) stated that 'The pupil's own perceptions suggest that the influence of a pupil's family, socioeconomic and sociocultural background on their behaviour is an important consideration'. As a teacher-practitioner, engaging in a positive relationship with the family is the most significant factor in gaining support for an education programme for students with SEMH difficulties. However, Wise (2000, p.101) identified that:

> Each individual pupil obviously presents a unique combination of factors; of varying significance, which could be used to explain behaviour. To ignore any

possible factors and focus solely on the family and related issues would be oversimplifying the problem.

The whole essence of Wise's (1999) study entitled 'Listen to Me!' is to listen and reflect on the student voice. Cooper (1993a) recognised that both internal and external factors influence students' learning or lack of engagement. Both Cooper and Wise proposed that all factors identified by the student voice should be included when discussing related SEMH needs.

In summary, this section identifies and details the impact of school-related elements on the existing complex nature of the student with SEMH issues. School Research Themes specifies how six important elements of school life may have a significant impact on students. The six themes identified in this section are comparable to Cooper's (1993) study and supported by Pomeroy (1999) and Wise (2000).

2.6 Alternative Provision (AP)

Alternative education provision (AP) has been identified as an alternative to schooling (Morley, 1991; Evans, 2011; Ward, 2013). Alternative education, also known as non-traditional education or educational alternative (Ward, 2013), includes a number of approaches to teaching and learning, excluding mainstream or traditional education. There are various styles and methods of pedagogy that can also be termed 'alternative'. The word 'alternative' denotes an element of choice, an option that may be substantially different from the common or prevailing practice. Morley (1991, p.1) took this a step further by stating that 'Alternative education is a perspective, not a procedure or program'. Morley (1991, p1) indicated that there are many ways to become educated, explaining that there is a need to 'provide a variety of structures and environments such that each person can find one that is sufficiently comfortable to facilitate progress'. Bentley (1998) argued that, in an increasingly complex society, effective education will have to extend beyond the classroom, using a broader range of resources: cultural, social, financial, and physical. Alternative education projects from the UK were reviewed by Bentley (1998, p.29) and it was suggested that they represented 'the seeds' of a new approach.

To place the research question in the context of 'How do students perceive AP and

therapeutic provisions?' (SRQ: 5), it would first be useful to identify how the government perceives AP and its future today, especially in light of the call to urgent action by Taylor (2012).

2.6.1 Government response to AP

Following the 2011 riots, Charlie Taylor, the Government's Expert Adviser on Behaviour, was asked to conduct a review on 'Improving Alternative Provision' (Taylor, 2012). This review's main aim was to consider existing provision and make recommendations for improving the outcomes of those vulnerable children, recognised as the education 'underclass'. It stated that 'If we fail to give them a first-class education, then as the events of last summer (2011) showed we will all pay a heavy price' (Taylor, 2012, p.3). As part of his evidence, Taylor used the Ofsted (2011) survey that evaluated the use of off-site alternative provision. This survey considered the key components in what makes alternative provision successful and examined some of the current issues associated with its use. A considerable amount of work with regards to AP had previously been carried out as is suggested by the literature and the events acknowledged in Appendix 5. Ofsted (2011, p.2) concluded that: 'Alternative provision is a largely uninspected and unregulated sector'. Taylor identified a flawed national system that failed to provide suitable education and proper accountability. Teather (2012, p.18) explained that 'there is a wider piece of work that looks at how we can improve the provision'.

'Unlocking Talent and Fulfilling Potential' (DfE, 2017a), some five years after Taylor's report, identified once more that AP was to be transformed. The report sought to identify best practice and evidence the most effective interventions in these settings. DfE (2017a, p.7) stated:

> This plan is an important step forward – a targeted response to begin to direct effort and resource towards the places and people where it is most needed to unlock talent and fulfil potential.

However, the DfE (2017a) stated that this plan is only an important first step in a long-term process and past discussions are only part of possible future developments. Just one year later, the House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC, 2018) identified that there are numerous frailties in the present system that need rectifying:

> Alternative provision is too often seen as a forgotten part of the education system …… too many pupils are failed by the system and they are not receiving the education that they deserve.

Notwithstanding a great deal of discussion regarding the way in which AP can support student needs and transition, it was acknowledged by the DfE (2018b, p.4) that there remains a lack of evidence and announced grants to fund innovation in this area. The intent is for the Innovation Fund to run for two academic years from September 2018 to July 2020. The aims are school reintegration where possible and improvement of education outcomes. To enable a programme to be delivered, the DfE (2019a) submitted 'A guide to new alternative provision free school' for proposer groups interested in applying to set up alternative provision free schools or special free schools. The government is still unsure about AP on three counts:

1. Limited evidence on the most effective methods to improve the outcomes for children.
2. Uncertainty as to why some commissioners and providers achieve better outcomes in comparison to others.
3. Uncertainty as to why effective practice is not systematically captured and shared in order to improve performance across the entire education system.

The guiding principle of the new Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2019b) is to bring about improvement in education provision. The changes are likely to appeal to AP as there is a much clearer focus on the individual needs of the student and their personal development within education.

2.6.2 Research on Improving AP

In response to government concerns, there have been noteworthy research projects directed at excluded and students with SEMH issues. Following the Labour government's 2008 White Paper 'Back on Track: A strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people' (DCSF, 2008), one such project commenced in April 2009. White, Martin and Jeffes (2012) stated that the project's aim was to transform the quality of alternative education for those who are either excluded from school or are unable to attend for some other reason. The 12 innovative projects incorporated a variety of contexts and provisions. White, Martin and Jeffes (2012, p.4) stated that the

Back on Track pilots

> …… provide valuable learning that may contribute to the evolution and improvement of alternative provision for the most vulnerable young people in, at the margins of, or excluded from mainstream education.

A four-year Ofsted study (2016) reported on the impact of an exclusion project and the use of AP provision. Significant success was reported in students' attendance, motivation, behaviour, progress, achievement, work-based skills, potential employability, and progression to further education, training, or work. Some alternative provisions are in place for students aged 14-16 who are deemed at risk of exclusion and is an alternative to permanent exclusion. Ofsted (2016, p.43) particularly mention that:

> …..some students with social and emotional difficulties benefit from effective alternative provision. Almost all go on to further education, training or work after Year 11.

However, it appears that Ofsted has inadvertently highlighted a major concern: the ending of alternative provision for many students aged just 16. Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) emphasised that transition at 16 is a genuine concern for many students.

2.6.3 Future AP

A number of possible models for school-organised AP provision have been proposed. Back in 1998, Bentley envisioned future AP opportunities:

> The vision implies that schools will progressively transform themselves to become the hubs of learning networks, centres of learning excellence. (1998, p.183)

Akoh et al. (2007) identified a flagship model that embraces satellite APs within a local area. The responsibility for the students remains with the flagship school whilst working in partnership with several APs. Other models have been suggested but are often discounted because hub members lack the necessary resources and expertise to organise an AP hub. A pilot hub was proposed by Downing et al. (2007) that was based on a philosophy of individualised, personal programmes and a syndicate of partnership working. Through networking in a particular area, a range and depth of alternative provision was organised. There is literature that promotes local collaborative AP initiatives. A report by O'Shaughnessy (2012) highlighted 'academy chains' as a new

form of organisation that had emerged over the last 10 years in the English school system. It is claimed that economies of scale suggest that school or academy chains are more effective than single academies or schools. O'Shaughnessy (2012, p.8) stated that, even with the proposed changes, 'chains cannot meet the underperformance challenge alone'. The recommendation is that the Department for Education needs to build on the existing strategy using academy chains and 'other good quality education providers'. Dearing's (1994, p.38) review of 14-19 education had identified that 'links with more adult environments of a local further education college may also be motivating'.

2.6.4 Commissioning

Teather (2012, p.18) reported that 'alternative provision is extremely patchy at the moment' and that it is 'in a new world, where schools are commissioning that provision'. Keeping students in compulsory education within an education system often requires collaborative working. There are significant strategies developed by mainstream schools in their effort to provide for students at risk of exclusion. AP is often organised through a consortium of schools or a partnership arrangement. A school exclusion trial incorporating 300 schools took place between 2011 and 2014 (DfE, 2012a). The trial, organised by the DfE, enabled schools to receive funding and retain responsibility for the education of students that they permanently excluded. Taylor (2012), rather prematurely, seized upon the ongoing trial to make some recommendations in his review following the 2011 riots (refer to section 1.2), enabling a response to government concerns with regards to alternative education. Taylor (2012, p.11) recommended 'that over the mid-term LA's should work with schools to begin to devolve the funding they currently use for this purpose to schools'. The schools were also to provide creative and individualised intervention programmes for their retained students and to work at a local level in commissioning alternative provision. Taylor (2012, p.11) made a further, highly significant, recommendation from the exclusion trial; namely, that it should be the responsibility of schools to commission AP and PRU services rather than LAs. LAs, with their reduced budgets, were identified only as the possible providers of training and support for this process (DfE, 2012b). As a result, the role of LAs would be greatly diminished.

Commissioning expertise was identified as a major concern for many hubs. Sodha and Guglielmi (2009, p.18) stated that commissioning:

> is a highly skilled job spanning needs analysis, strategy design, partnership, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and project management.

Davies and Davies (2012) shared their concerns with regards to commissioning services for SEN. A report on APs states that commissioning of alternative provision by schools and Local Authorities was of critical importance. The report called for the use of effective dialogue between commissioners and providers to ensure co-ordinated working (White, Martin and Jeffes, 2012, p.iv). New commissioning expertise is warranted in order to bridge the gap between AP supply and SEND demand.

In summary, it is clear that there are growing disparities between national policy, LAs, and schools in addition to discrepancies between their roles. Education is caught between competing independent and public sectors. After much research into AP, the government (DfE, 2019a) still has ongoing concerns regarding AP and commissioning, effective practice, and outcomes for children. Policy has been revised; Academies and free schools have been given more autonomy over their budgets. However, the responsibility and accountability for students and resourcing has not followed and instead remains with the LA. LAs still have the legal responsibility to organise and implement AP but without the necessary resources to do so. The DfE's (2019a) response is to place the responsibility on the LA strategic plan and, ultimately, on the individual AP as they are incorporated into the school system as AP free schools. This would negate the prevailing advice with regards to commissioning, responsibility for excluded students, and much needed support for co-ordinating AP provision. The research will strive to identify the effects of AP on learners with SEMH issues. There are more questions to ask than can be answered in this area of AP. The multifaceted and complex nature of the student with SEMH issues is now faced with new and different challenges of AP in the future. The choice of alternative therapeutic provision has been investigated as a further possible option.

2.7 The Alternative Therapeutic Provision

Therapeutic schools are considered as an alternative type of school. They provide a different ethos and purpose when compared with mainstream schools. The Therapeutic

School has an ethos of care, therapy, and education; it is a school that assesses and supports the needs of the most vulnerable students. Many publications advocate for therapeutic practice. Most do not relate directly to education and only a small number allude to being based on any form of research other than observations. There are few references made to methodologies used for obtaining and then analysing information or data.

The history of therapeutic schools is often shaped out of the vision of an individual entrepreneur or charismatic figure. However, shared common values concerning the treatment of students can be identified. Bridgeland (1971) identified the individual pioneering work of Neil, Lyman and Wills who rejected the rigidity and authoritarianism of state schooling. Dawson (1981) described the common values they share as the 'four pioneer tenets'. These principles include the showing of unconditional positive regard, rights to free expression, the importance of self-discipline and shared responsibility, and the understanding of treatments. The local interpretation and implementation of these principles varied according to the needs and purpose of the individual organisation. Seed (1992) wrote about a therapeutic approach that can be compared to The Therapeutic School in this study. David and Valery Dean founded Raddery School in 1979, an independent residential special school for emotionally damaged young people. David Smith founded The Therapeutic School in this study in 1975 for similar SEND students like those attending Raddery. Seed described Raddery School as providing 'a healing and learning environment' (1992, p.33) and developing a structure that is consistent with the healing process (McLaughlin, 2008). This is recognised by Seed (1992, p.33) as the core of what is meant by a therapeutic community. The philosophy at Raddery is child–focused and involves listening to children's needs (Cheminais, 2008), showing empathy (Dadds, 2008), and providing a protective environment (Aguilar and Retamal, 2009). Similarly, The Therapeutic School provides a comparable focus on a safe place for care, therapy, and education. The students in this study often exhibit extreme behaviours and need a special environment. Rose (2002) discussed those children and adolescents who are 'at the extreme end of a spectrum of disturbed functioning' and who are identified as 'often inattentive, hyperactive, disruptive and confrontational'. Rose (2002, p.185) stated that the therapeutic environment provided 'a place of hope and healing'.

2.7.1 Defining Therapeutic Communities

The definition of ‘therapeutic communities’ (TC) has been difficult to establish. Lees et al. (2004, p.280) stated that the early literature on British therapeutic communities involved ‘descriptive, usually single case studies and written by therapeutic community practitioners themselves, rather than rigorous evaluations’. Kasinski (2003) and Whiteley (2004) further identified the early innovative work that inspired educational communities. It has been suggested that the Second World War directly brought about the birth of the therapeutic community (Harrison 2000), although the term ‘therapeutic community’ was not applied directly to residential work with children until the 1960s. Rapoport’s (1960) classifications were regarded as TC criteria to be achieved and standards to be maintained. Lees et al. (2004) stated that Rapoport’s seminal work identified four themes that were seen to ‘broadly encompass the distinctive elements of the unit’s ideology’, namely:

- Democratisation - A degree of independent thought and functioning
- Permissiveness – A safe but free process of self-expression both in words and action without being destructive to self or others. In other words, a protected but non-controlling process.
- Communalism – A collective process of living, learning and working with each other.
- Reality confrontation – A process of living and learning from each other that encourages honest and sometimes direct feedback behaviours.

Adherence to these four ‘principles’ could be viewed as the defining features of a therapeutic community. Post-Rapoport, research continued to include descriptive work written by the therapeutic community practitioners themselves. It is only in more contemporary literature that more rigorous evaluations can be found. These may have been inspired by Rapoport’s earlier work in this field.

Cooper (1993a) argued that whilst the development of a behavioural approach has its merits, it should be substituted in favour of more systemic approaches. Cooper highlighted the importance of a systemic approach; it is child-centred and, as such, it brings the perceptions and insights of the individual to the fore. Cole and Knowles (2011, p.24) recognised Cooper as a skilled practitioner in identifying the relevance of ‘key factors that are crucial in easing children’s BESD’. The key factors identified in Cooper’s residential study are the 3 Rs: ‘respite’ from school, ‘relationships’ with others,

and ‘re-signification’. These are recognised as key components of student support in a therapeutic education setting. Cole and Knowles explained that ‘re-signification’, a sociological term, facilitates social and emotional stability and helps students to establish an optimistic view for future achievement.

2.7.2 Growing Therapeutic Influences

Manning (1989, p.49) identified key literature pertaining to TCs and cited 21 relevant titles ‘of books explicitly centred on the area’ between 1970 and his 1989 publication. Since the late 1990s, there has been an active debate amongst the staff of TCs with regards to their ethos and essence; there was some trepidation that agreement to a process of accreditation would contradict its main principles or risk losing its essence altogether. There were also concerns relating to the applicability of the TC way of working. Different types of TC have generated varying amounts and quality of research. Although there are general principles that apply to TCs, there is a great deal of diversity within the TC movement. The practical application of the principles may result in vastly different communities. Despite the fact that children and adolescents are the focus group in this study, there is much to learn from other groups: community care (Tucker, 2002), the prison service (Woodward, 2002), nursing (Byrt, 2002), and hospitals including areas of specific care such as schizophrenia (Pullen, 2002). These areas have all been bolstered by increased research, but TC literature education was being left behind.

A growing debate has arisen over the impact of therapy culture (Furedi, 2003) within education as highlighted by Ecclestone and Hayes (2003). They observed the effect of therapeutic education on the subject of what is being taught in schools and on the subject of the learner. The preoccupation with therapy is identified as a distraction, one that interferes with what they consider to be the real purpose of education. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) went further when they argued that the subject of the individual was devalued and diminished by encouraging therapeutic support in mainstream school education. However, programmes that promote resilience (Coleman, 2015) and sharing the support of nurture groups (Colley, 2009; Kirk, 2017) have been identified as having educational value. The recent changes in the school curriculum (Ofsted, 2019b) that focus on student well-being underscores the ongoing debate with regards to the

encroachment of therapy culture into education. Less resistance was identified for school-based art therapies for SEMH issues (Cobbett, 2016) and therapeutic responses for at-risk and disengaged students (Fish, 2017). Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) argued that it was the overriding infiltration of a therapeutic culture that they objected to rather than the work of therapists and the treatment of very damaged and vulnerable individuals who are regulated in therapeutic schools.

2.7.3 Therapeutic Standards for Education

Lees (2004) appealed for more complexity and sophistication in identifying factors within the therapeutic education regime. Lees (2004, p.220) stated that a 'more complex range of measures identifying change' would assist in identifying the contribution of TCs and 'teasing out which aspects of the regime are affecting outcomes' for clients. Educational TCs now have a set of tools that they can utilise in demonstrating that their work is based on the core values using the 'Core Standards' and the 'Self Review'. Haigh (2002, p.246) attempted to define and characterise the qualities that constitute a TC. He identified 'five universal qualities' for TCs and believed that these were 'ingredients of a therapeutic culture'. These qualities include attachment, containment, communication, involvement, and agency. Haigh stated that these five principles 'are what lie behind the establishment and maintenance of a psychosocial environment that holds, heals and empowers' (2002, p.247).

In 2005, the Community of Communities (C of C) was awarded a Big Lottery grant to develop the network to include TCs for the following: children, young people, addictions, and people with learning disabilities. Previously, different therapeutic organisations were working with different philosophies and had varying structures. However, since 2008, these organisations under the C of C banner have developed a set of Core Standards. O'Sullivan and Paget (2009, p.3) identified what they considered to be the key characteristics of a TC:

> Therapeutic communities provide an integrated, planned environment with clear boundaries, close relationships and open resolution of problems, tensions and conflicts. Daily life is filled with purposeful tasks – therapeutic, domestic, organisational, educational – and there is a shared commitment to the goal of learning from the experience of living and/or working together.

Community of Communities (2010) explained that the C of C is 'a standards-based

quality improvement programme' and that it engages TCs in service evaluation and quality improvement. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has a particular interest in evidence-based research issues related to mental health problems and accredits associated training and qualifications for TCs. However, the following question arises: if a therapeutic school fails to provide for the needs of vulnerable students, what is the alternative?

2.7.4 Out-of-School Therapeutic Education

In response to the needs of disengaged students, The Therapeutic School offers alternative education. The proposal, as described in section 1.3, offers full-time education in the form of OOSTEP. The purpose of OOSTEP is to re-engage the disengaged and mainstream school refusers in education and give them hope for the future. Studies that illustrate pupil voice for students with SEMH issues in therapeutic schools have been identified (Cornwall and Walter, 2006). However, despite an extensive search, no research for student voice in out-of-school therapeutic education was found. Identifying the voice of learners with SEMH issues and their parents and carers is vital as it will outline the worth they place on the learning pathway for students with SEMH issues. Research will then take place in 'a living learning situation' where there is a 'culture of enquiry' Kennard (2004, p.295).

In summary, Therapeutic Alternatives to school identifies the development of therapeutic provision which is an introduction to an alternative therapeutic learning environment in the form of OOSTEP.

2.8 Summary

Five of the six SRQs have been discussed through the literature review. The seminal literature, supported by relevant research reports, government policy, and contemporary articles, has unveiled key themes and identified further literature. An emerging agenda has been developed around a focus on the voice of young people with SEMH issues. These complex individuals are often encircled by and confronted with additional barriers to their well-being and future development. Their voice has been neglected in the past and their rights have often not been respected and supported. Their serious mental health issues and a distinct lack of assessment and support further compound their

SEMH conditions. In addition, disengagement in school has often been accompanied by anxieties and the risk of exclusion. This ‘onion skin’ of barriers around the student with SEMH issues makes them very difficult to reach. They appear to have several inherent challenges to overcome. Furthermore, students frequently have external influences that affect them when attending school or OOSTEP. These themes have been identified in relation to challenges with regards to AP policy and the development of alternative opportunities. The purpose of the research is to identify how students perceive their education experience and its worth. It will also aim to identify if an alternative therapeutic approach such as OOSTEP can support their individual conditions and learning needs. The following chapter will examine SRQ: 6: ‘What is the most appropriate research method to capture the perspectives of students with SEMH issues and their parents or carers?’

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This exploration is to understand and interpret the multifaceted nature of education for students with SEMH issues. Students, parents, and carers will give insights into the worth of education for SEMH issues both in school and on OOSTEP. This chapter will discuss the underlying philosophical position of the research, followed by an explanation of being an insider-researcher and the ethical considerations required throughout the research process. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the research design and the gathering and analysis of data.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinning

In social research, there has been some discussion with regards to the merits and assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research. Bryman (2008, p.14) referred to 'the paradigm wars' which 'centre on the contrasting epistemological and ontological positions...'. The philosophical nature of the researcher is guided by principles of beliefs about epistemology (knowledge and the process of thinking), ontology (the nature of reality), and methodology (how we gain knowledge). It is at an epistemological and ontological level that Bryman (2008, p.14) identified 'an incompatibility of the fundamental assumptions'. Pring (2004, p.52) suggested that 'there is a science of the physical world, but not one of the personal and social worlds'. A scientific reality is objective, positivist, has concrete structures, and is studied through empirical analysis. Pring (2004) asserted that quantitative research or positivism is appropriate to study the physical world, but that it is not suitable for researching both the personal and social world. Qualitative research addresses personal and social reality and the non-physical world, presenting a subjective view of reality that is open to interpretation. Pring (2004, p.26) stated that 'research wrongly attempts to quantify that which cannot really be quantified'. However, Pring (2004, p.25) identified the criticisms made by Dewey with regards to the wide division between the approaches and the idea that there must be integration and overlapping of these two methodologies. Gorard (2001, p.6) invited the researcher to consider the possibility that 'qualitative and quantitative evidence refers to a false dualism and one …. that we would be better off without', to 'cease wasting time and energy in pointless debates about the virtue of one approach over the other'.

The premise and underlying philosophy of this thesis is one of interpretivism. Literature has established (Bryman, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) that a researcher's implicit and explicit assumptions about the social world and ways to investigate it will influence their choice of research methodology. The desire is to capture meaning and motives which are located in a particular social tradition. The focus of the study is to facilitate and nurture the student voice and for students to share their feelings, emotions, sentiments, and attitudes with regards to their experiences in education. This individual and subjective social reality can be captured through a qualitative approach. However, individual social creations are continually constructed and reconstructed in the interactions between individuals.

All participants are to share their realities and stories of educational worth. This exploration will identify participants' interpretations and social constructions that are shared. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.13) shared a holistic position stating that 'All research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied.' It is further acknowledged that students were interpreting their educational experience and that parents, carers, and the researcher were then interpreting the perceived student experience. The work of Knight, Buckingham and Littleton (2014) identified criteria that can be directly related to this study. They recognised that an interpretivist ontology is particularly suited to a small number of participants producing a detailed data set. The data is focused on the perceived worth of student education experience. Lincoln, Lynman and Guba (2011) explained that data could be organised into themes of knowledge, providing a clearer understanding of the fundamental interpretivist beliefs. The data collected will be set within a student's social context of their education experience. The primary aim is to identify those factors and themes that influence education for students with SEMH issues. The individual student's personal development is a secondary consideration. However, the relevance and engagement of the students is still relevant to this study. The validity of data from an interpretivist perspective is that all responses are valid for they are a reflection of a personal meaning and understanding of reality. It is recognised that interpretation will be in a constant state of flux throughout the research study, as the participants share experiences and new insights are gained. My positioning as a

researcher is key to the research process and my attempts to interpret human behaviour in terms of meaning reflects a subjective epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Consequently, interpretivism fits into the constructivist paradigm in educational research. This exploration is to identify, understand, and interpret the multifaceted nature of learning of the students and their parents and carers.

According to Cresswell (2007), constructivism is often combined with interpretivism. Hajdukova (2014) explained that researchers working from a constructivist theoretical perspective focus not only on constructing meaning through particular interpretations of the world, but that they also seek to understand how their interpretations are influenced by personal experience. Interpretivist knowledge is a subjective process of thinking, and it is my social constructivist, ontological position that will identify the individual realities and the voice of students, parents, and carers in this study. The research will be based on the students' interpretation of their education and supported by the interpretations of their parents and carers. This interpretivist-social constructivist study will underpin an insider-researcher positioning.

3.2 Insider-Researcher Positioning

The notion of 'insider' research (Drake and Heath, 2011) is aimed at research into professional practice. A practitioner who has actual experience and insight into a particular setting conducts the research. As a member of The Therapeutic School community, I have an integral knowledge of the organisation and a close relationship with it. This puts me in a unique position and provides fundamental contributions for this research. This insider position can inform initial knowledge, understanding, and insight into why and how this research may be conducted. This understanding is not possible for the 'outsider' researcher and they will not appreciate the complexities of the community to be researched. However, just as 'outsiders' lack an intimate understanding of their research group, an 'insider' researcher may be viewed as prejudiced due to their professional knowledge and position; an insider-researcher may cause bias as they are too close to the community (Drake and Heath, 2011). The argument arises that there is a critical distance between a researcher and their participants that can jeopardise the resulting data. An outsider-researcher may be too distant, whilst an insider-researcher may be too close; in both cases, the researcher's

positioning has the capacity to cause research prejudice. It is understood that, as a researcher, it is important to recognise that there is a need for distance to enable and ensure impartiality.

Drake and Heath (2011, p.25) stated that 'The relationship between research and professional life is not static' and they identified that the professional position is likely to change over the course of a research study. A practitioner-researcher inhabits multiple identities and is continually switching between roles. Personal roles in a school environment can frequently change, shifting between researcher, teacher, tutor, instructor, coach, trainer, carer, mentor, family support worker, and Head of OOSTEP. Drake and Heath (2011) identified the roles of practitioner and researcher as being along an axis, recognising a continual position change. They cited Humphrey (2007) who outlined the significance of the hyphen in the term 'practitioner-researcher'. The prominence of the researcher role and the practitioner role will continually change. Hellawell (2006) identified different shades on the continuum of practitioner-researcher, sometimes being at the centre of the process and at other times as an observer working at a distance. As a practitioner-researcher, it is important to acknowledge one's position on the axis at all times, being both aware and reflexive. A continual change and fluidity in position as a practitioner-researcher is required when working with both staff members and participants. Drake and Heath (2011, p.50) stated:

> …. that practice needs to be continually negotiated and re-negotiated..... managing location as 'insiders' they may necessarily change positions, sometimes frequently.

I discovered that there were no set ways to negotiate apart from invoking my personal experience, practitioner's reflexive learning, personal attributes, and relational skills. My position of insider-researcher in education fluctuates as there are continual changes in relationships with students and adults.

As an OOSTEP staff member, I advocate (Bradley-Levine, 2021) for and on behalf of students so that their voices may be heard. This specific role is essential for students who often have difficulty communicating and explaining themselves. My positionality is essential in ensuring equity and in helping overcome the individual barriers faced by each student. As I negotiate and agree a pathway with each student, I am then able to

implement their perceived educational needs and requests into curriculum activities, plans, and policy. I strive to uphold the students' best interests and be a spokesperson in supporting their communication with peers, family members, and other stakeholders. This role develops a relationship of trust between the student and me as a significant adult. This relationship is founded on several principles: safeguarding, listening, empowerment, and an ability to respond openly. I identified that I needed to be sensitive to relationships with students and be willing to change in order to accommodate differences.

Professional settings can be intensely political climates. Power relationships are based on paradigms that may be continually shifting and which may bring forth dilemmas of interpretation, understanding, and expectations. In contrast, Foucault (1995) identified the idea of 'docile subjects' who are conditioned to behave and think in a directed way, rather than developing a position of power. The arrival of three new head teachers during the research period has necessitated co-operation, negotiation, and the establishment of a new position for a working relationship and understanding. It is necessary for head teachers to have confidence in the researcher and be assured that they have the relevant virtues and appropriate disposition. However, I have discovered that encouraging ongoing, open, and transparent discussions has led to four supportive researcher–head teacher partnerships during this research project. As part of their safeguarding role, it was necessary for head teachers to consider the importance of confidentiality and ensure the anonymity of the school. They were also kept informed of the research process and data gathering. Drake and Heath (2011, p.8) observed that insider-research at doctoral level 'may be particularly complex', emphasising that 'reconciliation pervades all aspects of undertaking research'. A therapeutic workplace is recognised as 'a culture of enquiry' (Lees et al., 2004) and research is identified as part of the values and mission of The Therapeutic School.

My position as a professional researcher is critical to the integrity of the research. It may be complex, but it must be personally understood, justified, and shared in a spirit of co-operation with all stakeholders. Self-evaluation has been central to my role as an insider-researcher. Indeed, Popper (1972) argued that the growth of knowledge can only come through criticism of the subject being studied. Through a process of

reflexivity, thinking, considering, and identifying the implications of experiences, new knowledge can be gained which can then be used to inform ongoing practice. Merriam (2009) identified the reflexivity of the researcher. Nightingale and Cromby (1999, p.228) stated that reflexivity will encourage the author:

> …to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research.

Costley and Gibbs (2007, p.26) discussed the importance of informing the research through recognising one's own attributes and 'being', as identified in the work of Heidigger. They observed that the reflective practitioner undertakes a radical transformation.

Throughout this study, I have experienced ongoing change as I have participated in reflexive practice. Judge, Jones and McCreery (2009, p.4) identified how the act of questioning and utilising a challenging approach to knowledge is essential as it 'enables you to make your own judgements'. However, this must be framed within a context of moral principles and research ethics; adherence to research regulations is a cornerstone of good practice.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The role of the insider-researcher is a complex one. As a researcher, I am required to abide by a professional code of conduct and I am obliged to declare any actual or potential conflict of interest which may compromise my research integrity. Hammersley (2007) considered ethical issues based on five principles: harm, autonomy, privacy, reciprocity, and equity. Hammersley observed that a researcher may encounter conflict between these principles during the research process. Consequently, a discussion must take place in order to identify the ethical issues involved in social and educational research and their corresponding severity. Hammersley stated that the first principle of research ethics is to ensure that no harm is caused. Greig, Taylor and Mackay (2007) referenced the Nuremberg Code and the Geneva Convention of 1949 as it identified the moral, ethical, and legal principles relating to research involving human participants. Rules, procedures, and safeguards ensure that all involved are protected. This is especially important in the case of the students, all of whom are vulnerable. The Code

includes the requirement for research participants' voluntary consent and Greig et al. (2007) have pointed out that, according to UNICEF 2002, a child should give assent in addition to the adult with parental responsibility if they are able to do so.

In striving to achieve trustworthy and reliable data, I have identified that ethical issues can arise at any time during the research process. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013, p.64) stated that:

> Ethical practices are essential at all stages from the design stage of your study through analysis and presentation.

Ethical issues may arise in the nature, context, procedures, and method of the research. However, I have been able to draw upon the professional codes of conduct for guidance and direction. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) identified ethical considerations that apply to both the procedures of research and safeguards for the participants themselves. As a data collector, an 'Ethical Approval Application' (Appendix 6) was required and it was mandatory to submit an overview of the study, planning, and documenting in order for it to be ethically scrutinised and then sanctioned. A 'Research Timeframe' (Appendix 7) was identified for the preparation, collection analysis, and interpretation of data. This was submitted as part of the Ethical Approval Application. It was envisaged that this research study would be completed over the course of six years on a part-time basis. In response to my submission, I received a 'Letter of Ethical Approval' from the University of Derby in recognition of acceptance (Appendix 8). These documents focused on the process of conducting education research with children.

The terms 'ethics' and 'morals' are often used interchangeably, but they have slightly different meanings and implications of use. Philosophical enquiry into morals is concerned with what is considered right or wrong, or acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Ethics is concerned with the basis of morals or moral judgements. Ethics in educational research is a search for principles and rules to conduct an investigation. A distinction between the two is that rules are more specific and not so open to interpretation. The rules are rooted in a set of general principles which embody moral values that need to be clarified in different situations. Pring (2004, p.144) observed that

‘...there is no possible way in which rules can be established for every conceivable situation’. Indeed, it would be impossible to establish rules of conduct for all possible moral and political dilemmas. Instead, it is important to focus on clarification of the principles that need to be applied to a particular situation. Two guiding principles that were fundamental to this research were personal respect and responsibility to the participants. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) identified these two principles together with significant documents on ethical guidelines, from the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011). These documents lay down the principles and procedures for ethical research. The University of Derby ethics guidelines adhere to these governing guidelines (UOD, 2015) and the Research Ethics Policy and Code of Practice (UOD, 2013).

Ethical consideration is foremost in the whole research process and in reliable data. The ethical approval process identifies that research proposals involving human participants must address issues related to research ethics I draw attention to these particular concerns and highlight the ethical dilemmas throughout the research process, sharing the complexities of research with this study.

3.4 Research Approach

My philosophical positioning is recognised as interpretivist in this study. Consequently, the underpinning philosophy identifies the research strategies and methods of approach that are used to answer the research question. On a practical level, Punch (2006, p.52) stated that research design ‘means connecting the research questions to data’. Within a qualitative research design, there are a range of strategies that could be used: ethnography (cultural interpretation), grounded theory (generate theory from data), phenomenology (comprehending phenomena events), case study, narrative discourse, and life history. Each has an application depending on the focus of the research question. Pring (2004, p.33) stated that ‘behind these different approaches may also lay more fundamental differences of a philosophical kind’. I argue for a research approach that will accommodate the following criteria based on the research question:

- a small, in-depth interpretivist study
- an approach that will engage the student and parent/carer voice

- an investigative tool that will gain a better understanding of education through the perspectives of students with SEMH and their parents and carers
- a holistic approach that will accommodate the individual and joint views of students and their parents and carers

During the planning process, I explored varying options with regards to research methods and scrutinised their uses, advantages, and disadvantages. I was able to make some initial arguments that included certain approaches but discounted others. I considered using a survey but found that it appeared more suited to gathering large-scale, generalised data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). 'Action research' methodology implies implementing interventions that would disadvantage some of the students (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). Ethnography was also a consideration, but it is based on observation of social activity and would not yield the insights into interpretation. The knowledge I was seeking was of a phenomenological nature, one that explored individual human experience (Gray, 2014). However, Denscombe (2007) emphasised that phenomenology does not seek to analyse or interpret. It assumes that participants' accounts would need to be kept as complete narratives. Similarly, a case study methodology has a 'holistic focus' (Punch, 2009); Stake (1995, p.2) identified it as 'a specific, a complex, functioning thing'. Case studies are specific and all-inclusive in nature and they are a complete bounded system; they are self-contained and not to be dissected and generalised. The approaches discussed raised questions that were not comparable with my interpretivist philosophical positioning. I required an approach that would enable students to be able to share their education stories which, in turn, could be analysed, interpreted, and divided into themes. These research themes identifying SEMH issues could be compared with themes from other studies. I needed an approach that would capture the multiple realities of a student with SEMH issues, reflecting the different perspectives of individuals that understand different meanings of their education experience. I sought an approach that would highlight student intentions and motives which would make their behaviour comprehensible and comparable. I needed a methodology to interpret the nature of the student narrative with a more critical response to their perceived realities. I concluded that I needed to consider an approach that accommodated the voice of all the participants.

3.4.1 Voice

Capturing the voice of students and identifying their perceived worth of their education was implicit in the research question. The aim was to identify the meaning and interpretations that participants place on their worth of education for students with SEMH issues. The premise is that understanding can only come from the authentic voices of the participants. By accessing and listening to their voices, data in the form of their subjective narratives can be analysed. Booth (1996) argued that narrative methods have the power to bring to life human experience. However, with regards to reliability, validity, and reproducing experience, they can be inconsistent as lives are not consistent with one another. Booth stated that narrative methods have the ability to share life experiences of those considered inarticulate, making this approach appropriate for the often hesitant and vulnerable students in this research.

Voice in the form of narrative is recognised as a tool that can come in several forms but in essence it is to make sense of the world, solving problems, and educating (Bruner, 1971). There are many different types of narrative including, but not limited to, stories, accounts, chronicles, descriptions, records, recitals, statements, reports, and renderings. Narrative and the use of stories are different but related. A story is defined as a chronological sequence of events over time. It is anticipated that the student voice in the form of stories can be collected from participants in this study. These stories can provide a contribution to knowledge in the field of education for students with SEMH difficulties. Personal accounts in the form of stories can also reflect the characteristics of the storyteller and the life that they portray. To gain an understanding of how participants viewed their education experience, I concluded that I would adopt an appraisal of participants' stories, provided as data through an appropriate research method.

Clough (2002) observed that there are few examples of stories which detail lived experiences in educational settings. The literature review identified a small number of SEMH/BESD reports prior to Clough (2002): Seed (1992), Cooper (1993a), Pomeroy (1999) and Wise (2000). Following Clough (2002), several reports were identified: Cornwall and Walter (2006), Sellman (2009), Cefai and Cooper(2010), Nind, Boorman and Clarke (2012), Prunty, Dupont and McDaid (2012), Davison (2013), Hajdukova

(2014), 2015 (Casey), Tellis-James and Fox (2016), Thacker (2017), Sheffield and Morgan (2017), and Davies and Ryan 2018. Clough identified that parents and carers can present stories. Research in relation to parent stories has been acknowledged, including the seminal works by Daniels et al. (2003). More recently, further studies regarding parent and carer stories have been identified: Grey-Elsharif (2010), Brookfield, Flitcroft and Kelly (2016), Craggs (2016), and Walsh (2017). A thematic analysis was used to examine a number of the stories identified above. Willing (2003) described a thematic analysis as a tool that can be used across a range of methods. There are advantages for recognising thematic analysis as it is flexible, and it accommodates similarities and differences between themes. Themes can also be compared with other studies (Casey, 2015), including existing themes and new themes that are identified in this study. Having determined that a thematic approach appeared most beneficial in answering the research question, I then sought an appropriate sampling strategy for the research. A suitable research sample of participants is a significant single factor that needs careful consideration.

3.4.2 Sampling

Seeking insight into the views of students potentially allowed for various responses, ranging from a single student to a whole cohort (Knight, 2014). I needed a sample that was accessible and that ‘could maximise what we can learn’ (Stake, 1995, p.4). This study has a clear focus: to identify the voice and worth of school and OOSTEP experiences of students with SEMH issues and at risk of exclusion. Gorard (2001, p.9) emphasised the importance of sampling, describing it as ‘the basis of all research’. He put forward seven key stage sampling criteria. The first stage was to identify the sample. There has been a total of 31 students at risk of exclusion who have experience of both school and OOSTEP since its inception in 2012. As contact could not be made with past students, I decided to use the whole student 2015/16 cohort population. The sample, therefore, included seven students and their seven parents and carers. The profiles of the participants can be found in Chapter 4: Findings (section 4.0). The second stage identified that the population of interest was to be represented by seven students in an out-of-school education programme (OOSTEP). The third stage was to list the population. Each of the seven students within the population has a pseudonym and are referred to in alphabetical order as Adam, Brett, Connor, Daniel, Elliott, Finn,

and George. However, following the research pilot (section 3.5.3), the parents and carers were included. These parents and carers are referred to by the acronym ‘P/C’ followed by the relevant student; for example, the parent/carer of Adam is referred to as ‘P/C Adam’ and the parent/carer of Brett is ‘P/C Brett’. The fourth stage was to identify the whole population as seven students and seven parents/carers. The size of the population was thus fourteen participants in total. The fifth stage was to establish methods of correction. I identified that all attempts to amend or correct data would be acknowledged in the study. In keeping with the key principle of reliability, all corrections would be examined, including uncompleted methods or if methods were met with a refusal. The sixth stage was to identify the total population, including dropouts. One student (Daniel) and one parent/carer (P/C Elliott) declined to participate at the interview stage. The seventh and final stage was to apply and correct this inquiry where necessary. The validity of this research was dependent on the ethical behaviours and processes being trustworthy. Gorard (2001, p.42) concluded that it is ‘risky’ to accept generalisations ‘without first considering their sample strategy and the potential bias this introduces’. Accepting all students from the 2015/16 cohort was a key decision that contributed to the trustworthiness of this study.

3.5 Research Design

There is no single way to plan research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). However, there are preparatory issues that need to be considered when designing a research plan. Denscombe (2010, p.3) stated that ‘there is no single pathway to good research’, going on to explain that one of the biggest decisions relates to the choice of research strategy. A strategy is a ‘plan of action’; this is a broad overview of the operation, a research design that is likely to offer the best chance of success, and a plan to meet a specific goal. A strategy was required that would provide an in-depth study, a focus on individualised experiences and instances rather than on a wide research field. This logic was based on a concentrated effort to identify insights that would not and could not be suited to other strategies that use a wider approach. Denscombe (2010, p.53) stated that ‘The aim is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular’. In this exploration, the ‘general’ of student education will be investigated through the ‘particular’ experiences of the participants and their views on its worth. A detailed study focusing on the specifics of experience provides a greater opportunity to probe and discover

things that may not have become apparent with strategies that were less in-depth. The research aim is to answer the following research question: 'What is the worth of an out-of-school therapeutic education programme (OOSTEP) from the perspective of students?' There was a need to enable the student with SEMH issues to articulate their perceptions. The voice of students needed to be captured through a method or methods suitable for their SEMH needs.

3.5.1 Research Methods

There are several possible research methods that could possibly be used: observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, experiments, secondary data analysis, and mixed methods. Based on my interpretivist positioning, I needed a method that would answer my research question and provide the necessary data. Yin (2014) demonstrated how the research question can indicate what methods are required for research. I returned to my research question that asks:

> What is the worth of school and an out-of-school therapeutic education programme (OOSTEP) from the perspective of students and their parents and carers?

Yin (2009, p.8) identified three conditions that need to be applied when planning to use a method. Firstly, the research study must be defined. Secondly, the concept of 'controls' in the study must be explored. Thirdly, a focus on contemporary events must be identified.

1. Defining the research study

It is through a process of questioning that the method of research can be established. Yin identified that the use of primary questions such as who, what, where, how, and why give an important clue when determining the most relevant research method. First of all, the focus was on the students' perceptions of education as this is central to answering the research question. It is the participants perceptions that are the basis for this study. The question is identified as an exploration into school and OOSTEP experiences through the perceptions of students, parents, and carers.

2. Controls in the study

Yin's second question is the most pertinent as the control element in this study is the participation of the students. The answer to the research question is provided by the student through their perceptions. However, it was identified that the students may have

difficulty accessing methods that included reading and writing. Consequently, there was a backup included in the study which allowed their parents and carers a voice so that they could make a contribution. This was to support student responses or in the event of a student's refusal to participate. Parent and carer perspectives could also add a depth and richness to the data.

3. Focus on contemporary events

The focus of the study is contemporary as students are being asked about their education experience of both school and OOSTEP. All the participating students can focus on contemporary events as they have both recent and current experiences in the two areas of interest. They are well placed to be able share their views in relation to past school experiences and current experiences on OOSTEP, giving insight into the worth they place on each.

I was able to narrow down my options by working through each of them in a methodical way. There are several possible ways of collecting subjective data: surveys, questionnaires, narrative reports, and interviews. Multiple data collection methods could be used to collect multiple sources of data. A survey allows many people to share their responses through the form of a questionnaire. However, questions are open to interpretation, especially if they require comprehension of the script, and I felt that students on OOSTEP would have difficulty with this method. Moreover, the students displayed very poor reading and writing skills, which would have required a support worker to explain each question to them and then record their answer. I observed that not all students were capable of filling in questionnaires and surveys and, as a result, I discounted questionnaires and surveys as a research method. In search of an appropriate method for the students' academic abilities, I identified that an interview would be more appropriate to their needs. Given the relatively small number of participants, I determined that a more supportive method of data collection would be necessary. I felt that there would be higher likelihood of gathering credible data if I could avoid ambiguity in the study. However, in whatever form the method was presented, I felt that there was always the possibility for disagreement and differences of interpretation. My experience with the students with SEMH issues identified that verbal communication was usually their favourite median. In conclusion, I determined that the use of questions with verbal responses would most likely be the best approach.

3.5.2 Interviews

The research method I decided to use for this study was the interview. I will describe how it was constructed, what it contained, and evidence for what type of interview I felt was appropriate. Interviews are a widely used method of research in obtaining a child's perspectives (Greig et al., 2007) and students appear to particularly enjoy one-to-one attention and communication. The aim of the interviews in this study is to reflect the interviewee's views of education. The interview can be well-structured with the use of specific questions that need to be answered by all. However, Casey (2015) recognised the power inequalities between researchers and participants and the need to reduce their impact by giving agency to participants wherever possible and enabling them to share their experiences freely. My research aim is to maintain an interpretivist position and allow interviews to elicit responses which are authentic as opposed to contrived (Casey, 2015). Interviews, as identified by Cooper (1993a, p.129), should be 'defined as a spontaneous and honest account of the respondents' thinking'. Cooper (1993a) promoted an informant style as opposed to a respondent style and this guided the design of my semi-structured interviews. Cooper's experience with challenging students and his style of interview resonated with me. My interview style needed to allow students to participate in this research, giving them a voice and an opportunity to speak for themselves when sharing their stories. I felt that an oral approach was much more appropriate for the cohort of students who were going to participate in this research.

As a seeker of constructivist-interpretivist knowledge, I viewed the interview process as a dialogue (Hajdukova, 2014), where both participant and researcher were active in negotiation and construction of meaning. I aspired to be an active interviewer in encouraging a collaborative effort (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). I wanted learners with SEMH difficulties to determine what was important to them and what the worth of education was both in school and OOSTEP. To understand the meaning behind those factors requires intense listening (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, Hajdukova (2014) emphasised that the responsive interviewing style advocated by Rubin and Rubin (2012) enabled interviewers to modify interview questions based on the interest and knowledge of the interviewees. Through this interviewing style, I was able to encourage the individuality of each participant during the interview process as I endeavoured to clarify their statements and elicit meaning from their responses. Clarity

can often be gained through the observation of a gesture in the form of a hand sign, facial expression, or intense listening which often included a period of silence to encourage further explanation.

I was aware of my responsibilities when designing the interview questions. My intention was to use questions that afforded all participants the opportunity to raise any theme they considered important to them. I was mindful of previous research in this field which was identified as significant to young people with BESD/SEMH. However, like Casey (2015, p.54), I did not make direct mention of any past research 'in order to maximise the chances of participants, focusing on the issues most salient to them as individuals'. My intention was to ask open questions based on general questions about school and OOSTEP which could then be interpreted according to individual experience. The significance of the interview method is that it allows the unique student experience to be explained, encouraging both understanding and learning that can be used for future change and improvement. However, Pring (2004, p.40) highlighted a philosophical criticism of the interview method. He described a dichotomy created by the researcher whereby meaning is 'negotiated' with the researched, stating that 'it is odd in an area where matters of truth and falsity are concerned..... negotiating what is to be counted as knowledge' (Pring, 2004, p.151). He considered this as nonsensical and thought that general principles needed to be put in place in order to reconcile the moral demands in a particular case. However, the general principle in this study was to allow participants to express themselves and share their perceptions of the worth of education for students with SEMH issues. The benefit of receiving this insider knowledge is that school and OOSTEP provision can be reviewed, adapted, and improved for the perceived benefits of-their education.

The research design reflected my interpretivist philosophy; I identified that an interview could generate a narrative and this method appeared to be the most suitable. Greig (2007, p.142) observed that 'a narrative can take many forms', explaining that it could be part of an interview process:

> Answers to questions in qualitative interviews can in themselves constitute narrative accounts that focus on episodes in personal experiences.

Student accounts can focus on perceived significant events that they experience in their

schooling. Parent/carer accounts can enlighten the experiences of students both at home and at school. Seidman (2006) identified how interviews focusing on different aspects of life experience can take place several times over a period of a year. A trusting relationship must be developed and sustained over this prolonged period. This is the interview approach identified in this study. I carried out a research pilot in order to assess the approach, enabling me to review and then refine my techniques.

3.5.3 Research Pilot

The trustworthiness of the research process can be tested in a research pilot. Cohen et al. (2018, p.133) identified the concept of validity as key to effective research. Validity can mean many different things. In this study, validity is based on a perspective that a particular method of research will, in fact, measure or identify what is stated. An interview method was used to answer the main research question (MRQ) relating to the worth of school and of OOSTEP. A research pilot was set up in order to ascertain this research method's reliability in practice and to reveal any potential challenges or difficulties that might be encountered. A home visit appointment to discuss the research project was agreed and arranged with the participants. I met informally with students, parents, and carers where we discussed the research study and I was able to answer questions concerning the student booklet that explained the project (Appendix 9). We identified issues such as the interview process, student consent, and withdrawal from the project if required. I then gained consent (Appendix 10) at the conclusion of the meeting or at a further home visit. I wanted to give students, parents, and carers sufficient time to consider and understand the proposition so that they did not feel pressured into taking part. It was prior to the interview that I gained consent (Appendix 11) for the child to participate.

Research pilot interviews were scheduled and the first was held at the home of the student where a chaperone was present. The interview was conducted using a small Microsoft Surface tablet so that the interviews could be recorded without the need for any intrusive devices that had to be spoken into. Concerns were highlighted prior to the first interview as the students did not appear committed to the process. The student had previously agreed to the interview when the research study was explained and consent was given by both parent and student. In essence, it was the enthusiasm of the parent

and my concern for the student with SEMH issues that gave rise to my suggestion that I interview both student and parent separately during the home visit. The two students and their parents/carers selected were from the previous 2014/15 cohort and I knew them well. The students were coming to the end of their OOSTEP experience. My worst fears were realised when the first pilot student refused to participate due to an unrelated disagreement with his mother. The second student attended but was not as responsive as expected during the semi-structured interview. The initial student interview in the research pilot identified certain challenges in this process and it was evident that guidance was needed according to ability and confidence. The complex nature of SEMH issues was highlighted and alternative approaches were necessary to accommodate each individual. It was envisioned that a semi-structured interview approach could be both supportive and flexible (Appendix 12). However, it was evident from the initial phase of the research pilot that changes in techniques and delivery were needed to enable me to focus on student perceptions of the worth and value of their education both at school and OOSTEP. It became clear from the research pilot that interviewing students may be problematic. I also recognised that I needed to develop a contingency plan as interviewing was an uncertain process and clarification would be required to meet the needs of each student with SEMH issues. It was during the research pilot that a parent was first asked to participate, and a Parent and Carer Interview (Appendix 13) was used. The parent responded to the request without hesitation and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be able to contribute to the study. Furthermore, the parent shared the student's education story as she perceived it with great emotion. It appeared as though a burden had been lifted as part of a therapeutic session and a story unfolded that was genuinely rich and articulate. The parent was able to provide a different perspective and therefore a different insight into the experience of the student with SEMH issues. She was able to cast further light on the student stories and also had other stories to share. This experience prompted me to modify the study's parameters in order to incorporate both the perceptions of students and the perceptions of their parents and carers.

I identified in the research pilot that the researcher is a further source of trustworthiness and verification for this study. I decided that my voice as an insider-researcher was valid and worthy of consideration throughout the study. I discovered during the interviews

that I was asking for further explanation of the participants' answers. At times, the clarification was apparent through gesture, tone, and/or silence. I acknowledged that my voice was a further validation of the stories being presented in the interviews, though I was aware that my contributions might be construed as interference which would introduce an element of bias into the proceedings. I was able to identify a manageable triangulation for this exploration through the student, parent/carer, and researcher.

3.6 The Process of Data Collection

The process of data collection was a crucial step within this research in terms of ensuring consistency, maintaining data integrity, and safeguarding all stakeholders. After an important learning process that included considerable scrutiny and various amendments, permission was granted for data collection to begin. The resulting procedure was followed: 1. Ethical Approval; 2. Approval from learning institution; 3. Explanation of exploration study; 4. Briefing of students, parents, and carers; 5. Approval from students, parents, and carers for safeguarding; 6. Interview schedule established; 7. Interviews recorded; 8. Transcripts written up. The first two stages were discussed earlier in this chapter in a section on ethical considerations (3.3). The section on the research pilot (3.5.2) has covered stages three, four, and five through explanation of the study booklet, briefing of participants, and finally approval, safeguarding, and project withdrawal. Stage six will be discussed in the next section (3.6.1) and stages seven and eight will be detailed in forthcoming sections (3.6.2).

Due to my findings during the research pilot, I made the decision to include parents and carers and change the course of the study. Inevitably, this led to changes to the research question and research boundaries. I elected to focus on the students' study experience along with support from parents and carers. This would allow for a more in-depth understanding of the students' involvement in education.

3.6.1 Establishing an Interview Schedule

The well-being of each participant was paramount to the research process and they were assured of their rights regarding their personal involvement. At each meeting, confidentiality was explained and all information was anonymised and kept secure. The study complied with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the University's Code of Practice.

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) were followed, and it was explained that data collected from the interviews would be protected via the use of pseudonyms used in lieu of participants' names. It was also explained that the research data was secured on electronic devices with password protection.

Regarding confidentiality and information, it was made clear that the researcher had a safeguarding obligation. The concept of confidentiality was explained, and assurances were given that it would be maintained. However, it was further explained that a researcher has responsibilities to ensure appropriate behaviours and an obligation to report accusations or inappropriate actions to the relevant authorities. In this regard, there is an individual right to privacy which is often contrasted with the public right to know. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013, p.76) suggested that 'some would argue that there is a clear obligation built around the notion of 'public interest' which would support passing this information on'. It was anticipated that private affairs might be discussed and that the privacy of the individual would be respected. At each meeting, it was made clear to the participant that they could withdraw from the project at any time. It came as a surprise when P/C Elliot refused to participate due to her personal experience being too painful to discuss. One can only speculate as to the meaning of this sentiment and why she withdrew but her privacy was respected and thus no questions were asked. The carer's student, Elliot, chose to participate. All students initially gave their consent to be interviewed but, after a number of failed interview appointments, Daniel decided he did not want to participate. The implication of withdrawal is discussed in section 3.6.3. His parent, P/C Daniel, fully engaged in this process, sharing valuable insight of his journey through education.

Appointments were made to meet with each of the students and their parents and carers to establish an interview time for all participants. Safeguarding was of paramount importance and interviews were chaperoned in homes in sight, but out of hearing range, of other adults and children. Alternatively, interviews were conducted in public areas or AP placements. Occasionally, the allocated interview location and time were changed due to the mood and/or SEMH needs of the student. This flexibility was vital for engaging with very complex characters with erratic behaviours. Students did not always want to participate according to the scheduled interview time or place, and they would

regularly reschedule to a different time and location. Due to individual SEMH difficulties and concentration levels, interviews ranged in number and length of time according to individual need. No upper or lower time limit was set unless dictated by the individual. Throughout the interview period, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw. At the conclusion of the interview cycle, there was a debrief session and a further opportunity to retract any previously shared information (Appendix 14). Some students had several interview sessions due to their lack of concentration and focus. There were students who returned for interview a number of times during a particular day. These irregularities are identified in the interview schedule (Appendix 15) and were deemed necessary to accommodate individual needs. During the research period, there were various interviews that were arranged and then postponed due to SEMH difficulties. Parents and carers were more accommodating, and their interview schedules were therefore more orderly, though several had to be rescheduled due to family situations. Interviews with parents and carers generally lasted between 20 and 30 minutes on average.

3.6.2 Data Collection

I conducted the interviews using the same Microsoft Surface tablet that I had used during the research pilot. All interviews were scheduled to take place at a predetermined venue. There were second and third choices arranged to accommodate the erratic moods and concerns of the students. Like all teaching within OOSTEP, research also needs to be flexible, spontaneous, and able to provide for all eventualities. I conducted all interviews with the participants, ensuring consistency and continuity of practice. All interviews were conducted in a manner that I considered both appropriate and ethical. As I knew the participants, I was particularly aware of their individual needs and could therefore be sensitive to any idiosyncrasies. A working relationship had already been established over several months. This was crucial in view of the extreme behaviours of some of these students. Access to severely damaged young people needs careful preparation, nurture, and an ongoing relationship of trust and support. A format for the interview had been established and utilised in the research pilot. However, this was changed in order to accommodate each individual. The format for each semi-structured interview included the following:

- I ensured that the participant felt safe.

- I asked the participant if they felt comfortable and if were ready to commence.
- I engaged in informal discussion to help make the participant feel relaxed.
- I was keenly aware of any signs of unrest or anxieties and, at any point, I was willing to suggest that we conclude the interview.
- The first interview began with a discussion of the participant's reflections on early years at school. The second interview began with reviewing or reflecting on the previous interview. Open questions were able to engage most participants.
- I was keenly aware of the lessons learnt in the research pilot. I started to focus on the interests of the participant with regards to school and OOSTEP.
- I implemented an informant style and encouraged further explanations wherever possible.
- I further encouraged students to share their feelings using brief questions:
  How did you feel?
  What do you think?
  What else do you remember?
  Could you tell me more?
  Could you share that with me?
  What about the people you met?
- The organisation of the semi-structured interviews became more informal following the research pilot and as the interview process progressed.

The data collection method of using semi-structured interviews was the same for students, parents, and carers. The practical application of the method often varied according to individual needs. My focus was to identify how best to present the research questions. Generally, the students required a small-step approach delivering several prompts to encourage participation, whilst the parents and carers appeared to benefit from a free flowing, conversational approach where they had the freedom to share their story as they perceived it.

3.6.3 Enhancing the Quality of the Data

In this study, I seek to identify what participants consider to be the worth of their education. I propose that the trustworthiness of their perspectives will increase knowledge in the field of SEMH. Likewise, I apply the same argument to the worth or

value of my approach within this study. Utilising this methodology, I attempted to improve the quality of this research. I drew on the insights of Knight (2015) who acknowledged a valuable framework used by Miles and Hubermann (1994). It incorporates criteria for quality assurance that includes objectivity, reliability, validity, transferability, and application. Knight (2015) acknowledged the work of Lincoln and Guba (1989) who rejected such measures as inappropriate for their study and instead focused on the concept of trustworthiness divided into areas of confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability. Knight (2015) combined these approaches and identified the measures that can be taken to enhance the quality and reliability of data (see Table 1 below).

	Criteria after Miles & Huberman (1994)	Criteria after Lincoln & Guba (1989)
1	Objectivity	Confirmability
2	Reliability	Dependability
3	Internal Validity	Credibility
4	External Validity/Transferability	Transferability
5	Application	

Table 1: Quality and reliability approach by Knight (2015)

I considered the application of this framework so that I could be confident in the outcomes of this research. I desired to uphold my responsibility to the research as identified in the ethical considerations section (3.3). I have provided a measure of the trustworthiness of this study and outlined the measures I have taken to comply with the research criteria by:

1. *Confirmability/Objectivity*
    - Identified my underpinning philosophy (3.1)
    - Acknowledged my dual role as a researcher-practitioner (3.2)
    - Outlined an approach to the research (3.4)
    - Provided the research design (3.5) and procedures
2. *Dependability/Reliability*
    - Completed a literature review which identified the definition of the theory incorporated into the research question (Chapter 2)
    - Provided a structure for data collection (3.6)

- Identified the challenges associated with interviewing young people with SEMH issues (3.6.2)
- Regularly supervised with academic colleagues (throughout)

3. *Credibility/Internal validity*
    - Findings supported by clear referencing (Chapter 4)
    - Choice of method allowed all to participate (3.5.1)
    - Interviews transcribed using all participants' own words
    - Triangulation of perceptions of students, parents/carers, and the researcher
4. *Transferability/External validity*
    - Sampling included all the 2015/16 cohort (3.4.2)
    - Samples included a short overview of each of the participants (3.4.2)
    - Thick description was produced resulting in detailed findings (Chapter 4)
    - Ongoing AP relevance (throughout)
5. *Application of the Study*
    - Clear implications for education with SEMH practice (Chapter 5)
    - Clear implications for interviewing students (Chapter 5)
    - Prior knowledge of the field from the literature review (Chapter 2)
    - Tentative findings emerge and shared (Chapter 4)

The concepts were incorporated and utilised throughout the study. The impact is central to a doctoral thesis and I am confident of presenting outcomes of quality and trustworthiness. I now turn to the analysis of the transcripts, stage eight of the data collection process.

3.7 Thematic Analysis of the Data

The research question seeks to identify the voice of students which is enhanced by the voice of their parents and carers. The voice of the participants was shared through interview and the transcripts serve as a record of their perceptions. I chose to apply a thematic approach and coded the transcripts. I observed that participants' thoughts and ideas often focused on common themes and patterns thus emerged in the data. I later identified that the key SEMH themes from this research could be compared with previous studies indicated in the literature review.

As a researcher, I had not set out to collect personal heart-rending stories but simply to obtain answers to questions. However, I discovered a deep emotional attachment to the data and to the personal experiences that were shared in the form of stories. The stories as presented in interview had to be subsequently separated into themes for analysis and participants' stories were lost within this process. This was emotionally unsettling and in essence a betrayal of the personal accounts that had been shared with me in confidence.

Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept of emotional labour and referred to a process whereby workers are expected to manage their feelings according to defined organisational guidelines. In my role as a practitioner-researcher, I was expected to manage my emotions whilst working in a very emotive and emotional place. Students, parents, and carers put their trust in me and shared their deepest feelings. The interview generated significant data which was read as stories and short accounts of experiences, some of which have been used as descriptions of events and explanations of the themes. However, I identified that thematic analysis engendered a greater understanding of the worth of education for students with SEMH issues. The themes focus on possibilities for future change in schools and in developing OOSTEP.

The aim of this exploration was to recognise the worth of education, both in-school and out-of-school, through the voice of the participants. I considered how those identified areas of worth would be classified or grouped. Braun and Clarke (2013) used a thematic analysis as a means of recognising and organising patterns in qualitative data. As an analysis tool, Casey (2015) detailed how it could offer a flexible approach. This approach allowed me to consider existing categories of classification and to develop new ones.

A fundamental point of principle for this study was the focus on the voice of all participants. It was initially determined that all data collected from participants in this study would be open for consideration. The study would be as wide-ranging as necessary to enable all perceptions of students, parents, and carers to be taken into account. All themes connected to both in-school and out-of-school education required appropriate deliberation. This led to a second consideration of positionality and

approach. Casey (2015) identified the challenge of recognising themes through theoretical and inductive methods. The theoretical approach acknowledges the researcher's prior knowledge and use of pre-existing categories. The inductive approach identifies themes without reference to any previous theoretical frameworks. I was aware that I was influenced by the classifications suggested in other studies, but I was mindful that the focus of this study was the voices of students, parents, and carers. A purely inductive approach could only have been possible if I had not been engaged in an ongoing and exhaustive literature review. I felt that it was inappropriate to attempt to fit new data into pre-existing categories generated from previous theoretical approaches. I concluded that I would compare prominent themes after the research was completed to see if links could be made with current literature. The construction of themes can be complex and they may not be open to a single or straightforward explanation. The process used to analyse the data draws further understanding and interpretation of the themes.

3.7.1 The Process of Data Analysis

Identifying and interpreting the data was an ongoing process throughout the study. As a greater understanding of the data was achieved, it continued to shed further light on the subject and more knowledge was revealed. Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the study. Stake (1995, p.71) stated that 'There is no particular moment when data analysis begins'. It appears that this process of analysis is seen as taking something apart and then interpreting what is found. I followed the five stages of data analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013) in producing a thematic exploration:

1. Transcription and Familiarisation
2. Generating Initial Codes
3. Searching for Themes
4. Reviewing Themes
5. Defining Themes and Reporting into a Final Form (in Chapter 4)

1 Transcription and Familiarisation

I recorded and transcribed all interviews. The aim was to reproduce the exact words of the participant. This activity was very time-consuming, but it was the only feasible way

to replicate the interview accurately and word for word. In addition to ensuring word accuracy, punctuation of the script also presented a challenge as meaning had to be interpreted according to my understanding and memory. It was beneficial to transcribe the recordings as soon as possible after the interviews. In so doing, I was able to draw on the feeling and sentiment of the discussions. The purpose of transcription was to capture an accurate account rather than detailing eloquent prose, but I noted that some accounts flowed quite eloquently. Familiarisation came through identifying numerous corrections and a desire to produce transcripts that were as precise as possible. The transcription process was a thoroughly absorbing experience and I became intrigued by the content of the materials, the insights presented by all the participants, and the common experiences the participants shared.

2 Generating Initial Codes

I discovered that a hand system was appropriate to enable scrutiny of every stated phrase. I did not wish to follow preconceived codes as identified in the literature review but rather embrace an inductive approach. For each transcript, I selected words that I felt summarised each sentence or phrase. A number on each transcript (Appendix 16) recognised each line. Grids were then generated that recorded the significant words or topics that I had identified. I then systematically grouped words that I perceived had similar meaning thereby decluttering, decongesting, reducing, and refining the process. I arrived at the codes by organising data (Appendix 17) into themes and sub-themes. Patterns were observed as I compared transcripts related to each individual participant.

3 Searching for Themes

Grouping the individual codes and then amalgamating them into perceived similar groupings reduced my possibilities. However, I had determined that all thoughts and contributions shared by the participants should be classified in some way. No contributions were dismissed due to preconceived notions or personal bias. I divided each transcript into two extracts: those that referred to school experiences and those that related to OOSTEP. From the transcripts, I was able to grid (Appendix 18) all contributions and was able to identify 10 themes. All thoughts and contributions of participants in this research could be identified within the themes. This research substantiates the themes that were identified in other school studies in the literature review. However, the out-of-school themes based on OOSTEP in this study including respite, relationships, opportunities, and personal development were not so well

developed in the literature. The literature review has given guidance in identifying themes for both in-school and out-of-school education. However, it was felt that the research from this study could make several additional contributions to knowledge in this field.

4. Reviewing Themes

I compared the themes that I had identified for school and OOSTEP. It was notable that there was an emphasis on different aspects of the education experience. I observed that the themes for school experience were consistent with previous research as recognised in the literature review. The prominent themes included school environment, learning difficulties, behaviour, teachers, and peers and bullying. The theme of family was omitted by several studies; however, it was deemed a significant factor in this study as it influenced the participants' education experience. Respite, relationships, opportunity, and choice were themes conducive with OOSTEP. All themes and related text are identified and discussed in the findings chapter (Chapter 4). Any data not incorporated into the findings was maintained securely in the transcripts for future reference.

3.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate the worth of the student experiencing SEMH issues in school and on OOSTEP for the 2015/16 cohort. This study has a social constructivist philosophical underpinning and adopts an interpretivist approach using interview methods to collect the data. As an insider-researcher, I had previously been able to build a relationship with the students as an OOSTEP mentor. As a practitioner, students accepted this research as an extension of my teaching responsibility. I was also familiar with all the parents and carers as it was not unusual for me to visit their homes in my capacity as OOSTEP manager. The decision to include the parents and carers had a transforming effect on this research study. The method of research was designed to enable students and their parents and carers to be able to respond to a semi-structured interview. I used an informant style of interview to enable participants to share their story of SEMH experience in education. These interviews were designed to answer the research question:

> What is the worth of school and the out-of-school therapeutic education programme (OOSTEP) from the perspective of students at risk of exclusion

and their parents and carers?

In this methodology chapter, I have placed the research in context of positioning, sampling, choice of approach, design, method of data collection, and analysis. Throughout the research process, several ethical considerations and dilemmas were identified to ensure the quality of the data. It is acknowledged that the student with SEMH issues is at the centre of this study and a holistic approach has been developed based on student, parent, and carer perceptions. It is through their voices that stories have been gathered to understand and make sense of the student's education journey. It is through careful analysis of these accounts that themes have been identified, providing understanding of SEMH difficulties in education and the students' social world. The findings chapter develops the themes that identify what is considered the worth of education for students with SEMH issues both in school and on OOSTEP. The participants' responses are collected and analysed using a thematic approach in order to provide an understanding and appreciation of the experience of students who are at risk of exclusion from education.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Findings Overview

This chapter provides a review of the findings of the study. The research data is based on the participants' memories, constructed through their perceived meaning and interpretive insights as reliable witnesses of their experience, as suggested by Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019). The findings set out below are preceded by student profiles along with their corresponding parent and carer (P/C) profiles. These provide a context for these real people and their individual challenges.

Student A and father P/C A

Student A lives with his father and has four siblings, two living at home and two living with his remarried mother. His statement of SEN is for ADHD. He has had CAMHS involvement and is in receipt of medication. He is deemed as very aggressive if this medication is not taken. Student A was excluded from two mainstream schools and a special school before attending The Therapeutic School. He has struggled with literacy and numeracy throughout his schooling. Due to his behaviour and family situation, several agencies have been involved including Community Services, YISP, CAF, YOT, and EWO.

Student B and step-grandad P/C B

Student B lives with his step-grandad who is very supportive and proactive. Student B has lived with his step-grandad since he was two years old. His grandmother died soon after they gained custody. Student B has previously assaulted staff, absconded from school, and has made allegations against staff. Student B exhibits aggressive behaviour, damage to property, disruption, fighting and injuring others, being out of class, and sexualised behaviour and language. He is identified as a threat to other students. There are frequently times when Student B finds it difficult to control his behaviour and follow classroom expectations. He can often have aggressive outbursts if he feels that he is not in control of a situation.

Student C and father P/C C

Student C lives with his father and a stepmother who have two very young children. He

has no contact with his birth mother and he was her only child. His paternal grandfather died last year and student C was very close with him. His SEN statement states SEBD, low attainment, and challenging and confrontational behaviour. He has a history of repeatedly absconding from school and violence towards adults, aiming to harm them when held. There are frequently times when he has found it difficult to control his behaviour and follow classroom expectations. He can often have aggressive outbursts if he feels that he is not in control of a situation. Student C has increased his criminal behaviour recently and will damage property if angry or challenged. He has a history of drug, solvent, and alcohol misuse, and repeatedly offers his peers drugs.

Student D and mother P/C D

Student D lives with his mother, two brothers, and three sisters. His SEN statement identifies ASD, SEBD, and cognitive learning and communication interaction difficulties. Student D interprets words literally and will only see things from his point of view. He will become very violent if held and will attack other students when angry. In school, student D is destructive of property including computers and he has a history of absconding. He has great difficulty in conforming to classroom expectations and finds changes in routine difficult to manage. Student D requires a higher than average level of adult support because of the violent nature of incidents. He experiences extreme anxiety when faced with tasks that he perceives as challenging which may act as a trigger for his behaviour. He takes medication for ADHD as prescribed. When agitated, he calms down by walking round in silence and he will not talk. As a child he experienced language delay. He finds it difficult to accept praise from adults and rejects attachments. He is easily distracted and needs to regularly refocus.

Student E and grandparents P/C E

Student E lives with his grandparents. He has a history of destroying property at home and absconding from school. When upset, he may leave the school grounds and he will sometimes lash out at students. There are frequently times when student E will find it difficult to control his behaviour and follow classroom expectations. He can often have aggressive outbursts if he feels that he is not in control of a situation. Student E will become more aggressive if agreed intervention does not take place and he will need time to calm down. He may respond to support from a staff member with whom he has

built a rapport.

Student F and mother P/C F

Student E lives with his mother and is an only child. He has a history of becoming very violent and he will attack both adults and other students when angry. He is very controlling of those in his environment and always wants his own way. Student F has a very short fuse and will need time to settle down and regain his composure after an incident. He will frequently abscond from lessons. When at home he takes time out with his animals.

Student G and mother P/C G

Student G lives with his mother and an elder brother. His mother works unsocial hours and he has little parental control. Student G is identified as being very immature, lacking in responsibility, and is easily led. His SEN statement identifies SEBD and the need for high levels of support. He has a home history of drug and substance abuse. In school, student G has a history of absconding from lessons. He has great difficulty in conforming to classroom expectations and finds changes in routine difficult to manage.

As the primary voice, student perceptions will be shared first, followed by the secondary and supporting voice of their parents and carers. This chapter will explore the six themes with regards to the participants' perceptions of worth of school and OOSTEP as identified in the data analysis (section 3.7.1). These are presented in the following table.

THEMES		SCHOOL (S)	OOSTEP (O)
1	**Environment**	School Environment (SE)	OOSTEP Environment (OE)
2	**Learning**	Learning Difficulties (SD)	Choice & Opportunities (OO)
3	**Development**	Behaviours (SB)	Progression (OPr)
4	**Staff**	School Teachers (ST)	OOSTEP Mentors (OM)
5	**Peers**	School & Peers (SP)	OOSTEP & Peers (OP)
6	**Family**	School & Family (SF)	OOSTEP & Family (OF)

Table 2: Theme Summary

4.1. Theme One: Education Environments

4.1.1 School Environment

All participating students shared perceptions of their school environment. This served as a baseline and underpinned their attitude towards the worth and value of their school experience.

All six students communicated a negative stance on their experience of school and their worth within it. Each participant responded with brief comments when they were asked about their school experience. Quotations are identified by the participant's pseudonym alongside the relevant page number and line of the transcription.

> *I was kicked out of school.* (Adam: 1, 3)
>
> *Crap, I did not like school.* (Brett: 1, 6)
>
> *Got on shit at (named school). (*Connor: 2, 42*)*
>
> *….the only thing that really happened was that I got bullied.* (Elliot: 2, 62-63)
>
> *Shite* (Finn: 1, 4). *It was just frustrating, all work is.* (Finn: 1, 16)
>
> *Horrible. I kept coming home with bruises and fingerprints* (George: 1, 18)

All six parents and carers observed that attending a school placement was problematic for the student with SEMH issues and/or to the school which found the students challenging and difficult to manage:

> *He has always struggled.* (P/C Adam: 1, 13)
>
> *His schooling was appalling.* (P/C Brett: 1, 8) *They turned round and said he was a problem to them.* (P/C Brett: 1, 21-22)
>
> *…. more unsettled than anything.* (P/C Connor: 1, 4) *It just was not the right*

setting for him, we knew it was not but we did not have any choice. (P/C Connor: 1, 12-13)

….. he just went from school to school. (P/C Daniel: 2, 51) *So in three years he went to about four or five different schools.* (P/C Daniel: 2, 56)

He has had problems (with school) since nursery. (P/C Finn: 1, 19)

The act of attending school had both physical and mental consequences for some students. For example, one parent noted the trauma experienced by their son preparing to attend school. Similarly, another parent recognised the anger that accompanied school attendance:

I escorted him to the school one day and we were chatting in the taxi.... I took him through the school door and the change in him ..., he was just like a bundle of nerves. It was as though he tensed up as soon as he got to that front door and he changed instantly..... The experience...showed me that it was the wrong environment. (P/C George: 2, 51-57)

He was angry every day when he was going to his special school. He would come home angry, like this. It was like a black cloud over him all the time, he would come home from school angry, he was angry in the morning, he broke his hand punching the wall one morning because he did not want to go to school. We were literally having to push him into the taxi in the morning, it was awful. (P/C Connor: 5, 188-192)

4.1.1. Summary: School Environment

Severely damaged students often shared insights of their feelings about name calling and attitudes towards school. Frustrations and anger aimed at school accumulated over many years of bad experiences and students often continued to associate those feelings with the mention of school. For some students who experienced SEMH difficulties, school life caused increased stress and anxiety. School is not necessarily the right setting to meet the SEMH needs of some students.

4.1.2 OOSTEP Environment

The majority of students and their parents and carers received OOSTEP (Out-of-School Therapeutic Education Programme) well overall, although a few had their concerns. Students responded favourably, stating:

> *Out-of-school education, it is bless isn't it?* (Adam: 2, 75)

> *I would say go on (OOSTEP), it is better than school.* (Brett: 9, 306)

> *Without (OOSTEP) well I wouldn't have done anything really. I would have just been like sort of. I hate the what if, it could have been anything.* (Elliot: 2, 45- 46)

> *There is no other way. It is a different way isn't it? Yes it is certainly helpful. I do not think there is anything that I would like to change.* (Elliot: 2, 55-57)

When OOSTEP was introduced, not all students understood its purpose and shared their reservations:

> *A school is a school.* (George: 1, 31)

> *What happens if I get kicked out, out of this one (OOSTEP), where do I go? ..... Back to (named 3rd school)?* (Finn: 1, 43-45)

After so much disruption at school, it is understandable that some parents and carers also had reservations about more change and what it entailed:

> *Coming out of (named school) and doing the (OOSTEP), change again. I think he does not deal with change at all.* (P/C Adam: 1, 16-17)

> *He lasted months at his first secondary school and he went to a PRU and then to the Therapeutic School. He is now back at a similar PRU provision with yourself, that is it.* (P/C Finn: 1, 30-32)

However, most parents and carers acknowledged that OOSTEP brought considerable benefits:

> *From the early days I think, from when he was younger to now his education has been quite poor, but now I would not say it was 100% but I would say it was 97, 98% now. His self-esteem was very low, he could not do things, but now he would not find it a challenge anymore.* (P/C Brett: 1, 4-5)

> *Actually does not seem to bother about school. Particularly this term he seems to be happy to go to (OOSTEP)……. He like, seems like he wants to go. He wants to go and is eager to do something.* (P/C Connor: 5, 192-196)

> *He then started (OOSTEP) and it was going alright at first I think, he enjoyed (named provision).* (P/C Daniel: 5, 92-93)

There was a clear impression that a change from school to OOSTEP had brought about several genuine benefits for students with SEMH issues. Students discovered that they were able to cast aside the problems that they were unable to manage at school; a different environment and new associations on OOSTEP enabled them to return to education, re-focus, and get back on track:

> *It has helped me a lot, a lot more than school did, a lot more than school did, a lot lot more than school did. I could not cope in school at all, with (OOSTEP) I could. I do not know whether it was different times in the day or just because of the people on (named programme). But I did not like school at all. I did not like school at all. There is something about it that I did not like.* (Brett: 7, 229-233)

> *A while back I wanted to go to school a bit more. But I went in for an exam and it was rubbish.* (Adam: 2, 59-60)

> *…… I can get back on track and do better……. is helping. Yes it's getting me on a straight. Like doing this sort of education, while before I didn't really want to, because I was bullied.* (Elliot: 1, 14-17)…..*a place I could enjoy. It was something I*

could enjoy..... It's way better now, it has to be. (Elliot: 2, 69-71)

George was able to avoid being bullied at school (George: 1, 34) and Finn also had respite from being 'terrorised' at school (Finn: 4, 136).

4.1.2. Summary: OOSTEP Environment

Students who had refused to attend school or who were school-phobic were able to re-engage in education. All students who were at risk of exclusion were initially able to get back on track through an alternative education programme (OOSTEP). Parents and carers identified changes in student attitudes, and they became more favourable to an out-of-school programme. They considered a move to OOSTEP beneficial as it provided a more appropriate environment, and it was safe from bullying.

Key Findings: Section 1, Environment

- School for students with SEMH issues can cause increased stress and anxiety.
- School was associated with bad experiences both physically and emotionally.
- School was not deemed the right setting for some students.
- OOSTEP was well received following concerns regarding further change.
- OOSTEP was identified as an appropriate and safe environment.
- OOSTEP allowed students with SEMH issues to cope, re-engage, and get back on track.

It is clear that some school environments are not considered an appropriate place for certain students. The responses illustrate a noticeable depth of feeling and antagonism towards schools. A respite alternative was thus welcomed and indeed essential for some students to remain in education. OOSTEP is a possible solution to the challenges facing some students with SEMH difficulties as it provides a safe and secure environment that they consider appropriate for their needs.

4.2 Theme Two: Learning

4.2.1 Learning Difficulties

In their interviews, the students, parents, and carers referred to the struggle with learning in school. When asked about SEN statements (now Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)), only one student acknowledged the statement, but another student recognised the labels associated with his condition:

> *Talks about ADHD, but I don't know what that special statement is.* (Adam: 1, 5)

> *I knew I had something, because I had problems* (Brett: 3, 99). *Yes, ADHD or ARD or something shit like that ……it is a disorder where I can just flick at any time.* (Brett: 7, 248-250) *It comes out as the wrong thing..... I will just start going off on one for no reason.* (Brett: 7, 254)

Despite their lack of understanding with regards to a SEN statement (EHCP) and its associated labels, some students gave fascinating insights into their conditions. Brett explained his own diagnosis as a switch to another side of his character:

> *One is the not happy and one is the normal, you can find I am the nicest person that you can meet. But if someone soon pissed me off, you want to get out of my way, it don't matter who is in my way, I will push you out of the way.....I cannot stop myself. I can feel it coming on, I can feel it goes from my head to my body, I start tensing my fist and that is when I feel the anger come.....But it is like a little tingling in my head at first and then start switch and that is it. That is when I go, I will not miss, I would not miss, I have been like that most of my life, so I have got used to it. When I was younger I switch within seconds.* (Brett: 8, 286-295)

Parents and carers were far more informed about SEN statements/EHCPs and were also sceptical about their use, along with the associated labels that had been used to describe their child's difficulties:

> *I think he got statemented when he was about nine, I think. Well originally he has*

ADHD and he needed that one and one support. (P/C Daniel: 2, 58-59)

Yes, he has had an educational statement since the first years of juniors. I did work with distracting him and he did not follow any of it, it all went straight out of the window. (P/C Finn: 1, 29-30)

The Easter holidays they got the statement prepared so he could stay at the school, so he could attend the school. (P/C George: 1, 32) *It wasn't actual an assessment of him. It was written so that he could attend the school (a named special school).* (P/C George: 2, 84-85)

Parents and carers shared their personal understanding of their child's SEMH needs which often disagreed with the diagnosis of the professionals:

They (school) were not cottoning on to that he had got learning difficulties. (P/C Brett: 1, 8-9) *They turned round and said that they could not help him and all that. But I did not believe them, he was just a problem to them, he was just clogging up the works if you know what I mean.* (P/C Brett: 1, 21-23)

I think to be honest Connor shows some signs of having autism, but he has never had an assessment for it and it is probably at this point isn't worth bothering with, but I personally think that he has some autistic tendencies, you know. (P/C Connor: 3, 114-116)

So he struggled to talk to the teachers and communicate with the other kids, and I think he got very frustrated with that. (P/C Daniel: 1, 18-19) *He was very behind with his reading, writing and anything like that, his understanding of things. But, I don't think the teachers got it really, I knew there was something.* (P/C Daniel: 1, 30-32).

Parents and carers were able to give an insight into the triggers for their children's difficult behaviours which were not always easy to define. They observed that, in most circumstances, it was not possible to stop the reaction once the trigger had been pulled.

This corresponded with the students' explanations as they were able to clearly recognise that they had lost control. The parents and carers recognised the triggers as instigating certain actions and these actions were described as an *explosion*, *lashing out*, *violent* and a *time bomb*. They identified that the triggers for young people with SEMH issues could not be fully understood which made the students' behaviour unpredictable and complex in nature. Furthermore, parents and carers expressed concern regarding the lack of awareness of young people's feelings and emotions:

> *…he is like a light switch, you cannot tell when he is building up to an explosion, it just happens or it doesn't. ……there is no two days the same. And with him I have found the best thing to let him do when he is angry is to walk it off.* (P/C George: 2, 72-75) *I think there is a problem there, I think there is something going on that he does not, his brain does not connect properly to emotions and he cannot express in a suitable manner.* (P/C George: 3, 89-90) *His brain starts panicking and he goes I am going to fail I cannot do it.* (P/C George: 3, 99-100)

> *I would try to talk to him about it and he would say that he goes blank. He doesn't mean it you know, he doesn't know why he does it. He does not know why he gets so violent. A staff member had actually said to me that you can tell when he is going to be like that because his face just changes and it is like he is not with us and he lashes out.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 86-89)

> *You cannot fully understand him, then it makes him complex….. can trigger a time bomb ..... his fingers will start clicking, and that is it you know he is going and when he starts there is no stopping him.* (P/C Finn: 38 - 43). *Fuck you, fucking arsehole, bastard, cunt, he is off... It is spontaneous.....* (P/C Finn: 3, 99 -102)

> *(He) never really thinks how things may affect other people.* (P/C Connor: 3, 123) *I do not actually think necessarily that he is getting that feeling that other people get, that guilt or that remorse, because he is removed from that I think in some way.* (P/C Connor: 3, 127-128)

There was a clear feeling of frustration amongst parents and carers as their children

with SEMH issues grew older. Caring for children was often exacerbated by their physicality. It was a common assumption that there would be personal changes; however, it was identified that children with SEMH issues often remained as excitable as when they were young. Managing an older and thus physically larger child with SEMH issues was understood as being more challenging by parents and carers:

> *… just gets bigger and bigger and bigger.* (P/C Adam: 2, 52)

> *… the older he got the worse the situation got because he was getting bigger.* (P/C Daniel: 1, 29-30)

> *The size of him, people automatically think young adult how are you, because he does not have a disability that you can see. So they can be chatting about something they have done and getting excited. Then you can see (Finn's) eyes and he is getting excited with you, do you know what I mean, and that is it, he is off.* (P/C Finn: 72-75)

Despite the depth of understanding demonstrated by parents and carers with regards to SEMH difficulties, the overwhelming feeling was that professionals did not listen to the voices of parents and carers. George's mother disagreed with a doctor but felt that she had no comeback:

> *There is nothing wrong with him (stated a doctor). I am like, OK, I think you are wrong but OK.* (P/C George: 2, 46-47)

Students shared their perceptions concerning their lack of progress and learning at school. No student spoke of their abilities and interest in any academic subjects taught in school. The nearest to identifying success in a subject was Finn:

> *(First school named) I was alright for ABC's, was alright.* (Finn: 1, 8)

> *Times I don't think I got on very well.* (Adam: 1, 14)

I did not progress education wise. (Elliot: 2, 62)

The parents and carers shared their concerns regarding students' lack of academic progress at school. They recognised that their children with SEMH difficulties had not been able to cope in school and that, consequently, they had fallen behind in their studies:

He was never one for getting along with his work, he was very behind with his reading, writing and anything like that, his understanding of things. (P/C Daniel: 1, 30-31)

Medication for Learning Difficulties

Three of the students (Adam, Daniel, and Finn) were prescribed medication. Although none of the students mentioned medication, it was discovered during parent/carer interviews that each of these three students had been taken off medication whilst they were in school. Parents and carers shared a belief that medication made a positive difference, enabling the student with SEMH issues to better manage their condition. Professionals have not always agreed about both diagnosis and medication:

...he was on medication and after a medical appointment they said basically that he did not need to be on the medication, that he did not have ADHD. He had been on medication for two years. So it did make a difference. (P/C Daniel: 2, 65-68)

The use of medication was often welcomed by parents and carers but avoided by students. It was often removed by medics for no apparent reason. This was true in Finn's case and similar opinions were found across the data for both Adam and Daniel. Consequently, both Finn's parent at home and subsequently the teaching staff at school felt that they were unable to cope with his learning difficulties. Finn's parent felt undermined by the medical professional who stated that Finn did not have to take medication:

…he did not have to take it, no one could force him to take it. That was his words and because he (doctor) said that, (Finn) would say I don't have to take it if I don't want to take it, so that was him. (P/C Finn: 2, 55-57) *His meds did what they said*

they gave him a little bit of extra concentration; he does not have that anymore. (P/C Finn: 2, 61-62)

4.2.1 Summary: Learning Difficulties

The students identified that they were difficult at school. However, they were able to provide a greater understanding of their personal challenges despite knowing very little about their SEN statements/EHCPs and the labels placed on them. Parents and carers were able to explain and clarify this further, sharing a greater understanding of SEMH. They spoke of their personal beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge of SEMH as it related to their children. Furthermore, they were able to give increased insights into the young person's identified triggers and their resulting behaviours. Although students, parents, and carers demonstrated a unique and rich understanding of their perceptions of SEMH conditions during this study, they all felt that they were not listened to by education and health professionals and therefore felt unable to share their personal insights with them. Guidance with regards to understanding and managing SEMH conditions was rarely shared with the students. Parents and carers observed the challenges associated with students with SEMH difficulties growing up, especially the difficulties in managing their physicality. Parents and carers welcomed the use of medication but they felt that medical professionals undermined them by explaining that students had a choice when it came to medication administration. Students provided particularly personal insights into the 'switches' that can influence their behaviour within seconds. The data confirmed that parents and carers provide insightful knowledge, understanding, and support for students with SEMH issues where necessary. They believed that they should have been listened to and had the opportunity to work in partnership with school environments.

4.2.2 Learning Opportunities

A significant area described by students and their parents and carers relates to the opportunities afforded to students with SEMH issues on OOSTEP. The perceptions of these participants were divided into three subdivisions which included:

- Personal choice and opportunities
- Outcomes and achievements

- Future opportunities, transition, and pathways

Personal Choice and Opportunities

One of the significant benefits of OOSTEP as identified by students was the opportunity to make choices:

> *I have a choice. When I was in school I did not like it, but when I have been on (OOSTEP) I have liked it more.* (Brett: 7, 222-224)

All the students were given a choice of curriculum on OOSTEP. Finn found making education choices difficult and needed some support. When asked about education, he stated:

> *No. I do not want to do it ….OK (he agreed)* (Finn: 3, 63).

Finn was asked about a mentor for the subjects of Maths and English and he responded: 'No chance' (Finn: 3, 80). He shared that he was 'Better at Maths than English' (Finn: 3, 86). He then consented: 'Probably' (Finn: 3, 88).

Once Finn had chosen and then experienced the activity of go-karting, he became engaged, showed a real aptitude for the sport, and excelled. When asked about go-karting, he responded:

> *I want to do that.* (Finn: 1, 40)

> *It is fun and fast.* (Finn: 3, 80)

> *Go-karting, it is fun, it is a miracle.* (Finn: 4, 131)

Students highlighted the wide range of learning opportunities available on OOSTEP that were provided by alternative provision (AP), even asking if they could return for further study:

> *Mechanics, sports, gym, drove a Lambo, done loads, loads of stuff. All different*

opportunities, different opportunities and different parts like companies, like how can I explain it? Like I have done nearly every subject. (Brett: 7, 217-219)

I have been on loads of courses. I have been on music, bikes, mechanics, I have done English, Maths, Art and Music again..... I have been on all the courses. (Adam: 1, 26-28)

anything... animals …see if I could work with the RSPCA? (George: 2, 46)

I would like to do (named provision) thing again. (Connor: 1, 10)

However, as Connor confirmed, the choices made by each student with SEMH issues on OOSTEP were not always a success and new choices then had to be made:

Alright. Out of town (Maths provision), key workers are different each day, just getting to know them. Went to (2nd provision), (3rd provision) alright at (4th provision) first and then got lazy, OK. (Connor: 1, 33-35)

Agreeing opportunities on OOSTEP was difficult at times. This process requires negotiation and compromise as parents and carers often had their own ideas and students also changed their minds:

I was not too keen on the music course he was doing, that was me, I could not see where it would lead in years to come. (P/C Adam: 2, 81, 82) *I was hoping that he was going to get some form of trade at college, and go down the lines that he is interested in cars or mechanics..... Perhaps go into a trade like carpentry, joinery or something. But we were talking about it and he seemed quite interested in doing something like that, but he seemed to have done a U-turn on it now.* (P/C Adam: 2, 68-72)

He enjoyed the cycle (maintenance) provision. (P/C Daniel: 3, 92)

Independent living would be fantastic, to know that he can do that on his own. (P/C

Finn: 3, 93-94)

Regarding provisions, George's mother shared an extensive conversation she had with him about possible choices:

> *I have discussed with him a lot of other things that he can do. He said he wants to continue fishing. I think he should continue his cooking because he is very good at that, he is just very good at cooking and always has been.* (P/C George: 3, 101-104)

Outcomes and Achievements

During the OOSTEP experience, there was a sense of ever-increasing confidence as students grew as learners. Students expressed their personal choices and outcomes in interviews. They shared a sense of responsibility and pride in their achievements. Most participating students clearly identified the ways in which their priorities had changed since starting OOSTEP:

> *I am going to work harder now, just so I can get on the course. I want to pass these exams whatever and at least I will have a chance.* (Adam: 2, 68-69)

> *I have breezed through them so far. Level 1's Maths and English and Level 2 and I have been preparing for them a little bit, but I haven't found it as too much of a struggle or struggle at all.* (Elliot: 1, 42-44)

> *I am glad I passed them both (Maths and English).* (Brett: 6, 208-209)

> *Do not know, you try things and if you can do things you can, but if you cannot you can't.* (Connor: 2, 55)

Parents and carers also shared a sense of pride in students' outcomes and revealed their ambitions:

> *He got a level in the bike maintenance, so can build on that.* (P/C Connor: 4, 171)

He really wants to do his exams. (P/C Daniel: 3, 97) *I just want him to get some qualifications and prove everyone wrong.* (P/C Daniel: 4, 135-136)

I would like him to get his GCSE, because he is more than capable of getting them. I would like to see him get the basic subjects of Maths, English and Science. (P/C George: 3, 101-103)

Future Opportunities, Transition, and Pathways

Recognising future opportunities and pathways at the age of 16 was a significant point of discussion for students, parents, and carers alike. Students identified:

College, mechanics. It depends on what will be the best or the one that I will be best at (named college). (Connor: 2, 61-63)

Brett reflected on education without the educational support, stating:

I do not know, just weird. It will be just weird. Hopefully it will be OK. Hopefully it will be bright, if not then I have got to make it bright... (Brett: 7, 225, 226)

When asked about the future one student simply stated 'I do not know' (George: 1, 45) and one did not appear willing to think about the implications of the future, saying 'Future? …smoking, getting a job' (Finn: 1, 33-34). Parents and carers offered more insight into the students' mindset about their future pathways:

As far as interests go at least he does say that he has an interest in mechanics and things like that, because before it was absolutely nothing, he did not want to do anything, absolutely nothing..... Yes even my mum asked him the other day, what he was thinking of doing and he had said mechanics and he was going to be looking at college courses over. (P/C Connor: 4, 158-164)

Adam's father shared a discussion he had had with his son where Adam stated that he did not want to go to university like his sister (P/C Adam: 3, 86-87). Adam went on to

study as an electrician at college, but his father had previously offered him an opportunity to work as an electrician abroad:

> *I have a cousin in America… A big chance for him, a lifetime, a change of lifestyle completely, but he does not seem to be taking it seriously.* (P/C Adam: 2, 73-78)

Parents shared genuine concerns regarding their sons' ability to manage after OOSTEP:

> *I said to the college, he finds it very difficult to change, does not like change. As you know yourself he goes from one route to another. He will either instantly like it or instantly dislike it. He will walk in there and he will take to it in the first week or he will say I am off. That is Adam all over.* (P/C Adam: 1, 4-7)

> *…there is not much more I can do for (Finn) unless I am with him twenty four seven. And I have got to make a living myself because the government say I have got to work.* (P/C Finn: 2, 66-68)

> *I just want him to be a good kid.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 135)

4.2.2 Summary: Learning Opportunities

Encouraging personal choice enabled students to have a voice and to engage in their own curriculum. Students on OOSTEP were empowered and encouraged to choose their own curriculum and learning opportunities. Choice facilitates engagement and ownership of learning opportunities and appears to help students in conquering their fears, failures, and rejection of past educational experiences. Some opportunities were not successful and new courses had to be chosen. Parents and carers were encouraged to discuss possible opportunities and one had concerns regarding a chosen course. However, poor choices and opportunity breakdown were seen as a part of the learning process. It was generally the case that students, parents, and carers welcomed the choices and opportunities.

Students willingly shared their growing confidence and aspirations through their outcomes and achievements on OOSTEP. Similarly, parents and carers shared a

sense of pride for those achievements, along with increased independence. These accomplishments were valued highly by all participants.
Transition from school is a crucial time for all teenagers. Three students shared their optimism, determination, and desire to succeed. Whilst parents and carers identified their concerns regarding further changes at the age of 16, they also observed a change in student attitudes. Three students shared their concerns for the future, especially the prospect of a lack of further education support.

Key Findings: Section 2, Learning

- Students had little understanding of their school assessment of SEMH issues.
- Students rarely received guidance on how to manage their learning difficulties.
- Students, parents, and carers have insightful knowledge of SEMH difficulties.
- Medication supported student with SEMH conditions.
- Students stopped taking their medication(s) of their own accord, as authorised by GPs.
- Parents and carers felt undermined by education and health professionals.
- OOSTEP empowered students, gave choice, and encouraged ownership.
- OOSTEP provided the opportunities to meet student aspirations.
- When learning choices and opportunities failed, new opportunities were chosen.
- All opportunities had outcomes that demonstrated student achievement.
- Preparing for transition was crucial for future chosen pathways.
- Parents and carers shared concerns regarding more student change.
- Parents and carers celebrated success with students.

This section demonstrates that isolating and labelling students in school does not help to provide for their needs but instead causes them harm. Students' learning difficulties are magnified as they are unable to access the necessary support and resources. The provision in school is based on the assessed perceived needs of the student although these needs have not been met. On OOSTEP, education can be shaped around a student's wants and aspirations and this provides a new start and thus a meaningful and worthwhile education experience. Encouraging the important elements of individual

choice and opportunity based on student needs, wants, and aspirations is empowering; students feel that their voice is heard and that they are valued and cared for. OOSTEP strives to provide students with a sense of self-worth, motivation, and desire to succeed and achieve in their chosen outcomes. School appears to focus on learning *difficulties* whereas OOSTEP highlights learning *opportunities*. It is this shift in focus that enables students to maximise their potential and achieve their learning outcomes.

4.3. Theme Three: Development

4.3.1 Behaviours in School

Four students with SEMH issues recognised their poor behaviour in school. Adam felt justified in his behaviour because he felt that he was being neglected. Elliott and George reported behaviours that related to being bullied. Students were very open and honest, describing in detail a whole range of extremely negative behaviour:

> *Times I don't think I got on very well …trashing things and not doing any work…Just throwing chairs and things.* (Adam: 1, 14-16) *I was not behaving. I was not doing any work, like I was just roaming around school. I was not causing too much trouble* (Adam: 1, 22-24)

> *I wasn't really bothered … they would just moan when I would kick, smashed the school up… They would just leave me at the back (of the classroom).* (Brett: 1, 17-22)

> *I was a mad head, at Primary School.* (Connor: 1, 8) *Going mad, kicking doors, smoking, smoking weed, possession of weapons.* (Connor: 2, 40-41) *Fighting, stealing, walking home.* (Connor: 3, 76)

> *Throwing chairs, tables at teachers and I was worse there.* (Finn: 1, 13-14) *I wasn't good in the classes.* (Finn: 2, 68)

All parents and carers perceived that student behaviour in school was worthy of consideration when discussing SEMH issues in education settings. They spoke of the

significant impact of behaviours on learning throughout the students' school years. Furthermore, they identified SEMH learning difficulties as the main cause of these behaviours:

> *Very disruptive, violent. Yes wrecking classrooms, took the headmistress's computer to bits and stuff like that. He just progressed from that.* (P/C Brett: 15, 16) *I would say his behaviour problem was down to his learning that is all I could really say.* (P/C Brett: 3, 111-112)

> *I noticed he started to become really spiteful, he would hit anybody that was in his way, he would pinch, he would scratch and it just went from there really.* (P/C Daniel:1, 24-26). *… you know there was lots of violence, lots of violence, lots of running away.* (P/C Daniel: 2, 85)

Poor attendance was also deemed worthy of consideration and this was compounded by students absconding from class and leaving the school premises:

> *… walked all the way home from (named therapeutic school) to home, it took all day, eight hours and I got home about ten.* (Finn: 4, 128-130)

Parents and carers appeared to have different perceptions regarding the seriousness of absconding:

> *It was nothing major, it was more that I do not want to go to this class, I want to walk around instead.* (P/C Connor: 1, 42-43)

> *(Daniel) was running away, constantly running away I was getting phone calls from the school saying that they had had to contact the police, because he had run away.* (P/C Daniel: 2, 78) *I think that when he felt pressured into doing something, or he did not feel able to do something that is when he would run.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 89-91)

Furthermore, parents highlighted the issue of school attendance and carers who were asked to remove students with SEMH difficulties from school.

I was getting phone calls every day to pick him up. He was hardly ever at school. (P/C Daniel: 1, 32-33)

I told them at that point that I had had enough. It got to the point when they were ringing every day, can you just come pick (Connor) up. (P/C Connor: 1, 27-28)

Students were removed from school on a daily basis and this caused a great deal of inconvenience for parents and carers; however, there was little explanation for such action:

Early days he went to nursery while I was working full time. It was just him and me and they said that they had problems with his outbursts, but never really followed it up. I would just pick him up and they would say that they had had a bad day or a good day. I never had got any information, never anything specific from them; just he has had a bad day. (P/C George: 1, 4-8)

4.3.1 Summary: Negative behaviour

The information shared was powerful and gave a concise account of negative behaviours in school. Students, parents, and carers were able to identify anti-social behaviours in school that included damage to property, violence, disruption, and absconding. Behaviour needed to be identified within the context of individual student needs; students in fact felt justified in their behaviours when their perceived needs were not being met. Parents and carers identified that behaviour was at times misunderstood by teachers and that this was often due to a lack of understanding of SEMH difficulties. However, schools were frequently unwilling or unable to be flexible in order to meet SEMH needs which then led to students being removed from school often without explanation. Students, parents, and carers could have identified additional resources and opportunities to improve student engagement and management of their individual needs. Parents and carers often felt disheartened and disappointed by schools when they were asked to remove their children.

4.3.2 Progression on OOSTEP

Students acknowledged that OOSTEP provided them respite from trouble at school and identified that their attitudes and personal behaviours changed. Students focused on their progression, development, and improving functional skills. Students, parents, and carers all reported an increase in maturity and a change of attitude towards education:

> *Yes, more mature I think. ...I do not know it has just happened didn't it…… I am more in control.* (Adam: 2, 47-50)

> *It is up to me what I do, I can control myself now. I can remember that when I was younger that could not. ...I would just flip.* (Brett: 6, 212-213)

> *It is up to me what I do, I can control myself now.* (Connor: 6, 211-212)

Other students (Daniel, Elliot, and Finn) who disengaged at school saw dramatic changes in their behaviour when they transferred to out-of-school education. Parents and carers noticed considerable changes in their child when they participated on OOSTEP:

> *Things that he could not grasp, and now he can.* (P/C Brett: 2, 63-64) *I think it has given him responsibility to do what he is supposed to do.* (P/C Brett: 3, 97) *(Asked if there had been change) Oh yes definitely.* (P/C Brett: 4, 151)

> *(Connor) is becoming (Connor) again. Yes, I think you have done a good job with him.* (P/C Connor: 4, 148-149)

> (*Daniel) is more mature than he was, you can have a little conversation with him now….. He is brilliant with baby.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 125-128)

> *I do like that you are taking him Go-Karting and that type of thing is a good thing and he actually ..... is building up his confidence. When you guys go and bring back the reports back, he actually leaves them around so someone notices them. I made sure to tell my mum, in front of him, what a great job he was doing and he was so close to beating the record time, you know and he smiled and I thought,*

gave him a little confidence. (P/C Connor: 4, 174-178)

A key part of OOSTEP is incorporating experience of independence. The aim of out-of-school therapeutic education is to allow students with SEMH difficulties to experience as much of the real world as possible. Opportunities were created to allow students like Elliot to develop independent skills, including independent travel:

> *I just feel more, like mature and that, I feel more independent. Yes it is a lot better than it was. On buses I have no problems, so I am going to (named town) on my own. I have seen my mum quite a bit, I always have really, but it is easier, so I can just get there on my own, because I have a bus pass and I am more independent. It has made me more independent. It has made me feel more confident now.* (Elliot: 1, 36-40)

Students, parents, and carers often felt that students with SEMH issues had matured and had shown personal development whilst on OOSTEP. However, Finn's mother felt that her son, despite displaying progress, had a long way to go and required concessions to be made due to his learning difficulties:

> *More mature in basics, like go and make a pot noodle now, he can boil an egg, he can make a bit of bacon. All bog-standard stuff that his elder brother could do at eight, he is just learning how to do it now, that is about it.* (P/C Finn: 2, 70-72)
> *But everything, you have to make a concession for him, you have to change. We have tried to be social, but (Finn's) social and someone else's social are very different.* (P/C Finn: 3, 87-90)

4.3.2 Summary: Personal development

Students who engaged in out-of-school learning and purposeful education experiences were afforded the opportunity to focus on their personal development rather than on their difficulties. Students did not associate themselves with the behaviours they exhibited at school but spoke of control and maturity. Students focused on their abilities and not on their disabilities. Overall, there was less conflict in their lives and a greater focus on personal improvement. Similarly, parents and carers

described students who were more mature, responsible, and approachable. Related skills of personal development and independence helped to build self-confidence and self-esteem. However, as one parent identified, concessions were still necessary for students who were still maturing. Increased maturity has been attributed to student development on OOSTEP as the programme supports, changes, and adapts to the needs of the individual. However, this increase could also reasonably be related to the fact that the students were growing up.

Key Findings: Section 3, Development

- Negative attitudes and anti-social behaviour dominated school activity.
- Behaviour was justified by the students because their needs were not met.
- Students believed that their behaviour was often misunderstood.
- School did not provide choices, opportunities, and transition support.
- Parents felt unsupported when students were sent home or excluded.
- OOSTEP engaged students and focused on their personal development rather than their behaviours.
- OOSTEP focused student attitudes on opportunities rather than learning difficulties.
- OOSTEP identified student abilities rather than disabilities.
- Independence developed responsibility and self-confidence.
- Maturity was identified but concessions for SEMH issues were still required.

These findings illustrate the disturbing feelings and activities that motivate negative student behaviours. Student school experiences reflect student behaviours. Students often characterise the learning environment as a system of control and their behaviours are a rejection of this system. OOSTEP thus strives to reduce and/or remove behaviour barriers by focusing on personal progress and development. Students are given personal responsibility for their future pathways in an environment conducive to learning and personal development. This, in turn, facilitates growth and enables the student to become the person that they aspire to be.

4.4. Theme Four: Education Staff

4.4.1 Teachers

All participating students, parents, and carers identified relationships with teachers as a significant factor in the school experience for students with SEMH issues. They shared their perceptions of teachers at school incorporating three main categories.

- Teachers acting unfairly
- Teachers' behaviour management
- Teachers' positive actions

Teachers Acting Unfairly

All students highlighted what they perceived as the unfair actions of their teachers. Brett was particularly vocal and revealed that he felt a lack of connection with his teachers:

> *…. they used to help all the other kids except me* (Brett: 1, 12-13)... *because I was the dumbest.* (Brett: 1, 15) *They would just leave me at the back and if I asked for help or put my hand up they would not even come over to me they would blank me.* (Brett: 1, 22-23) *When they were chucking me to the back of the classroom it weren't helping me.* (Brett: 1, 27) *…weren't helping the kids that were thingy in the head.* (Brett: 2, 41)

Students identified that they felt disrespected by staff, resulting in upset and name-calling from other students:

> *How did they expect respect from me if they did not give me respect in school?* (Brett: 1, 57-58)

> *….. the head teacher was dissing me up.* (Finn: 1, 15) *I kept getting pissed off at the teachers* (Finn: 1, 20) *I called the teacher, because she has crabs.* (Finn: 1, 23)

Students also revealed that staff picked on them:

I didn't like it because of the teachers that tried to act big, because I was the biggest lad in my year they thought they could pick on me. (Brett: 6, 196-198)

Students reported that they were threatened by teaching staff. This precipitated extraordinary and intense feelings, resulting in actual attacks on school staff:

That it was French shit. When I told the teacher that I did not want to do it, I did not do it. That's what he does, forces me to do it. Do it or I will get the police involved. Then get the police involved. I threw loads of chairs and tables at the French teacher. I told him I did not want to do it. (Finn: 3, 117-118)

OK some of them (staff) I wanted to kill. (George: 1, 37) *I nearly killed a pupil and a teacher. I nearly killed them. I have got to admit I did hold back, I did hold back.* (George: 1, 15-17)

Brett identified that his behaviour was a direct consequence of the negative actions of his teachers (Brett: 6, 190-191). He explained:

I was evil, they were evil to me and I was evil back to them. That is how I was, they were evil to me so I was twice evil back to them. (Brett: 2, 50-51)

He stated that he was falsely accused on numerous occasions and that staff lied about his behaviours, blaming him for hitting other students (Brett: 1, 25-28). He identified a teacher who assaulted him:

…he used to, he hit me he did, he punched me in the face and said that I hurt myself, he punched me in the face and said I hurt myself, I did not hurt myself. (Brett: 3, 100-102)

A further source of grievance and perceived unfairness was the poor communication of the teaching staff which led to George being disadvantaged:

did not invite me (to a meeting), so I never turned up (consequently, George)...

lost his placement. (P/C George 24, 25)

Teachers' Behaviour Management

There was a complex teacher-student relationship, a game almost, as teachers demonstrated authority in the classroom:

> *I can remember being sarcastic to a teacher. I think it was low low school toddler type thing and it was the first time you sit on chairs and I was like fidgeting on the chair. The teacher asked me to sit on the floor. So I sat on the floor, sat down calmly. Then asked if I could sit back on the chair, went back on the chair and started fidgeting again. She said you need to sit on the floor now. I said back to the teacher, I wondered how long it would take you to get me back on the floor.* (George: 1, 5-11)

Several ways of managing behaviour were disclosed by students which included isolation, restraint, suspension, and exclusion. Most students spoke of their experience in an isolation room, a space that is separate from the classroom that is used to physically contain students:

> *At the end of it I was isolated from the whole school. I was kept in a room.* (George: 1, 25-26)

> *If it was where you were banging, you got put in a room and they locked the door. I cannot remember what it was called but I was always in there.* (Adam: 1, 17-18)

> *They used to lock you in a room, if you were naughty they would lock you in a dark room and leave you there, for ages and ages and I smashed a room up and they did not like it.* (Brett: 3, 69-71)

A parent shared genuine concerns about behaviour management practices in school:

> *The head mistress did not deal with the situation well at all. One time I went to pick him up and she had locked him in her office and tied a rope to the handles holding*

the rope so he could not get out, which I was not happy about at all, you just do not do it so. (P/C Daniel: 1, 34-37)

Students felt that they were set up to fail and, rather than being calmed down, they were in fact antagonised and the situations exacerbated. There was a lack of understanding of SEMH difficulties; teaching staff were unable to manage student behaviours and did not have appropriate strategies according to student need:

I got told off, all because. Who puts a kid, if they know the kid has disability? Do they put him in a room that has a computer system in it? You know the towers that you control the computer system and one of those was in there and I jumped up and smashed and ripped all the cables out, took the whole internet out and then I got blamed for that. Don't lock me in a room then, with the light off. Lock me in a dark room and I am going to go mad I don't like it, I don't like it, because you couldn't even get out either. They would lock the door so that you couldn't get out, and there was no light in there it was pure dark, I didn't like it. (Brett: 3, 71-78)

George perceived 'isolation' as a game:

Enjoyed Friday. Every Friday I had isolation, because I didn't go into lessons. I went on the roofs. Every week I would run away from isolation. (George: 3, 123-125)

The students' experience of holding techniques was that they often developed into violence:

There was a room.…And he was holding me one time and because he got me like that (in a wrap). Yes, so with my arms like that he was proper pulling them tight. I was trying to get out and obviously I went like that and he wouldn't let go, put my head forward and I head butted him in the face. I went 'you should have let me go of me' then he grabbed me and sorted, he was the only one holding me when I was in the room. (Brett: 3, 102-108)

Students were asked if they remembered incidents at school and they shared their

experiences of behaviour management:

> *I cannot remember any good times. When (named staff) tried to push off the roof with a stick. I can remember that fucking teacher. I've lost his name (named), he jumped on my ribs. I can remember that. I can remember there were not many good memories there at school.* (Brett: 6, 183-185)

Parents voiced their displeasure at being frequently contacted by school:

> *It was a nightmare at (second named special school), it was literally phone calls three times a day to tell me that he had absconded that he was on the roof.* (P/C Connor: 4, 149-150)

When behaviour strategies failed, students were suspended from school and their parents and carers were obliged to have them stay at home for a period of time. This was an outcome for all students in this study.

> *This is at four years old…… we are suspending him.* (P/C George: 1, 16-17)

Exclusion from school was the ultimate sanction that was experienced by all students participating in this study. The same students were excluded from various schools for different reasons and for different lengths of time. George and his mother identified the same exclusion:

> *I got kicked out for anger.* (George: 1, 15)
> *...so he then spent 6 months at home* (P/C George: 1, 26-27)

Daniel's mother removed her son from schools to avoid exclusion:

> *I change his school because they were not happy with him, they did not want him there any longer. So I took him to (named) local school. He was there about six weeks and they said that they could not deal with him any longer.* (P/C Daniel: 2, 44-46)

Teachers' Positive Actions

Positive narratives about teachers were the exception in this study. Students identified limited positive and worthwhile relationships with teachers. However, students did admit that some schools were better than others at supporting their individual needs:

> *I was OK with some of the teachers there, I was OK with them.* (Brett: 3, 82) *I got more help than I got at (stated school), a lot more than I got at (stated school). I didn't get chucked to the back, to the back of the classroom. We were all on one, one big table so that we were all around each other, so that was the only one.* (Brett: 3, 88-90)

> *I was good there, good with (named teacher). Kind of, I scored the goal at overhead skill.* (Finn: 1, 27-28)

Elliot had to return to early years in school to be able to recall a favourable involvement:

> *....painting in reception, like below year one and we just did painting whatever. (Asked if he enjoyed it) I think I did, yes.* (Elliot: 4, 5)

Parents and carers acknowledged the relatively few members of staff who had made a positive and worthwhile contribution to their child's school experience. Parents and carers indicated that they were especially grateful and appreciative of these positive school experiences:

> *…but there was one teacher who was really good with him and she suggested that I take him to the GP because of the way that he was behaving. … …she suggested that he could have ADHD, I had never heard of it.* (P/C Daniel: 1, 37-40)

> *He got on really well with (named staff) was a SENCO at the time she did all his paperwork and all that.* (P/C Finn: 1, 21-22)

Positive school experiences were the exception in this study. However, two parents

identified special schools which they explained had made a worthy contribution to their child's education experience:

> *(named special school) was a brilliant school, it is brilliant school, so relaxed it is. All the kids like are happy, they are little kids, polite, they look after each other.* (P/C Connor: 1, 23-25)

4.4.1 Summary: School Teachers

Students with SEMH issues identified that they received unfair treatment from teachers in school. Some students were ignored and left alone without any support from teachers, whilst others felt they were being bullied or persecuted. To some, this unfair treatment resulted in students being threatened and assaulted. Parents and carers also observed situations where teachers had treated their child unfairly. Despite the use of several behaviour management strategies there was little to no evidence for their success during the students' school experience. Students shared many examples of the futility of the behaviour management strategies that they had observed and experienced. The outcome of behaviour strategies was negative as they appear to have led to further animosity, conflict, and a breakdown in relationships with the schools. Parents were unable to comment on direct experiences of behaviour management techniques; however, they spoke openly about the ineffectiveness of school suspensions and exclusions.

All participating students and supporting parents and carers realised that the student-teacher relationship was a significant factor in the school experience of students with SEMH issues. However, the overwhelming response from students was that teachers acted unfairly towards them in school. They described a lack of support, criticisms, persecution, threats, and assaults. Behaviour management was based on teacher control and sanctions, none of which were successful when working with students with SEMH issues and their extreme behaviours. Parents felt let down when students were suspended or excluded from school. However, there were a small number of schools identified as having provided for SEMH needs, including adult support, fairness, and a connection that allowed for the students to be taught in an engaging and meaningful way. Participants in the study felt that staff needed to be more flexible and engage students according to individual interests and needs in school. Students

expressed that they needed to be listened to. Similarly, parents and carers felt that they needed to be listened to and regarded positively by school staff.

4.4.2 OOSTEP Mentor Relationships

All students were engaged with OOSTEP staff for different lengths of time throughout their out-of-school experience. In contrast to their school experience, no student, parent, or carer observed any negative relationship with OOSTEP staff (teachers/instructors). Furthermore, there was a definite shift in relationships in terms of shared positive associations. Elliot described one relationship as 'good' and stated that he was able to get on 'with quite a bit of work' (Elliot: 2, 47). Connor stated that his key worker was 'alright' and he asked if he could 'continue with him' (Connor: 1, 10-11). Brett reported that '(staff member named) has helped me with my reading' (Brett: 7, 216). Parents and carers were able to give further insight into the significance of the students' relationship with OOSTEP staff:

> *Like I say he has come on leaps and bounds with (OOSTEP) staff, since (OOSTEP) staff has been doing it. It has given him confidence, he has got a lot more confidence than he had before, because he is doing reading with out-of-school staff as well.* (P/C Brett: 120-123) *I think that he gets on quite well with (named staff).* (P/C Brett: 4, 141)

Connor's parent likened his present OOSTEP staff to a staff member at a previous school:

> *(Named special school) had been a good thing for him, he certainly liked it, kind of how you are with him. He had that kind of relationship with them, it was almost like a little family outside of home and they were doing little different things with him and they were able to appreciate that he was not always super co-operative. They were able to work around it like you guys do and he was doing quite well there.* (P/C Connor: 1, 8-12)

Five students with SEMH difficulties (Adam, Brett, Connor, Daniel, and Elliot) were registered and were actively involved in out-of-school alternative provisions. Connor confirmed that he was happy with the people he was working with (Connor: 2, 84-85) and at a new provision he stated that he was 'Just getting to know them' (Connor: 1, 34). When asked about how he was getting on with the staff at his provisions, Brett said 'OK' (Brett: 8, 266). Adam gave additional insight into one provision:

> *It is fine. I will just do what I normally do there, chill, that is about it, because I didn't have to do anything. Yes, it was alright.* (Adam: 1, 29-30)

One parent spoke very positively about their relationship with an education professional who referred her son to OOSTEP:

> *I think it was down to the education officer (named), that he was referred to (OOSTEP) education and things started working a lot better. And to me I have seen him move on over this period of 3 years, because I have watched him move on.* (P/C Brett: 1, 32-34)

Whilst on OOSTEP, students' relationships with medical professionals appeared to continue in the same vein as before. Finn's parent identified a negative relationship with a doctor:

> *He (Finn) just does not like him and never engaged with him at all.* (P/C Finn: 2, 53-54)

Daniel's parent continued to have an ongoing disagreement with a psychologist over medication:

> *... did not need to be on the medication, that he did not have ADHD.* (P/C Daniel: 2, 67-68)

> *... we have been through CAMHS five times and every time they turned round and said he does not have any mental health issues. It is not a problem.* (P/C George:

2, 86-88)

Parents and carers felt that healthcare professionals would not listen to them. This was an ongoing concern for parents and carers of Daniel, Finn, and George both before and during OOSTEP.

Summary: OOSTEP Mentors

It was a significant finding that no negative experiences were shared regarding AP staff. However, it was also significant that students may not have been appropriately challenged during their learning activities, as Adam identified. It was also the case that AP staff were respectful of student needs and treated them differently in a positive way. No parents and carers mentioned relationships with AP staff by name although they did mention the benefits of alternative provisions. One carer identified a helpful and supportive education officer by name who had referred the student to OOSTEP.

Key Findings: Section 4, Staff

- Relationships with teachers was a significant factor in schooling students with SEMH issues.
- Negative relationships with teachers were synonymous with school.
- School behaviour management strategies led to further animosity and violence.
- Teachers acted unfairly and students with SEMH issues stated that they were ignored.
- Teachers were identified as threatening and assaulted students.
- Teacher sanctions were considered ineffective for extreme behaviours.
- Parents and carers felt ignored by teachers when they wanted to be heard.

These findings illustrate that there was a distinct lack of appropriate student-teacher relationships and a dearth of adult role models during the school experience. Teachers,

however, may also feel trapped in a system that is unwilling or unable to respond, perhaps due to lack of resources or training. OOSTEP mentors are able to dissociate themselves from past teacher indiscretions through name and conduct and, as such, they present as relational partners in supporting student well-being.

4.5. Theme Five: Peer Relationships

4.5.1 Peer Relationships at School

All students and their parents and carers recognised peers as an important factor worthy of mention. Four areas have been identified from the narratives relating to relationships with peers:

- Negative peer relationships
- Bullying and being bullied
- Positive peer relationships
- Peer relationships out of school

Negative Peer Relationships

The students participating in this study experienced an extremely wide range of SEMH abilities and differing disabilities in other students during their schooling. Brett shared the traumatic experience of being placed in a classroom with students who had different disabilities:

> *I think they put me in the complete wrong school there, because that was for proper, like people with proper, proper problems. Not like me, you know like me like you know in my brain, thingy like, I am talking of autism problems. And they put me and they should not have put me in there, when they put me in there, I hated it there, I hated it there.* (Brett: 5, 151-154)

Violence between peers was a common experience for the students with SEMH issues in this study:

> *Kicked off a number of times, a couple of times with (named student).* (Finn: 1, 22)

Students reported that transition to a new school often involved an invitation to fight. Brett shared his account of starting a new school:

> *When I got to the school people were always wanting to fight me. So I just started fighting them back and I battered them and they would cry about it, because they had got beat up. I would go in there not starting and then they would get in your face and they would be saying 'come on then, come on then' and I wasn't going to back down so I would say, 'come on then and come outside, let's go'.* (Brett: 7, 241-245)

Connor disclosed that he felt he had to fight back but on a different occasion he avoided peers:

> *..... the kids were annoying, hitting me and that, so I thought fuck it so kicked off.* (Connor: 29, 30) *Got on shit at (named school) with everyone, did not like the lads and stayed away from them.* (Connor: 2, 42)

A parent observed extreme levels of peer violence that resulted in severe injury to a student:

> *One time he came home because he had punched a boy in the jaw, I heard that he had dislocated this boy's jaw and he actually had broken his own hand, when he did it.* (P/C Daniel: 2, 82-84)

Bullying Relationships

Finn, Elliot, and Connor admitted that bullying was a major problem at school. Elliot and Finn were open and honest in sharing their experiences:

> *It started about 4 upwards I would say.... I started getting bullied and stuff.* (Elliot: 1, 7-8)

> *I got bullied there as well, that's why I didn't go anymore.* (Finn: 2, 81)

Connor did not speak about his experiences of bullying, but his mother was able to

provide some details:

> *(Named second special school**)** where everything went to bits.... It just was not the right setting for him, we knew it was not, but we did not have any choice (LA moved him). He'd be just walking down the corridor and someone would just punch him in the face. That is when we started to get real problems. You had to force it out of him and he would not tell you.* (P/C Connor: 1, 12-15)

The students were targeted for bullying for specific reasons:

> *...fags, because I would not give them one.* (Finn: 4, 135-136)

The students reacted in very different ways to the bullying. Connor and Finn responded by fighting back:

> *I knew some people there already, before I went. I got terrorised (at named school). I knew them, I kept going. Went for a year.* (Finn: 3, 122-123). *I had a fight with (3 students named), all had a fight with. Had a fight with (2 students named).* (Finn: 4, 133-134)

Elliot explained that he did have friends at school but that he had become isolated, lonely, and bullied. He later dropped out of school. Elliot expressed that the primary school transition was the cause and that he was put in a position he could not control:

> *I started getting bullied and stuff..... It was sevenish, just after I change (named school), because I did not start the same time as everyone else. (Elliot: 1, 8-10) And then they went to different schools it was like there were three or four people in my year that went to different schools. So from that time I have been alone, I sort of was left alone.* (Elliot: 1, 24-26) *… do not see how I could have prevented myself getting into the position I did really.* (Elliot: 1, 30-31)

Positive Peer Relationships in School

All the students except Adam had very few peer relationships and attachments in

school. Brett acknowledged two other study participants with whom he had once associated at a previous school:

> *I can remember, I can actually remember when (Adam and Daniel) were there and they had baby chicks in the little incubators and me. (Adam and Daniel) I think were the first ones to hold the first three born chicks that came out* (Brett: 3, 92-94)

Connor's mother reflected on his relationships at school and the fact that he was the centre of attention amongst his peers:

> *You know he was always the centre of attention, so all the rest of the school loved him. You know what I mean, because he was great fun, the joker, you know what I mean.* (P/C Connor: 1, 30-32)

Parents and carers were concerned that students had limited friendships:

> *Other than his best friend (name) he would have a couple at school, normally just the one. I think that is back from when he was a lot littler, at (named learning support unit). So he has never had a big group of friends.* (P/C Daniel: 4, 130-133).

The students were very isolated at school. A significant relationship with a therapy dog gave some companionship for George:

> *I am on Google and YouTube… Danny, he goes around schools and you read to the dog and the dog, it is a greyhound. I can show you the pictures on Google, but it is a greyhound and it goes around. I am in a book as well. Danny goes around. Danny is like a world famous dog it goes around schools and around the county. You read to the dog and the dog listens. This was at school and you were recorded with this dog. It was like proper, I used to talk to Danny about all the time he was there. He used to come once or twice a week.* (George: 1, 19-25)

Out-of-School Peer Relationships

Students, parents, and carers observed that peer relationships and activities were perceived to have different influences on the students' educational journey. Peer relationships away from school often reflected peer relationships in school. Three of the students (Brett, Daniel, and Finn) had a limited number of friends and two of the students (Elliot and George) had none. Brett talked about his friendship:

> *He has been a good friend, but he has been a cunt at the same time. We nearly weren't friends at one stage because I nearly battered him.* (Brett: 8, 261-264)

The parents and carers added further clarification:

> *He has not got many friends, he has one friend (named friend) and elder brother and basically that is all I know. He has not got a great field of friends.* (P/C Brett: 2, 47-49)

> *He has only ever stuck to one friend, (named) his best friend.* (P/C Daniel: 4, 131-132)

Brett's grandad and Finn's mother explained why they had so few friends. When playing football, Brett's response is 'kick me and I will kick you back' (P/C Brett: 2, 59-60). For Finn:

> *... he wants to have friends but he has always been heavy handed. He always has more energy than them.* (P/C Finn: 1, 15, 16) *He does not play well with others and at a sleepover he will wake them up all bloody night.* (P/C Finn: 2, 82-84)

George's mother acknowledged that he had no friends other than those on social media where he played games online:

> *I would like him to have friends in this area that he can go, that he can have a friend, because he does not have any friends… The only friends he has got are on his play station or me or my partner and that is not healthy.* (P/C George: 3, 124-126)

Elliot shared just how important social media and his internet friends were to him. They enabled him to move on from a very desperate and lonely time in his life when he refused to attend school:

> *I sort of met them like, three or some years ago. I have known them for quite a few years, I think it was about that time when I was not going to (named school) and I didn't have friends.* (Elliot: 1, 32-34) *That is when I met my friends as they are now, I actually had people who wanted to talk to me, during that time, they might not be like in a school situation… A place I could enjoy. It was something I could enjoy.* (Elliot: 2, 66-70)

Two of the boys, Adam and Connor, stated that they had several friends out of school. However, their parents and carers either did not know them or contradicted their claims. They were very unsure of the out-of-home activities with peers:

> *I do not know what he does when he is away from here.* (P/C Adam 2, 54-55)

> *Friends are fleeting sometimes you know friends one minute, not friends the next, depending on what is going on. He has had one friend for several months now which is a good start, he goes to hang out with* (P/C Connor: 2, 71-73). *He has always got something on, he will have in his head, planning something, what he is going to do with his mates.* (P/C Connor: 3, 110-111)

Adam, who disclosed his criminal activities out of school, shared activities with peers:

> *I used to be out all night and causing trouble and stuff and being picked up by the police. If I had got caught could have been locked away, taken away from home.* (Adam: 1, 39-41)

4.5.1 Summary: School Peers

Students valued their peer friendships very highly. However, many students found difficulty in making friends and keeping them. The students had attended several different schools and therefore felt that there had been little time to settle or make

friends before they were transferred to a new setting. Students recognised the expectation of fighting when they started a new school. Since changing schools was a regular occurrence, there were frequent invitations to fight other students. There were habitual misunderstandings between peers with SEMH issues and an evident lack of social skills, issues that were often resolved through fighting. They appeared very willing to fight each other to resolve conflict, even if this meant fighting with their best friends.

Students admitted that they were bullied at school. All the students faced challenges in their peer relationships at school. The students were faced with a 'fight or flight' scenario each time they started a new school. Half the students acknowledged that they had been bullied, terrorised, isolated, and lonely. Two students became school refusers because they were being bullied. One of these students reported that he felt trapped in a school system where there was no way to escape the bullying other than refusing to attend school.

The students with SEMH issues identified positive peer relationships and shared how they had valued their peer friendships. Parents and carers explained that the students found making friends with peers and maintaining relationships very difficult. An opportunity to make a friend of a therapy dog was a valued connection for one student. Although friendships were a challenge, parents and carers identified that four of the students were often the centre of attention in school due to their disruptive and attention-seeking behaviours.

Out-of-school peer friendships were similar to in-school peer friendships. Students had very few friendships with peers both in and out of school. Two students reported that they had a number of friends outside of school and claimed to take part in criminal activities and/or anti-social behaviour. The students who had friendships out of school were also involved in street crime. Two students were involved in social media with peers outside of school and late at night, which affected their school attendance and punctuality.

4.5.2. Peers and OOSTEP

Relationships with Peers at APs on OOSTEP

Only two students described their peer relationships whilst on OOSTEP as being

significant. This demonstrates that they were either unable or unwilling to make new friends at APs. The lack of attention given to peers at APs may also indicate that they had no difficulties with those peers. Elliot was acutely aware of his lack of friends but indicated that his life transformed on OOSTEP:

> *It's been way better now, it has to be.* (Elliot: 2, 69-70)

Finn stated that he would like to associate with one peer in particular:

> *Do not want any help. I have other lads to help. What do they do? Does (Connor) go climbing?* (Finn: 3, 91-93)

Brett's grandad recognised the effect and influence of his peer relationships and thought that this might encourage his attendance:

> *If his best friend is staying I can get the pair of them going together. That is what I am hoping. If I can have his friend staying the night and then hopefully they will get off there, because he will go with his friend and I think it will be beneficial if they stay and go together. I think they can pull each other down but they can also pull each other up.* (P/C Brett: 4, 133-136)

Relationships with Peers Away from Education

Relationships with peers away from school changed for two students. Adam's extreme behaviours and relationships appear to have improved:

> *Obviously I'm no angel when I am out, that is it really. A few months ago, but nothing, it's becoming less now. But I don't do anything like that now.* (Adam: 2, 52-54) *I am with (girlfriend) all of the time. And living at Dad's.* (Adam: 2, 42).

Connor described how he would visit various places within the community but appeared to avoid peers in general:

> *Beef, I still got it. Got it all over the place (named places). If going to (named place)*

on a Friday is fine, go to play football. Boxing place, not too bad as I don't stay there too long. (Connor: 14-16) *Yes, I am a well-known person everywhere.* (Connor: 23) *Yes. I know a couple of mates that go to (named college). If it is one day a week I am fine. If it is Fridays at (named provision) is fine once a week because no one goes there.* (Connor: 24-27)

The other students' out-of-school peer relationships continued to be limited whilst on OOSTEP. Students continually found it difficult to make friends. Daniel's mother confirmed that her son was only close to one peer and Brett identified that he and his few friends would often stay inside:

Well we hardly go out, well we do sometimes but not all of the time. We go on the play-station that is it. (Brett: 8, 259-260)

One real close friend and he is still like that now. (P/C Daniel: 4, 131)

4.5.2 Summary

Students gave few details with regards to peer relationships at APs (alternative provisions) whilst on OOSTEP. There were no reports of bullying at APs or misbehaviours whilst on OOSTEP. However, no student-peer connections were mentioned which may be a negative factor. The key concern of OOSTEP students was the possibility of isolation from their peers, especially considering the challenges they faced when making new friends.

There was a change in peer relationships away from education whilst on OOSTEP, as students appeared to become more mature and behaviours at home became less extreme. Forming and maintaining friendships remained a challenge but friendships on social media continued. One student's out-of-school peer relationships affected his placement on OOSTEP due to threats of violence in localities. Threatening behaviour from out-of-school peers was a notable concern as students were often exposed to trouble on public transport and/or the streets at a time when they were not supported by staff.

Key findings: Section 5, Peer Relationships

- Students valued their friends very highly, yet they often had very few or no friends.
- Students had difficulty in forming and maintaining friendships; changing school often brought conflict with new peers.
- Students were frequently misunderstood by their peers and would often resort to fighting in an attempt to resolve their differences.
- Bullying was a major issue as it was often the main source of anxiety, resulting in school phobia and school refusal.
- Parents identified out-of-school friendships as similar to in-school friendships.
- Out-of-school peer relationships sometimes included elements of criminality and drug use.
- Social media provided an outlet for communication whereby students could form and maintain peer relationships.
- Transition to OOSTEP created change, often resulting in loss of past associations and a concern that students may become isolated at APs.
- On OOSTEP, forming new friendships still presented a challenge and no new peer relationships were mentioned at APs.
- Peer relationships away from OOSTEP continued as before.

These findings illustrate that, despite a desire to make connections with their peers, the students found making and maintaining friendships extremely difficult. Although they were already in a needs-focused environment conducive to learning, it appeared that the students required much more support than they were currently receiving. This suggests that they require support to learn the skills needed for socialisation. Out-of-school programmes such as OOSTEP must endeavour to engage young people in learning whilst ensuring that they are not isolated from their peers. They need to cultivate peer relationships and incorporate elements of fun and socialisation into the learning process.

4.6. Theme Six: Family Relationships

4.6.1 Family and School

The findings placed significant focus on the effect of family on school. Six areas were identified by students, parents, and carers with regards to relationships within the family. These relationships were recognised as having an influence on students' schooling. These six areas were identified as:

- Structure of the family
- Poor family relationships
- The 'growing larger' issue
- Support for education
- No talk and poor communication
- Individual personal problems at home

Structure of the Family

All students who participated in this study came from 'broken homes'; no students lived in a traditional family unit of two parents (a mother and a father). It is suggested that each student had attachment difficulties. There were various different support structures for each student: Adam and Connor lived with their fathers; Brett lived with his grandfather; Daniel, Finn, and George lived with their mothers; and Elliot lived with both his grandparents. The death of Elliot's grandmother/carer during the study had a major effect on his relationship with his grandfather/carer. Furthermore, change and transition within the family structure included new family associations with new partnership arrangements of parents and carers. Significantly, students did not comment on changes in their home life. However, parents and carers gave significant insights into relationships in the home. Connor's father recognised the change in his family structure and how this might have affected him:

> *It was quite a transitional time for him because he had a new stepmother and during that time he got a baby brother. It was quite, you know, it was probably a lot for him to take on board, I mean from originally being just living with his Dad. .....he was doing good having our own little family settling in with his school family.* (P/C Connor: 1, 18-21)

Brett's grandad observed that talking about family members was difficult for him. Finn's mother reported that he had had attachment issues for most of his life. Furthermore, the death of Connor's grandfather affected him deeply:

> *I know at times that he does not want to talk about certain things, touching on questions about his mum, he gets quite, well he gets off his trolley, with his mother, it is like a love hate relationship.* (P/C Brett: 4, 146-148)

> *He has had problems since nursery. He was like attachment, if he liked them he liked them, but if he didn't oh boy you knew, if he doesn't like you that was it, but it is pretty much the same now.* (P/C Finn: 1, 19-21)

> *Dad died when he (Connor) was three… That is when it really started at school. …… I did not have a house at that time, so he lived at my dad's with me, with my two sisters…. He (Connor) was part of a family… he got spoilt rotten…… It is like something he never grew out of.* (P/C Connor: 3, 134-143)

Adam and Brett had on-off relationships with their mothers who had left the family home. Connor, Daniel, George, and Elliot all had fathers who had left the family home. It was clear that this group of young people with SEMH issues had experienced significant parental loss. Elliot felt awkward about the possibility of renewing his relationship with his father:

> *I met my dad during that time. In some ways I would like to know more about him. It just might seem a bit awkward now. (Asked if he would follow up) I don't know.* (Elliott: 2, 63-65)

Poor Family Relationships

Relationships between students and their parents and carers were reported as being difficult in general. There was limited disclosure about relationships at home by Adam, Finn, and Elliott:

> *It has changed because some things were quite bad.* (Adam: 1, 44)

Iffy some of them (going on to state) it's boring. (Finn: 4, 141)

I do not know it is sort of, I do not know, the same. (Elliot: 1, 35)

Parents and carers were able to give real insights into the students' home life. They revealed that strained family relationships had led to property damage and domestic violence:

Just the same, up and down. (P/C Adam: 3, 101) *But again it depends on his mood and behaviour.* (P/C Adam: 3, 108-109)

I felt like hitting him, but I never did. I have had a lot of punches from him when he was younger.... In the past I have seen his violence and I have felt it as well. (P/C Brett: 4, 164-165)

Where we lived before there was not one door that did not have at least three holes in it, where he had lashed out and punched doors. He broke computers, DVDs you know with lashing out, he's hurt his brothers and sisters. (P/C Daniel: 3, 101-104) *Yes, when he was younger he would attack me all of the time, if he could not have his own way, he would kick, he would pull my hair, anything.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 123-124)

George's mother and Connor's father perceived that their children were fine at home and that home relationships were good. George's mother questioned why he should be perceived in a negative way:

You know if he is a violent child how can I take him out? If he is a violent child how can I let him play with other children? And to me it was just, I saw a very frustrated boy. (P/C George: 1, 29-31)

It was an interesting observation that Connor's mother attributed much of his personal development to simply being a teenager rather than his SEMH difficulties:

He is nice with his young brother and sister but he does not have too much interest. A lot of it now is that he is a teenager now, but it is to be expected from any teenager. (P/C Connor: 2, 60-61)

An important finding in this study was that parents and carers were physically and mentally exhausted by their relationships:

I call him an aerobics (Rubik's) cube because you can be in a situation when you think that you are reading it really well and it can just turn, you know what I mean. And you really believe that I have nailed it this time but no you haven't it is just like it changes again, so you go back and forth like that like a constant and you have to work and tweak it every day and do you know that is mentally exhausting. (P/C Finn: 2, 62-66)

The 'growing larger' issue

Physicality was identified as an issue in school (section 4.2), but it was also perceived by parents and carers as a major issue at home. Problems due to growth and an increase in size were exacerbated over time as the young person grew older and larger. Brett identified concerns about his strength:

Mum says I have to be careful because I am getting stronger. I could hit a person and proper kill them if I hit them... She says that I could do that one day.... My Mum knows what I am like, when I go for a punch, I will use my strongest hand and I will make sure I do not miss. (Brett: 8, 283-286)

Parents and carers emphasised that they could not use the same techniques to calm their children because of size:

I have had my times, I mean, even when he was younger he was a strong lad and I have had to sit in the hall there calming him down with my arm around him, like this. I cannot do that now and he knows that. (P/C Brett: 2, 68-70)

The older he got the worse the situation got because he was getting bigger. (P/C Daniel: 1, 29-30) *If I try to grab something off him, he would not think about it and push me away.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 112-113)

So he has not really changed, he has just got bigger and stronger and the aggression is getting worse because it is almost like he demands there and then that it happens and if it does not then he does not understand why it wouldn't. I tried to explain that to him, he does not get it. (P/C Finn: 1, 32-35)

Family Support for School

Parents and carers regularly visited school to provide support for students. Brett was the only student who acknowledged how proactive and supportive his grandfather was in this regard:

…….. my (grandad) came into the school one day …… The old headmistress said I don't want you in the classrooms anymore because my grandad was starting to know that they weren't helping the kids...who had disabilities.... They were chucking them to the back of the classroom. (Grandad) started noticing it.... they did not like it and that is why the headmistress said to him that I don't want you in the classroom anymore. (Brett: 1, 39-44)

Parents and carers spoke of supporting their children both in school and during long periods of exclusion. They spoke of having to repair the damage ostensibly caused by school and received no home support:

… there was quite a few occasions when he was (at named school) when I had to go down there to sort him out and calm him down. (P/C Brett: 1, 28-29)

I had him at home for eighteen months and all I managed to do in eighteen months was rebuild his self-esteem that he did not have. (P/C George: 2, 58-59)

… got moved and was out of school for a couple of years. (Connor: 1, 7-8)

Parents and carers shared their frustrations at not being available to support their children:

> *….. because of the hours I do, I am not here every day and every night or every morning when he expects me to be here.* (P/C Adam: 3, 101-103)

No talk and Poor Communication

Parents and carers gave significantly more detail than students about their relationships at home. All parents and carers confirmed that the students had communication difficulties. They believed that their inability or unwillingness to talk led to poor relationships at home:

> *It just worries me that he does not give things a chance, the first thing that goes wrong he will be up and out, he will not sit there and talk to me, he does not talk to people about anything. And off, he does not talk to people about anything, give things a chance.* (P/C Adam 1, 8-10)

> *He was not terribly social, he was really kept himself to himself and had no great eye contact with you, you know, just quiet.* (P/C Connor: 2, 55-56) *… you know he is kind of like the lodger, in some ways.* (P/C Connor: 2, 59)

Daniel's mother observed that he usually communicated through body language. A shrug of the shoulders was not a response indicating that Daniel did not know, but rather a negative gesture signifying disagreement with a particular comment:

> *It is hard to get anything out of him because he does not really tell you. He just shrugs his shoulders.* (P/C Daniel: 3, 95-96)

The findings illustrate a sense of collusion between students and parents and carers in the home. Behavioural issues and incidents at school were discussed in the home. George recalled an incident at school that his mother would raise:

> *I just remember that because Mum goes on about that.* (George: 1, 12)

Individual Personal Problems at Home

The students in this study did not share any personal issues that affected their home lives. However, three parents and carers raised several issues deemed worthy of consideration. Issues such as an eating disorder and self-harming were highlighted by Adam's father:

> *His eating is really up and down, he can eat and eat and eat. I think he eats for the sake of boredom. He eats and has nothing to do and he can eat. He can then go a couple of days without eating. I mentioned that to the lady from CAMHS as well.* (P/C Adam: 2, 56-59)

> *... his sisters said that he has been, he covers it quite well because he wears long sleeves, but his sisters said that he had been playing around with a knife on his arm recently, to what extent I do not know. If I say something he will not let me near him, but I do believe he has been self-harming again.* (P/C Adam: 2, 63-65)

Adam's father also acknowledged that he knew little about the places Adam frequented or the activities that he was involved in:

> *He started smoking again and I do not know if he drinks or not when he goes out to his friends, he doesn't in the house here but I do not know what he does when he is away from here.* (P/C Adam: 2, 53-54)

Finn's mother and Connor's father identified the use of drugs as an issue:

> *Other things, which have concerned me is that he is smoking cannabis, but we have sat and spoken about it at great length actually. Because when me and (Finn) do talk, we will talk, do you know what I mean. It is really hard so now it is like there is no getting through to him.* (P/C Finn: 2, 77-79)

> *I hate him doing, but I actually buy him tobacco because I do not want him picking dockers up and something or buying fake stuff that is like ten times more lethal, that is expensive as well. ….. And his cough like ridiculous.* (P/C Connor: 3, 90-93)

Finn's mother recognised safeguarding issues as concern for a vulnerable child:

> *We started trying to make him a little bit more independent at junior school where he would walk to school and walk back, but I would follow behind in the car. But he would just talk to anybody, no fear at all. Hiya how are you? He genuinely feels that everybody is nice unless he says I do not like you.* (P/C Finn: 2, 45-48)

Finn's mother and Adam's father acknowledged absconding as a concern in both early years and as young adults:

> *He used to run off and I would say go on then, then I would wait five or ten minutes and go round in the car... and keep an eye on him.* (P/C Finn: 2, 43-45)

> *He is gone for two or three nights some weekends. He will let me know, I'm OK Dad, but that's about all I get from him that I'm OK, back in 2 days' time.* (P/C Adam: 2, 55-56)

Finn's mother shared what she perceived as unhelpful advice from a professional that undermined her role as a parent:

> *…the doctor says you cannot be forced to do this, it has given him the full rod now to be a law unto himself.* (P/C Finn: 2, 80-81)

The complex web of factors that affected the students in the family home exacerbated their complex personal difficulties.

4.6.1 Summary: School and Family

Family was understandably a very personal matter for the students in this study. They were reluctant to talk about their home lives and were vague in their responses when they did so. Parents and carers were able to give a far greater insight into family life than the students. Change of family structure, personal family loss, and attachment issues were identified by parents and carers as being significant concerns that were worth sharing.

All students experienced challenging family relationships at home. Parents and carers spoke of mood changes that would, at times, lead to violence against property and family members. However, one parent questioned the accusations of violence levelled at her son and one attributed these types of behaviours to being a teenager. Parents and carers characterised their experiences in terms of significant emotional pain, feelings of frustration, and mental exhaustion.

Challenges at home increased as the students with SEMH difficulties grew in height and weight. Four parents and carers identified this as a particular area of concern; they were worried about students' violent outbursts and the damage they could cause in addition to their own inability to control or restrain them if necessary. However, only one student acknowledged this as a cause for concern.

All participating parents and carers stated that they had provided support for students' education, but this support was only acknowledged by one student. Parents and carers had lived the school experience with their children and had been there for each and every stage of their journey. Their support in school had been rejected, although they often collected their children and kept them at home when requested to do so. Exclusions and education at home had been the experience of all parents and carers of students with SEMH issues. They also conceded that they were unable to offer a sufficient amount of time and/or support for students' education due to work or family commitments.

A clear lack of communication from the students was highlighted by all parents and carers, one even referring to her son as a 'lodger'. This lack of verbal communication meant that the reading and interpretation of body language was essential. It was left to parents and carers to recognise the students' issues with regards to their home life. Issues revealed were eating disorders, self-harming, drug and drink abuse, safeguarding, and absconding.

4.6.2 Family Relationships and OOSTEP

Whilst on OOSTEP there were significant changes in family relationships, and these were identified by parents and carers. It was perceived that an increase in positive out-of-home relationships was commensurate with improved in-home relationships. Students frequently avoided this topic or were somewhat vague in their responses:

> *OK most of the time, except when he (Grandad) starts having a go at me.* (Brett: 8, 256)

> *I do not know, it is sort of, I do not know, the same.* (Elliot: 1, 35)

Parents and carers gave far more detail; they observed more communication and positive changes in family relationships:

> *He (Adam) is linking more with his mum now, he is starting to build bridges and they have got a bit closer.* (P/C Adam: 2, 60-61)

> *He does seem to be trying more just lately to behave himself and come in on time.* (P/C Connor: 2, 61) *I think he has definitely improved.* (P/C Connor: 5, 185-186)

> *He will come and talk to me; he has not got that aggressive sound in his voice. The relationship with myself over the last 3 years, compared to before that, I think it is better, a lot better. He does a lot of things that he, that he does not listen to me about, but all teenagers are the same aren't they? I forget that I was a teenager once.* (P/C Brett: 2, 42-46)

The point was made that some difficulties initially attributed to students may in fact be related to age-appropriate teenage development and relationships. Some family members observed considerable changes in the students' attitudes whilst on OOSTEP. After Connor had washed, dried, and put away the dishes following a large meal, Connor's mother states:

> *I have never seen anything like it, it was almost scary. But I thought that was*

incredible and I gave him a bit of money to say thank you. He said today he wanted to get back a bit earlier, because he wanted to get back and get changed because he needed to change his clothes. He had a good clean up of his room before my mum came and whatnot, he has been doing so much better. Actually he came in to speak to my mum while she was visiting, he kind of hung out for a few minutes the other day. He does not really create his own conversation, at least he responds when we ask him something. While 3 years ago he wouldn't have bothered, it was like pulling teeth. (P/C Connor: 2, 67-70) *He is definitely maturing. My mum noticed a difference in him since last year when she was here even, so that is a good thing.* (P/C Connor: 5, 198-199)

The students' domestic lives whilst on OOSTEP appeared to improve rather than deteriorate. There were some exceptions; Brett's grandad shared an isolated incident where Brett had hit him after he had told him (Brett) 'to come on' but claimed that 'it was [his] fault' (P/C Brett: 2, 71-76). Adam's father stated that there were still some incidents at home:

…[he] does not understand: starts winding them (sisters) up and there will be a few outbreaks. (P/C Adam: 1, 33-37)

Daniel's mother also explained that violence in the home had reduced. However, she could not manage anymore and soon after the interview Daniel went to live with his father:

Obviously, as he has got older he has not done that unless I have approached him and then he can. (P/C Daniel: 3, 123-124)
*I can't cope with the way that you are behaving. (*P/C Daniel: 93, 8. 99)
He now thinks he is man of the house and what he says goes and if I say anything to him, he is not bothered. I have tried my best with him, but he is very violent, I can only do so much. (P/C Daniel: 3, 108-110).

4.6.2 Summary: OOSTEP and Family

The students continued to refrain from talking about home and family whilst on OOSTEP. Parents and carers identified behaviour changes in the students during their time on OOSTEP. They referred to positive changes in the home such as building bridges, domestic improvement, and improved relationships. However, parents and carers continued to identify problems in the home and felt that they were unable to cope any longer.

Key Findings: Section 6, Family Relationships

Students identified:

- Family appears to be a very personal matter for students with SEMH issues in this study; they were reluctant to share their experiences and gave vague responses when asked about any family relationships.

Parents and carers identified:

- Changes in family structure induced loss and attachment issues.
- The students experienced frequent SEMH mood changes which often led to property damage and domestic violence.
- It was difficult to manage students' physicality as they grew bigger and stronger.
- Relationships with their respective schools were strained; parents and carers were involved with each part of the school journey yet felt dismissed by school staff.
- Schools often requested that students be collected and then kept at home; exclusions and home education was common.
- The students had poor verbal communication skills and body language had to be interpreted.
- The students would dictate and set their own agendas in the home.
- Students' with SEMH issues included eating disorders, self-harming, drug and drink abuse, safeguarding, and absconding.
- There were feelings of shame, helplessness, and personal failure.
- There were feelings of physical and mental exhaustion due to SEMH complexities. This led to emotional pains, frustration, and mental exhaustion.

- There were positive changes in the students such as improved relationships and often intensive support from OOSTEP for families.

These findings were presented predominantly by parents and carers and are insightful. They demonstrate the needs of families and the harrowing experiences of pain and despair they suffer due to and on behalf of their children. The silence of students is awkward and possibly results from embarrassment, shame, or loyalty to the family. It demonstrates a need for daily family support, communication, and partnership with all stakeholders. OOSTEP mentors are student educators and family support link workers who provide advocacy and support for any family needs that may have an impact on the student.

4.7 Conclusion

The essence of student, parent, and carer perceptions has been captured in a rich description of the educational experience of students with SEMH difficulties, through stories of the participants' voice. When the themes were compared, they identified a clear contrasting relationship between school education and OOSTEP education:

1. Environment: The disparaging comments from the students and the disapproval of parent and carer perceptions showed clear dissatisfaction with the school environment. OOSTEP was identified as a respite from school was looked upon favourably by students whilst parents and carers supported somewhat more cautiously.
2. Learning: The learning difficulties identified in school were mentioned and this contrasted with the learning opportunities on OOSTEP.
3. Development: The behavioural challenges in school were not mentioned whilst on OOSTEP but can be paralleled with the personal/behavioural development identified on OOSTEP.
4. Staff: There was a noteworthy difference identified between the negative relationships with schoolteachers and the positive relationships with OOSTEP mentors.
5. Peers: Differences were recognised between individual peer relationships when at school and individual peer relationships when on OOSTEP. However, sustaining peer relationships was an ongoing concern observed by students,

parents, and carers. Although bullying was identified as a problem at school, this issue was not mentioned whilst on OOSTEP.

6. Family: Parents and carers identified negative family relationships whilst attending school but students spoke little about family life. Parents and carers shared that there had been a general improvement in family relationships whilst on OOSTEP.

In summary, the students made significant contributions to themed data in the areas of environment, development, staff, and peers whilst the parents and carers gave much needed support in sharing their perspectives on the areas of learning and family. Students with SEMH difficulties were very open about their criminality on the streets or behaviour at school; however, they did not share their thoughts and experiences of their home lives. Whether they were trying to mask, hide, or protect family was open to conjecture and is an area for further research. The decision to incorporate parent and carer perspectives was justified by their significant contributions. As a research-practitioner, I have gained greater insight from contemplating the responses of students, parents, and carers. In the Findings chapter I have shared my own perspectives and thoughts at the conclusion of each section. I created Appendix 19 to identify a personal review of the findings. My perception is that the students, carers and parents perceive schools in essence as a toxic place where there are difficulties, behaviours, power relationships, peer concerns and dysfunctional families. OOSTEP however incorporates respite, opportunities, personal development, mentoring, peer socialisation and improved relationships at home. I consider OOSTEP to be a local response to local and possibly national student engagement concerns. However in practice, OOSTEP is an individual mentor response to individual student matters. OOSTEP is a philosophy, a process of appropriate bespoke responses and not just an out-of-school event. It is a learning experience facilitated by mentors who focus on child-centred desires and aspirations. The six core themes shared in this chapter will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Discussion Overview

The aim of this study was to identify the underlying issues that underpin the worth of education for students with SEMH issues. This was more significant than the individual journeys of the participating students. Through both the student voice and the parent and carer voice, the worth of education practice in school and on OOSTEP could be identified. Six key underlying themes were identified in the findings chapter (Table 2, p.78): education environment, learning, SEMH development, relationships with staff, relationships with peers, and family. All these themes are interlinked in influencing the students' education experience. These themes directly relate to the OOSTEP success criteria framework (section 1.3, p.6). The discussion will incorporate the comments of students, parents, and carers in order to discover the effectiveness of OOSTEP.

5.1 Education Environments

Education environments in this study relate to all references to school experiences and any separate alternative education involvement associated with OOSTEP. A discussion based on both school and OOSTEP education environments will incorporate a review of the literature and the research findings. The first OOSTEP success criteria for students is identifying the worth of past and recent education strategies and provision. To enable OOSTEP staff to support students with SEMH issues, they identify the worth of their past education experiences. To enable a worthwhile OOSTEP experience, the education experiences are reviewed with the students and other stakeholders.

5.1.1 Student School Experience

The findings illustrate that there are serious concerns as to whether schools provide an appropriate environment to meet student need. All students attended several different schools and had their schooling disrupted. All students identified negative experiences at school; they used a variety of disparaging words to describe school, including 'crap', 'shit', and 'shite' (section 4.1.1). These perceptions of school were identified as paramount and set the scene for their negative school experience. Parents and carers of Brett (P/C Brett 1, 8) and Connor (P/C Connor 1, 4) stated that 'school was appalling and not the right setting'. All participants expanded on the struggles the students

experienced throughout their school lives. Many of the students fought the school system and Elliot refused to attend. The anxiety and anger shown towards their school experiences appears to have been instilled in them throughout their school lives, causing great personal distress. Cooper (1993b) and Hajdukova (2014) both identified that schools were unfit for meeting SEMH needs and the majority of students in this study did not want to attend school. This study accords with Wise (2000) who recognised that schools contribute to student difficulties and that students with SEMH issues are also in a state of anxiety due to the physical size and nature of the school environment. Cole and Knowles (2011) ascertained that a lack of personal space can intensify feelings of low self-esteem. However, the schools identified in this study were not striving to improve areas so that students could feel more comfortable, safe, and included. Consequently, the schools identified in this study were not actively being inclusive. This does not mean that they were not trying to make improvements but demands meant that they fell short where this group of students was concerned. These students had the very experiences that Lady Warnock identified (The Warnock Report, 1978) and later apologised for (Warnock et al., 2010). This is despite the fact that her earlier report had informed the inclusion policy as enacted by the Education Act 1981.

Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) recognised the increasing complexity of young people and the concerns they pose. They highlighted a major concern regarding the need for successful transition through the key stages in school. Students in this study revealed how changes at school and transition between schools caused them to feel unsettled as they experienced constant change. All seven students experienced a number of school changes throughout their journey, ranging from four to seven schools. Both Connor and Finn enjoyed school at some time, but this was spoiled when the LA removed from them from a school they liked or when they were bullied in school as a consequence of transition. Research states that students need consistency. Delaney (2009, p.9) acknowledged that teaching the ‘unteachables’ requires clear and consistent management in school. Unpredictable, changing environments can cause confusion and anxiety for very vulnerable students. Craggs (2016) and Flitcroft and Kelly (2016) recognised the disruption caused by students moving between schools. Furthermore, Davies and Ryan (2018) highlighted that the challenges instigated by changing schools detracts from providing for the personal needs of students. The significant shortcomings

of managed moves is another major concern identified by Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) and is an issue highlighted in this study. A more appropriate description for the students' experiences in this study might be 'unmanaged' moves. The participants shared that moving school affects continuity in education and in student relationships. Five students explained that they were 'kicked out' of school. Parents and carers spoke of several managed moves and shared their frustration and anger when they received very little support from schools and the LA. Transition between schools was often a very slow process, with little communication from relevant education professionals. Parents and carers often felt abandoned and were left to arrange home education, resulting in greater feelings of resentment.

The work of Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) acknowledged attachment difficulties and Craggs (2016) further observed the feelings of loss and associated distress relating to being removed from school. The impact of constant school changes, transitions, and moves caused students to feel unwanted, contributing to low self-esteem and low self-worth. Students felt that they had been 'kicked out' of school and that they were not worthy of attending a school. Failure of the school system has had profound effects on the students and their parents and carers. All students reported an intense dislike of school at some time and five of them felt like this most of the time. These feelings reinforced an identity of abandonment and loss which resulted in further attachment difficulties. Casey (2015) described a lack of attachment or connectedness in hostile school environments. For the students in this study, it reinforced feelings of pain, anger, and frustration towards the apparent failures of the school system. The findings corroborate the research in this field, though the data reveals an increased intensity of feeling in comparison to other studies.

5.1.2 Respite and OOSTEP Environment

The findings illustrate a noticeable disparity between a school environment and an OOSTEP environment as recognised in this study. Cole and Knowles (2011) explore 'respite' as one of Cooper's 3 Rs (Cooper, 1993a). It was recognised that some students needed to escape the demands placed on them by school. Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009) identified the unrealistic academic pressures placed on students and the stress of learning in a performative school culture; students appeared to have

no say in their education. School had become so intolerable for some of the students in this study that they needed a break. Although the term ‘respite’ was not used in the narratives, the students’ views indicate a need to escape the demands of school and to bring closure to negative school experiences. The need for respite was a key finding in this study; it allowed the parents of both Connor (P/C Connor 5, 188-192) and George (P/C George 2, 51-57) to avoid the harrowing experiences they had when their children were preparing to enter school.

Students appear to have been driven out of schools. Elliot left school due to bullying and became an absconder, refuser, and school phobic. The students in this research group were all at risk of exclusion, needing respite from school and an alternative education environment. Cooper (1993a) did not condemn all schools; however, it is clear that the students in this study had predominantly negative experiences of school life which were personally damaging. Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019, p.234) identified that the strategies of ‘repair and return’ and ‘fresh start’ approaches run the risk of medicalisation of young people as the objects of necessary treatment. However, the apparent relief of leaving school, as shared by the students in this study, and their subsequent transfer to AP was deemed as a therapeutic opportunity. A further contribution to practice is the noticeable difference in the students’ attitudes with regards to being forced out of school or leaving voluntarily to a new OOSTEP opportunity. There was also a critical difference relating to the success of future programmes when comparing voluntary acceptance or being coerced into change. The latter was very unlikely to succeed while the former had every chance of success.

OOSTEP is The Therapeutic School’s initiative for avoiding permanent exclusions for students with SEMH issues. There was a consensus amongst students on OOSTEP that it was a break from school, a safe place (Casey, 2015) with no reports of physical or social bullying. Students participating in this study describe OOSTEP as a voluntary positive alternative to their disengagement with school. They all identified OOSTEP in a positive light, stating that their experience was ‘bless’, ‘better than school’, ‘happy to go’, ‘a place to enjoy’, ‘a chance to get back on track’, and ‘98% better than school’. The quote often credited to Mark Twain (1885) could be attributed to the students in this study: ‘I will never allow my schooling to get in the way of my education’. Schooling had introduced many barriers to student education in the past. In effect, the students on

OOSTEP no longer allowed schooling to get in the way of their education.

OOSTEP has been identified as respite from past school experiences as it provides education in a therapeutic and safe setting. Therapeutic values based on independence, self-expression, and working together in real life situations have been developed through therapeutic communities (Rapoport, 1960; Bridgeland, 1971; Dawson, 1981; Pullen 1986). As part of therapeutic practice, OOSTEP encouraged a culture of enquiry (Kennard, 2004) as identified with this research. It also provided a child-focused approach (Cheminais, 2008) that allowed students such as Brett (7, 229-233) to manage in a different learning environment.

Therapeutic environments are perceived as healing (Seed, 1992), empathetic (Dadds, 2008), and protective (Aguilar and Retamal, 2009). These requirements assist those who have very challenging SEMH needs (Rose, 2002) as identified in this study. Some authors, including Ecclestone (2003) and Ecclestone and Hayes (2009), voice serious concerns regarding therapeutic education practice. However, the students, parents, and carers in this study have identified the worth of past and recent education strategies and provision; OOSTEP has been portrayed as a worthy education experience, one that has had a positive impact on their lives and was conducive to SEMH learning needs.

5.2 Learning

There was a strong correlation between the learning difficulties identified in school and the development of learning *opportunities* as recognised on OOSTEP. Wise (2000) discerned the complex and wide-ranging needs of these students. There is a need to listen to students (Flynn, Shevlin and Lodge, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2013) and understand them as a prerequisite to teaching them. Learning difficulties associated with school experience will be discussed first, followed by the learning opportunities that are attributed to OOSTEP. The second OOSTEP success criteria is to negotiate and implement a bespoke programme based on students' interests, desires, aspirations, and wants.

5.2.1 Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties affected students in various ways, causing problems in all learning

situations. Cole and Knowles (2011) identified that many students have mental health needs; however, the students in this study did not have any knowledge of an assessment process. Cole and Knowles (2011, p.29) were 'against simplistic or single-perspective solutions', but the students in this study did not have access to any form of solution. Students reported that they were unaware of their diagnosed conditions and SEN statements. This study has highlighted that, even at the time of increased SEND legislation in England (DfE, 2014), there remained little understanding of individual needs, treatment, or learning plans, by students and their parents and carers. In the absence of relevant information, it was not surprising that learners with SEMH issues felt neglected and not included in school.

A finding of this study revealed that students, along with their parents and carers, have an awareness and understanding that could have been of great value to schools. Brett (p8, 286-295) gave detailed explanations of his difficulties, describing his 'flick' as a tingling in his head to his body that occurred seconds before an anger outburst. The parent and carers described symptoms: Daniel's facial change (P/C Daniel 3, 86-89), Finn's finger clicking before a time bomb (P/C Finn 1, 38-43), and George's light switch before an explosion (P/C George 2, 72-75). Such insights would have been essential for practitioners, yet this information was not often sought. It was determined that Brett (P/C Brett 1, 8-9) and Daniel (P/C Daniel 1, 30-32) had a lack of comprehension, yet the teachers had not 'cottoned on'. This lack of understanding caused frustrations that often resulted in the behaviours receiving far greater attention than the initial learning difficulties.

In addition to the students' lack of understanding of their conditions and diagnoses, parents and carers often disagreed with the diagnosis (P/C Connor 3, 286-295). Some recognised that the diagnosis had been one of convenience, made with the aim of gaining access into a special school and so had no real value. Others identified additional concerns and the need for a comorbidity diagnosis. The parents and carers of Daniel, Finn, and George observed how complex their multiple needs were, Finn having been described as a 'Rubik's cube' (P/C Finn 2, 62-66). Other major additional concerns included speech and language difficulties and attachment disorders. It was noted that Finn's parent (P/C Finn 1,19-21) was the only parent/carer to identify

attachment difficulties by name and so it became a consideration in this study. Casey's (2015) research on attachment difficulties would have been applicable to the students in this study but this went undiagnosed. Cooper, Smith and Upton (1994) proposed the use of a 'biopsychosocial' model. Cole and Knowles (2011) stated that this model combines all the factors that make up a child's world and accounts for the constant interaction of both nature and nurture. However, although the literature speaks of SEMH complexity, schools appeared devoid of SEMH support for the most extreme and vulnerable students in this study. It was noted that all students only had one or two of their difficulties diagnosed and that they received very little support. Kelly and Norwich (2004) suggested that those with learning difficulties often require additional support, but little was evident. In this study, students recognised the need for support but felt aggrieved because they did not receive the necessary attention and nurture in school.

Students, parents, and carers questioned whether school staff and outside professional agencies truly understood the students' learning needs in school. Parents and carers observed that their opinion was not valued by professionals and that their suggestions of additional complex difficulties were not explored in terms of a comorbidity diagnosis. Delaney (2009, p57) stated that 'One of the greatest challenges in teaching' is teachers' acceptance that their job involves helping young people develop appropriate emotional and mental states for learning. This is particularly relevant in a time where school support for mental health issues is part of current government policy; 'No Health Without Mental Health: a call to action' (Gov, 2011) and talking therapies (Burstow, 2011) were introduced. It was proposed that young people services were to become comparable with adult services (Burstow, 2011). Weare (2015) identified that schools have a central responsibility as part of the ongoing mental health agenda (DoH and DfE, 2017; Whittaker, 2019). Support for students was not forthcoming and this had an impact on them and their behaviour in school (DfE, 2018a). Of the four students who had been prescribed medication (Adam, Daniel, Finn, and George), all had stopped taking it at the time of interview. Students often refused medication because it was causing side effects such as nausea, lack of appetite, drowsiness, and fatigue. These were all common side effects. Mueller et al. (2012) highlighted concerns relating to the use of medication by young people by describing them as the 'Zombie' generation. However, the parents and carers of Daniel (2, 65-68), Finn (2, 55-57), and George (2,

46-47) felt that the medication was necessary in order to moderate some of their excessive behaviours and that this then would have facilitated their learning. Nevertheless, they felt undermined by professionals who presented the students with a choice to accept or reject their medication. Consequently, the students' behaviour deteriorated to the point that the parents and carers felt exhausted, limited in their care, or unable to carry on. The issue of fatigue is a serious carer issue that requires further research and support.

Students, parents, and carers reported a lack of academic progress and development. There was inadequate understanding of individual learning needs and academic progress was severely affected as a result. Labels are subsequently attached to students who are perceived as having difficulties. Kelly and Norwich (2004) identified the dangers of assigning negative labels. Students can become marginalised (Murray and Phillips, 2001) and become part of an ascribed 'underclass'. Labels associated with being different were labels that the students gave to themselves such as 'wonky brain', 'thickies', 'dumb', and 'not normal'. They saw themselves as unworthy of being taught and included, often feeling like strangers in their own class. Elliot and Finn perceived their difference in a social sense and viewed this as a contributing factor to their experience of bullying in school.

Long (2010) emphasised that behaviour needs to be understood within a context of emotional needs and circumstances. Feelings of inadequacy at school could often be linked to learning and SEMH difficulties. Wise (2000) explained that language may also be a factor that frustrates students who are unable to communicate or use the appropriate words and/or expressions to describe their behaviour and feelings. Learning development improves as students grow older; students become more mature, gain a greater understanding of themselves, and learn to manage their behaviours. However, the parent of Finn (P/C Finn 1, 32-35) contradicted this finding and reported very little change, stating that Finn had only grown 'bigger and bigger'. The issue of physicality and growth was a major concern for parents and carers in this study. They expressed that there was increasing difficulty in managing the students' immature behaviours as they grew older, physically larger, and became more unmanageable. Listening to and working with both students and parents/carers was beneficial as it assisted with the

understanding and recognition of the students' significant learning needs. It also reduced their feelings of anxiety and pain associated with perceived failure in school.

5.2.2 Learning Opportunities

Opportunity is one of the key elements identified by Cooper (1993a) in his educational framework and further recognised as fundamental in the work of Cole (2015). OOSTEP opportunities act as a respite from past negative school experiences. Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) observed that there is currently a significant lack of opportunity in schools. A key finding from this study was that learning opportunities on OOSTEP and relevant engagement override and take priority over students' learning difficulties. The Riots, Communities and Victims Panel (2012) acknowledged that students need to experience success through further opportunities and the aim of OOSTEP is to create and provide hope for the future.

The key to providing opportunity was allowing students a choice and encouraging self-expression in their education journey. Brett (7, 222-224) specifically mentioned 'choice' and having been able to engage in 'every subject' (7, 217-219) whilst on OOSTEP. Four of the parents and carers recognised the opportunities that students had to develop their personal interests, enthusiasms, and capabilities. Cooper (1993a, p.177) identified that school effectiveness research has shown that the more effective education settings tend to offer a greater range of opportunities. Four of the students in this study specifically recognised the worth of the opportunities that they chose for their own curriculum. Sellman (2009) affirmed that the power to choose is particularly significant and is vastly different from just having a voice. Sellman stated that being empowered allows students to have positive control over their lives. Tellis-James and Fox (2016) and Thacker (2017) shared their optimism for some excluded students that are empowered to move on from their experiences of the past. OOSTEP has enabled students to negotiate their timetables and environments according to their individual needs. It was observed that students on OOSTEP became immersed in the present by being active in their opportunities and choices. Engagement in new and meaningful activities was therapeutic and this shifted the students' focus away from their SEMH difficulties and disabilities. This study identified that engagement and hope for the future appeared to deflect attention away from student with SEMH difficulties and disorders.

Bentley (1998) argued that education opportunity should be extended beyond the school classroom. Mac Ruairc (2013) suggested that inclusion is about choice of personal opportunity and that this can be provided by AP. In fact, the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel (2012) stated that the way forward after the 2011 riots is to engage disaffected young people in quality AP. Rutherford and Quinn (1999) had previously recognised the need for students receiving special education to be involved in alternative education programs. Gutherson, Davies and Daszkiewicz (2011) identified what effective AP could look like and Sodha and Guglielmi (2009) presented characteristics of innovative and effective practice. Furthermore, the NAEA (2012) recognised the positive contributions of AP regarding the future life chances of young people. Student AP placements on OOSTEP are wide-ranging as they are all chosen according to individual needs. The exploration identified that students had tried many courses. Students are given a choice of APs and they are encouraged to 'sample' some of the courses before they fully commit themselves. Although the students were encouraged to take responsibility for their choices, it took several taster sessions and experiences before students such as Adam and Brett settled into a single provision. The exploration also observed the need to sustain parent/carer involvement throughout the AP process, from first choices to final outcomes, as was the case with Finn (P/C Finn 3, 93-94) and George (P/C George 3, 101-104). Education institutions are responsible for commissioning APs (Taylor, 2012) and monitoring their effectiveness. OOSTEP experience is an individual personal programme (Downing et al., 2007). The links with more adult-centred environments have been motivating (Dearing, 1994) and were very well received by the students in the study. Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) identified the longstanding challenges of using AP as an education pathway and focused on both the lack of a national strategy and the inadequate resourcing of AP. This is still an issue despite recent publications by the DfE in this area: Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential (DfE, 2017a), Creating Opportunity for All (DfE, 2018b), and guidance for AP free schools (DfE, 2019a). However, these recent endeavours have come too late to prevent the closure of some excellent local AP practices that were previously used by OOSTEP, thereby denying students further opportunities.

The exploration revealed that OOSTEP provided positive outcomes through the use of

both academic and vocational courses. Students shared their pride in their qualification success. Adam, Brett, and Elliot shared specific personal stories of success in academic and vocational courses. Coleman (2015) recognised that, having suffered adversity in the past, excluded students can exhibit increased resilience and achieve positive outcomes. OOSTEP students at risk of exclusion observed the need for progress in Maths and English and requested opportunities to this end. A small-step approach was established for students so that they could see success quickly and move on to more advanced courses. Indeed, students were able to build on previous 'Entry Level' success in Maths and English before tackling their GCSEs. Students felt that they were able to achieve initial success (Brett 6, 208-209) and then 'breeze' through their exams (Elliot 1, 42-44). The individual success contributed to the students' personal development (section 5.3.2).

Literature establishes a well-documented link between learning difficulties and misbehaviour (Cooper, 1993a; Pomeroy, 2000; Head, 2005; Mowat, 2009; Hewett, 2012;). OOSTEP is a flexible and effective response to the learning needs of students which, in turn, affects their behaviour. It is vocational education that often plays a significant role in alternative education on OOSTEP. Students were regularly engaged in workshops where they were able to move about rather than being seated in a traditional classroom environment. Both Daniel and Finn enjoyed and had fun at their provisions (Daniel 3, 92; Finn p3, 63). Responding to the needs of the learner reduced the incidences of student misbehaviours. OOSTEP staff members highlighted the need to observe behaviours and change activities according to individual engagement. The study identified the need for meaningful activities appropriate to learning needs (Hamill and Boyd, 2002; Cefai and Cooper, 2010). Differentiated activities are seen as essential to effective teaching and learning (Haager and Klingner, 2005; Hajdukova, 2014).

OOSTEP students were motivated by their success in a wide variety of different courses alongside their personal achievements. Initial challenges and motivation by staff members encouraged higher expectations of the students. Following their initial engagement, students requested participation on various other courses (George 2, 46) and asked for additional help with their core subjects (Adam 2, 68-69). Students became more resilient and were determined to succeed and then share their success.

Hajdukova (2014) observed the effect of higher expectations as it changes attitudes and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The study identified that initial, personal success led to further achievements and a confidence to try new opportunities.

The opportunity to engage in future pathways was principally identified by the parents and carers of Adam, Connor, and George. As most students were already experiencing training and even college courses (Elliot) on OOSTEP, it was believed that transition to post-16 courses would be less challenging. Most students were attending courses that related to their future plans. As such, transition concerns were reduced in the minds of some students and their parents and carers. Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) highlighted that there is a great deal of anxiety regarding change and transition and this is corroborated by this exploration into the student with education experience. A major consideration and contribution of OOSTEP is to reduce the anxieties that accompany transition and change in the future. The subject of transition was raised as a chief concern by the parent of Adam (P/C Adam 1, 4-7). Like other students, Adam needed time to consider opportunities and prepare for his transition from OOSTEP to college. This exploration further contributed to knowledge regarding the need for choice, opportunities, and appropriate transition planning for the development of students. Students, parents, and carers identified the importance of negotiating and implementing a bespoke programme based on students' interests, desires, aspirations, and wants.

5.3 Development of students with SEMH issues

In this study, the students with SEMH issues displayed progress from negative behaviours in school to positive personal development on OOSTEP. Wise (2000) observed that the problems associated with students are many and varied. Studying behaviour is a complex task. Student behaviours in school put them at risk of exclusion and they were therefore invited to participate in OOSTEP. It is suggested that these students were able to focus on areas of personal development on OOSTEP rather than on their behaviours in school. Furthermore, the third OOSTEP success criterion strives to achieve worthwhile personal, academic, and vocational outcomes and to develop future pathways.

5.3.1 Behaviours in School

Adam, Brett, Connor, and Finn were most forthcoming when it came to describing their behaviours in school. The exploration identified five types of behaviours acknowledged by the students: endangering people's safety, including violence to staff and students; endangering self, including drug and drink abuse; absconding from school; damaging property; and persistent general misbehaviours. These behaviours are consistent with the reasons for permanent and fixed-term exclusions in 2017-2018 (DfE, 2019b). The students also recognised three main motivations for their behaviours in school:

1. The majority of students described themselves as having personal issues related to learning difficulties. They acknowledged that they 'acted out' and became the centre of attention (Cefai and Cooper, 2010) which then increased disruptive behaviour.
2. A motivation for their behaviours was due to unfairness (Hajdukova, 2014); notably, feelings of injustice or being wronged by others, including poor student-teacher relationships and bullying by staff and other students.
3. A third motivation was being disciplined (Dishion and Dodge, 2005), including being put in isolation which instigated reprisal and their response to being sanctioned (Ryan, Peterson and Rozalski, 2007).

Literature as far back as Cooper (1993a) acknowledged these same reasons for student behaviours that resulted in their disengagement from school. Notably, these motivations for negative behaviours are intertwined with associations regarding relationships with teachers (section 5.4.1), identified by Pomeroy (1999) as the key ingredient in the school process.

Steiner (1985) stated that society often seeks to disregard and 'turn a blind eye' to education concerns notwithstanding publications such as 'Excellence for All Children' (DfEE, 1997) emphasising that exclusions are a symptom of unmet student need. There is a plethora of literature that has identified different SEMH needs. Winnicott (1971) suggested that children need a space to think and Bowlby (1982) underlined the importance of a secure base for students. Cooper (2005) observed that society needs to initiate engagement with young people whilst Trotman, Tucker and Martyn (2015) recognised the dangers of personal instability that can cause SEMH difficulties.

Sheffield and Morgan (2017) identified that education should be both relevant and engaging and Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) indicated that there is an apparent need to access a wide range of opportunities. The students, parents, and carers in this study shared how OOSTEP has delivered in these areas, providing essential elements in education for SEMH issues. Paget et al. (2018) observed that the consequences of these needs not being met are disruptive behaviour, verbal abuse, and threatening behaviour. Each student in this study exhibited these behaviours; they were trashing and smashing schools (Adam 1, 22-24; Brett 1, 17-22; Finn 2, 68) and carrying out violent and physical assaults (Daniel 1, 24-26) in school. George (1, 15-27) spoke about an incident where he felt he could have killed someone. Drug use was identified as a problem by Daniel (2, 40-41) and for Finn (P/C 2, 77-79).

Elliot was persistently absent from school, despite the school making attempts to work with him and his carer. The charity 'Not Fine in School' (NFS, 2019) described school refusers as those children that experience extreme anxiety and distress in relation to attending school, often resulting in prolonged absences. Rather than persevere with schooling in a traditional education environment, the therapeutic approach has been to engage students in OOSTEP. Initially, this may start in the home, whereby parents/carers coax the students out of their bedrooms so that they may engage in some form of home-based education before then moving onto community activities. OOSTEP staff members work in learning environments that support the students' needs and this includes initial home support. However, this is not to be confused with traditional home schooling where the students are based at home and often taught by their parents and carers. There was often a willingness to participate in out-of-school learning as opposed to a reluctance to participate in school education. Once the threat and perception of hostility of school is removed, learning opportunities were often embraced and behaviour and attendance improved. Elliot (2, 69-70) recognised that education was 'way better now' as he was engaged with imaginative strategies that he perceived as worthwhile. Working closely with educational psychologists resulted in initially reducing the demands of the timetable, thus enabling Brett (P/C Brett 1, 32-34) to have the appropriate amount of time and space to personally adjust to these new opportunities. OOSTEP has been identified as having considerable success with some very vulnerable students who had been labelled school refusers.

5.3.2 Personal Development on OOSTEP

OOSTEP is based on a child-centred approach that aims to focus on the needs of the individual. Fish (2017) recommended therapeutic responses for disengaged students and students at risk of exclusion. Students recovering from their damaged emotional and social states may be on a lifelong journey of healing. OOSTEP offers an opportunity for personal healing and development away from the experiences of schooling. Engagement in worthwhile activities has a significant impact on students' well-being and emotional resilience. Subsequently, students grow in confidence and self-esteem as they engage in provisions and develop a sense of self-worth. This approach tallies with Cooper (1993a) who proposed that building confidence in students is important so that they feel valued by others in society. Wise (2000) reflected on SEMH needs and identified that there is a call of 'Listen to me!' made by students in school. Adam (2, 47-50) spoke of being more mature and both Brett (6, 212-213) and Connor (6, 211-212) stated that they had more self-control. Daniel and Finn witnessed dramatic changes in their behaviour and engagement. Connor's parent (P/C Connor 4, 174-178) identified an increase in confidence and stated that he had found his old self (P/C Connor 4, 148-149). It was apparent to parents and carers that, as the students acquired new social skills in their out-of-school provisions, they were better able to manage their emotions and behaviours. These areas of personal development may well reflect the independence programme that includes taking responsibilities and being encouraged to improve executive functions (Appendix 20), as advocated by ADHD Solutions (2019).

Cefai and Cooper (2010) recognised that deficiency in social competence is often a characteristic of students and that social skills are paramount to successful learning (Walker, Ramsey and Gresham, 2004). The process of re-signification was identified by Cooper (1993a) and explained by Hajdukova (2014) as the positive recognition of self in a supportive but challenging environment. The research identified that a wide range of provision opportunities were presented on OOSTEP that offered students the chance to achieve success and targeted outcomes. Mowat (2008) observed that change will only take place when students make a deliberate decision to take responsibility and accountability for their behaviours. The students on OOSTEP chose to make personal changes. A remarkable finding from the interviews was that there were no reports of

misbehaviour or bullying during their education whilst attending OOSTEP. This is in stark contrast to the students' behaviours in school.

Responsibility to independently manage their travel to and from provisions engendered a sense of reliability, self-worth, and personal achievement. Elliot (1, 36-40) stated that he was more independent which made him feel more confident. OOSTEP students were encouraged to be responsible independent travellers. As a result, there were no incidences of misuse or abuse of the independent travel arrangements presented to students on OOSTEP. Brett's carer (P/C Brett 3, 97) recognised that he could give him more responsibility as he had become more mature. The attributes identified on OOSTEP enabled students to develop greater self-worth, prepare for transition at the age of 16, and be more socially responsible in their local communities. Students, parents, and carers identified that students were able to achieve worthwhile personal, academic, and vocational outcomes and develop future pathways.

5.4 Relationships with Education Staff

Cooper (1993a) identified the importance of good relationships between teachers and their students. Teachers have long acknowledged this as a crucial ingredient in the teaching process. Pomeroy (1999) stated that the key to effective education is the student-teacher relationship. There is a noticeable disparity between the negative relationships with teachers in school and the rapport developed with staff members on OOSTEP. The fourth OOSTEP success criteria identifies the importance of developing a rapport between students and their mentors.

5.4.1 Relationships with Teachers

All participating students spoke about their poor relationships with teachers in school, but Brett and Finn discussed this at considerable length. From their negative perceptions, it was clear that there was often a breakdown in the student-teacher relationship. Students focused very heavily on the negative attributes of teachers with an occasional positive perception of individual support. Students reported undesirable actions by teachers as one of the main reasons for their negative behaviours. Delaney (2009) identified that teachers perceive a dilemma when applying classroom management strategies. On the one hand, they are trying to foster relationships with

individual students with different boundaries to accommodate their needs. On the other hand, they are receiving a possible adverse reaction from the class as a whole due to perceived favourable treatment for students with SEMH issues. The result is that teachers are being left to manage these tensions, often having to strike a delicate balance in the classroom. According to Swinson and Knight (2007), negative teaching attitudes and lack of encouragement can contribute to increased behaviours and drive students out of the classroom. These negative actions incorporate three areas for discussion: disrespect, lack of trust, and feelings of hatred. The students stated that their greatest challenge at school was the student-teacher relationship; their teachers were often hostile (Adam p1, 17-18), abusive (Brett 3, 71-78), and gave them no respect. Perceptions arising from unfair actions by teachers included a lack of respect, 'being dissed' (Finn 1, 15), and being isolated (George 1, 25-26). Consequently, some students expressed that their behaviour was a form of retaliation (Brett 6, 190-191) as they felt neglected and often ignored by their teachers in school. Parents and carers identified that students had low self-esteem partly due to the way they had been treated by teachers and head teachers (P/C Daniel 1, 34-37).

Teachers were accused of not listening, of not being trustworthy, of lying (Brett 1, 25-28), and of fabricating stories when they reported incidents. Consequently, some students and their parents and carers felt that incidents had been engineered or exaggerated so that, ultimately, students were removed from school (P/C George 1, 24-25). This principle of trust between teachers, students, parents, and carers has been highlighted by Pomeroy (1999) and Cefai and Cooper (2010). Students in this exploration shared their deep feelings of anger and expressions of hatred (Brett 2, 50-51) towards their teachers. Teachers verbally threatened students with sanctions and threats of police involvement (Finn 3, 117-118) and students who physically threatened teachers were removed. Parents and carers reported that their children regularly absconded (P/C Connor 4, 149-150) and that they were suspended from school. Some parents and carers resorted to changing schools (P/C Daniel 2, 44-48) only to discover similar problems.

There is a very close connection between the students' perceptions of school and their perceptions of teachers. For some, a poor student-teacher relationship was what they

perceived as their school experience. The word ‘school’ had a negative connotation as it was an association of all the poor student-teacher relationships that they had previously experienced. Each subsequent school placement was therefore at a distinct disadvantage from the start and were often perceived as of no benefit at all. In Pomeroy (1999), the study of excluded students identified a 50/50 split reaction between relief and distress at being excluded. In this study, students at risk of school exclusion responded positively to out-of-school provision, sharing their relief at having a fresh start, new opportunities, and respite from their school experience. The approach of confirming their invitation to OOSTEP was vastly different from the feelings of rejection at school and the stigma of exclusion.

A key issue that Cooper (1993a) identified is that, because teachers are accountable, they make judgements on students. Hargreaves et al. (1975) reported on teachers’ assumptions and the identities of the students they teach. Aronson and Mettee (1968) recognised an attribution theory, suggesting that labels assigned to students are often accepted by them. Adam, Brett, Connor, Daniel, and Finn were students identified and labelled as ‘bad boys’. This provoked resistance from the students who then exhibited open defiance and physical conronation as identified in the literature (Cooper et al., 2000; Hamill and Boyd, 2002). There exists a considerable degree of consistency between the information gleaned from interviews in this study and the literature with regards to unfair teachers (Pomeroy, 1999; Cooper et al., 2000; Hamill and Boyd, 2002; Riley and Docking, 2004). The students in this study claimed that their teachers were unfair because they exhibited negative attitudes towards students who were perceived to have learning difficulties. Brett was very vocal when stating that he was identified as the dumbest (Brett 1, 15), the one ignored (Brett 1, 22-23), the one receiving no helpand the one left at the back of the classroom by school staff (Brett 1, 27). Wise (2000, p.39) acknowledged that teachers frequently take criticism and blame.

The misuse of teacher power and authority in behaviour management was observed as manifesting itself in coercion, physical force, and restraint. According to Delaney (2007), general misbehaviours in the classroom can be recognised as low level ‘sparring’ leading to physical damage to property. However, specific disciplinary practices of locking doors, physical restraint, physical assault, and student isolation in dark rooms

were revealed by students. Brett explained how he had felt threatened by constant physical violence because he was the 'biggest' student in his class (Brett 6, 196-198). The use of behaviour management strategies that involve some form of physical restraint is identified as provoking even greater anger and encouraging further violence. Students thus retaliated against teaching staff and damaged school property. Teachers were perceived as using their own size and strength to enforce what some students regarded as bullying, assault, and evil practice (Brett 2, 50-51).

There were only a limited number of stories in this study where students shared their experiences of positive relationships with teachers. Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) focused on identifying positive principles related to student-teacher relationships and this was consistent with the following findings. The constructive practices identified as worthy of being shared were based in three areas: being included, being supported, and being listened to. Brett recalled just one occasion when he felt included (Brett 3, 88-90). Finn's parent acknowledged a time when he was supported (P/C Finn 1, 21-22). Daniel's parent identified that a staff member listened to his needs (P/C Daniel 1, 37-40). Students could only recollect a small number of activities that they enjoyed in school. Elliot enjoying painting (Elliot 1, 4-5), Brett enjoyed the birth of some chickens (Brett 3, 92-94), and Connor's parent remembered that he had really enjoyed a particular school that he had attended (P/C Connor 5, 192-196). Students being given a voice in their schooling was seen as the exception rather than the rule for those who participated in this study.

Pomeroy (1999) stated that the greatest concern in school was problematic student-teacher relationships and therefore an ideal model of the student-teacher relationship was created. However, Garza et al. (2014) identified that teachers' perceptions needed to be recognised as they have value. Hajdukova (2014) agreed with Cooper's (1993a) view that a change in teachers' attitude has been shown to have a significant effect on students. Understanding the student experience could have changed their involvement in schooling and improved the way students with SEMH issues were taught.

5.4.2 Relationship with OOSTEP Mentors

Students, parents, and carers observed positive relationships with staff members on

OOSTEP, identifying the need for a mentor to develop a rapport with each student. However, the lack of any negative comments regarding OOSTEP staff was perhaps a more significant finding. Staff members that were in an out-of-school setting were framed in a different light when compared with staff members that were in an orthodox school setting. It was acknowledged by Cooper (1993a, p.171) that teachers in an alternative setting 'acted towards [the students] in ways which encouraged the boys to think of themselves as worthwhile individuals. Brett, who spoke out against the negative attitudes and behaviours of teachers in school, was 'OK' when describing OOSTEP staff members (Brett 8, 266). Similarly, Adam reported that his relationship was 'fine' with his mentors (Adam 1, 29-30). Parents and carers were more specific in identifying the staff members who had enabled their child to make significant academic progress (Brett 4, 129-123). Connor's parent (P/C Connor 1, 8-12) described how staff members worked around his needs. OOSTEP staff were mindful of student needs and had positive expectations of them. OOSTEP staff also engaged students in opportunities of personal interests (section 4.2.2).

Therapeutic practice is based on a child-centred teaching approach according to Cornwall and Walter (2006). The OOSTEP staff members' practice of unconditional positive regard for students was evident. Skilled instructors had the ability to relate to students and meet their needs, improving both confidence and self-esteem (Polat and Farrell 2002). Parents and carers recognised that the OOSTEP staff allowed their children to achieve positive outcomes and move on in terms of their education (P/C Brett p1, 34). The principal finding in this section was that positive relationships with education staff enable students to manage their difficulties without the behaviours exhibited in school (section 4.3.1). This is supported by the literature. The relational approach with students was extended to partnership working with parents and carers. OOSTEP staff made a difference and a key contribution to positive student experience. Their knowledge and understanding, evident in this study, was central to enabling students, parents, and carers to cope with the challenges of education for SEMH issues.

An exploration of the perspectives of the students, parents, and carers in this study offers key insights into education for students with SEMH issues. When combined with

the relevant legislation and literature, these narratives raise awareness of the education experience of this vulnerable group. The Children and Families Act 2014 brought about a change in policy, but its implementation has not brought about a change in practice. Furthermore, a 'lost generation' has suffered due to policy not being realised and the resulting damage to students is reported through their narratives of disaffection. Education needs to awaken to the issues already identified and it is clear that a change to current policy is required in order to present additional opportunities for students.

Students on OOSTEP are fully involved in decisions about their education. By listening to students and implementing the Code of Practice (DfE, 2015a), a vision is achieved through OOSTEP. The student voice is central to a child-centred learning approach as they are able to share their individual attitudes to education and identify their aspirations for the future. Listening to each individual student is imperative as all are different and all have experienced different situations. Student insights can inform intervention strategies and policies that support their curriculum choices. Through listening to parents' and carers' voices, a bespoke approach to the curriculum is developed and implemented in partnership. Staff members who listen and implement the student voice are advocates (Bradley-Levine, 2021) and a key part of OOSTEP success. Staff relate to and motivate students by heeding their views, thoughts, and opinions, enabling them to engage in a worthwhile curriculum. The OOSTEP approach has informed local policy which has increased the successful outcomes of students and significantly enhanced their future life opportunities.

OOSTEP has listened to the concerns raised by students, parents, and carers and has implemented them into school policy. The students' views are incorporated into an alternative education approach that has brought about a resolution at the local level. The new Children's Commissioner (2021a) has identified similar areas of SEN concern: vulnerabilities, poor outcomes, mainstream schooling concerns, unsustainable funding, and increasing numbers of SEN complaints. Families, however, need support in advocating their views and in offering clarification and recommendations regarding policy. The Commissioner has proposed that the SEND Review must align with the Department for Education's work in reforming alternative education. Joining policy would bring together SEN and AP reform, since the solution for both is closely

interconnected.

This study has raised the issue of the importance of the student voice and how this can inform policymaking. There is an increasingly powerful shift towards listening to students' views and opinions when considering how to provide for them at local and national level. Incorporating and reflecting the student voice in policy can help to provide for them in ways that will enhance their future life opportunities. The education system is under increased scrutiny, imposed accountability, and transparency. An environment conducive to meaningful student voice is being created and this can be reflected in policy. To enable the voices of children to be heard, the Children's Commissioner (2021b) is launching a childhood review. The 'Big Ask' is the largest consultation with children ever held in England. The purpose of the review is to identify the barriers that prevent children reaching their full potential and to identify policy shortfalls that have held their lives back. It will allow children the chance to have their voices heard and inform policymaking in order to enhance their future life opportunities. The Commissioner will not solely focus on the problems highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic but will address the policy shortfalls that have hampered children's educational progress for decades. The report will recommend solutions and propose that the welfare of children be at the heart of economic policy and recovery.

5.5 Peer Relationships

Students, parents, and carers identified that students expressed difficulty in making and sustaining meaningful friendships. The findings are consistent with studies that relate to students with SEMH and SEND issues in general (Visser and Dubsky, 2009; Hajdukova, 2014). Cooper (1993a) observed that both internal and external factors influence school education and that one of those influences is peer relationships both during and outside of education. OOSTEP success criteria encourages each student to have fun, enjoy their education, and explore further options.

5.5.1 Peer Relationships in School

Students in this study identified few peer friendships from school. Students, parents, and carers recognised that constant school changes were not conducive to continuity and making friends. Wise (2000) identified the fight-or-flight response. Students shared

the physical challenges they experienced each time they moved school. Starting a new school inevitably brought invitations to fight other students (Brett 7, 241-245). Some students who take up the challenge are perceived as troublemakers, whilst others who withdraw are often isolated, bullied (Elliott 1, 30-31), and abscond from school.

Gaining approval from peers was often challenging for these students with SEMH difficulties. They lacked in social skills and were unable to understand the feelings and needs of their peers. However, the notion of peer approval and being perceived as a friend was important. Connor (1, 30-31) described how he was the centre of attention at school. Making his peers laugh and earning their approval was important for him and he was often seen as the class clown (P/C Connor 1, 30-32). Play at school frequently got out of control for Finn as he often became heavy handed with his peers (P/C Finn 2, 82-84). Inconsiderate actions towards others and the consequences of such actions were perceived as different, anti-social, threatening, and isolating.

Wise (1999) acknowledged that there was an inadequate response to bullying in schools. Four students stated that they had experienced bullying from peers at school, whilst three felt so terrorised that they had absconded from school and one became a school refuser. Connor's parent (P/C Connor 1, 12-15) reported that he was bullied and assaulted in a school corridor but was inclined to keep it to himself. Students specifically recognised the consequences of bullying such as feeling isolated, inducing anxiety, and absconding from school. Elliot (1, 7-8) and Finn (1, 22) stated that they had also bullied others in school as a consequence of being bullied themselves. Finn (4, 135-136) shared that commodities such as cigarettes were targeted and stolen by bullies at school. Some students also used such commodities to buy approval or curry favour with those who appeared threatening. Research revealed the nature and role of both the bully and the victim, acknowledging that a victim can also be a bully. Hajdukova (2014) observed that peer bullying encouraged students to be more aggressive towards other peers. The findings of Farmer et al. (2012) illustrated that bullying is often a reactive response to being a victim. However, Wise (2000, p.64) observed that bullying does not only occur in schools.

Although the students had real difficulties making and maintaining friendships, all stated

that they had friends in school at one time or another. Parents and carers reported that Brett (P/C Brett 2, 47-49) and Daniel (P/C Daniel 4, 131-132) had only had one best friend at school. Connor (1, 23) described himself as being well-known but his parent (P/C Connor 2, 71-73) shared that he only had one friend. Elliot (p1, 32-34) admitted having no friends at school, although he had had friends in the past. George (p1, 19-25) described his best friend as a therapeutic dog who he read to at school. These insights support the idea that students had few friendships in school which was a real cause for concern. This is supported by Hajdukova's (2014) study which indicated that relationships between students and their peers was often negative. Hornby (2011) identified that students felt more comfortable with peers who had similar difficulties and interests. In this study, the students reported difficulties at all the schools they had attended and with all students. Slavin (2011) suggested that co-operative learning between students led to further opportunities for developing friendships with or without SEMH issues. Although the students did not identify peers as friends on OOSTEP, they did work well with one another in alternative provisions.

A similar friendship pattern that was established in school was also established outside school. Most students in this study had few friends which was raised as a concern by parents and carers. Brett (8, 259-260) shared that he stayed in his house and played video games with his one friend. Elliot reported playing games on the internet with five friends, all of which lived in different countries. He classified his internet friends as being very important during his years as a school refuser. Connor's parent (P/C Connor 3, 124-125) was particularly concerned for her son who only had gaming associations on the internet.

SEMH difficulties were greatly compounded by the involvement in anti-social behaviour with out-of-school peers as discussed in the Chapter 1. Wise (2000) gave students the opportunity to discuss anything that they did out of school which included peer relationships. Two students reported being affiliated with local peer groups or gangs. One student readily talked of drug use and carrying weapons. Another spoke of drugs being common, readily available, and used in the home. Pomeroy's (1999) study emphasised that out-of-school criminal activity was a significant and problematic factor. In this study, Adam admitted that he 'was no angel'; he described himself as being at

the forefront of trouble in his neighbourhood and being known to the police (Adam 2, 52-54). Connor (1, 14-15, 23) reported that he was well known and involved in trouble 'all over the place'. Adam's parent (P/C Adam 2, 54-55) had no idea who he spent his time with, who his associates were, or whether he had used substances. The students' out-of-school associations continued whilst on OOSTEP. However, the parents and carers reported that the students' behaviours with peers improved and that they became more responsible and mature as they grew older.

5.5.2 OOSTEP Peer Relationships

A concern raised by parents and carers was the students' need for friendships on OOSTEP. However, none of students identified concerns regarding friendships on OOSTEP and no incidents of bullying were reported. OOSTEP encouraged school refusers to leave the home and engage in education provision. Students were able to engage in environments that were non-threatening and devoid of bullying as experienced in school. The parents and carers of Adam and Elliot shared their concerns with regards to more change and the apparent difficultly of settling into new provisions on OOSTEP. The statements made during interview confirmed that there were no shared experiences of difficult peer relationships on OOSTEP. However, none of the students referred to associations that grew into friendships or the development of associations after education hours. This is in stark contrast to students who reminisce about their misbehaviour in school with their peers. Parents and carers did not highlight any peer concerns on OOSTEP. The students continued to have a lack of friends just as they had throughout their education journey.

In conclusion**,** students found it difficult to form and maintain friendships. All students wanted to have friends and could identify the benefits of friendship despite the fact that peer relationships in school were often accompanied by bullying. In contrast, there was no mention of any peer relationships and no incidents of bullying on OOSTEP. Students had very few close friends both in and out of school. Students who had friendships after school continued those associations after education while on OOSTEP. The majority of students had less than two friends and two students had no friends at all. All had fewer friends at home than in education. Parents and carers were concerned about their children having so few friends and feared that they may have even less friendship

opportunities on OOSTEP. The success criteria for OOSTEP encourages each student to have fun, enjoy their education, and explore further options. However, students remained rather uncommitted and did not express themselves fully as they had with other themes. The findings in this area are thus inconclusive and more research is required to determine how students can engage in friendships on alternative education programmes.

5.6 Family

The literature reveals limited research into the role of parents and carers in education for SEMH issues. It has been identified that education engagement was often borne out of a wider experience involving family and community. Cooper (1993b) recognised that the family is the primary source of experience for most students. However, the students in this study did not give a great deal of insight into their experiences of home and family life as they appeared reluctant to talk about this topic. Wise (2000, p.85) quoted studies from Charlton and David (1979) with regards to the influence of family and life outside school. Cole and Knowles (2011) recognised that families have a significant influence on students. They identified the need for practitioners to consider children's experience at home. This study demonstrated parents' and carers' willingness to share their experiences of their children in the home. Communicating with parents and carers and listening to their experiences and intuitions is one of the success criteria for OOSTEP. The findings emphasise that parents and carers were an essential ingredient for partnership working and SEMH support. Furthermore, they identified several contributing factors with regards to family and home experience which had an impact on education for students with SEMH issues.

This study identified that all seven students were from broken homes. Two students lived with their fathers, three with their mothers, one student with his grandad, and one with his grandparents. All students had experienced significant loss to their nuclear family and it is reasonable to suggest that all could have attachment difficulties (Casey, 2015). Other significant family changes that occurred during the short period of this study included the death of a carer, birth of a sister, and the gaining of a stepmother. Finn's parent identified concerns regarding attachment (P/C Finn 1, 19-21). Personal loss and insecurity in the family was recognised as a major reason for the poor

relationships that were identified both in the home and subsequently at school. It is significant that, throughout the short seven-year history of OOSTEP, no student with SEMH issues has lived with both his birth parents and therefore has not benefitted from the support and stability of a traditional nuclear family.

Relationships in the home between family members, carers, and students were considered by four students to have been ‘iffy’, ‘quite bad’, and ‘violent’. Six parents and carers considered home life to be: violent, mentally exhausting, frustrating, threatening, demanding, and up and down. Feelings of frustration and emotional pain often resulted in physical attacks instigated by the child. The students themselves were very reserved and thus reluctant to speak about their behaviour, relationships, and domestic violence, but parents and carers were relieved to be able to share the pain and difficulties experienced in raising young people with SEMH issues. The interview process was a cathartic experience and enabled a therapeutic release for the parents and carers of Daniel, Finn, and George. This is exemplified through their emotional interview responses. Parents and carers recognised the difficulties involved in raising children who they could no longer physically control as they grew bigger (P/C Daniel 1, 29-30) and stronger (P/C Brett 2, 28-70). This same issue of physicality was raised with regards to physical control by teachers within school (section 5.4.1).

All parents and carers reported spending considerable time supporting the students’ schooling both at home and in school. They all identified significant periods of time where they supported the students at school, only for the placements to break down. All students had spent considerable time at home due to school suspensions and exclusions. Four of the seven students had spent extended periods of time out of school (between one and two years at a time). George’s parent had tried home education or Education Otherwise. ‘Not Fine in School’ (2018) identified that the majority of home-schooled students are only home-schooled due to inadequate in-school provision. Two students struggled to attend school. Bodycote and Burmish (2018) shared that there are relevant agencies that offer support to students who are not attending school. However, in this study, parents and carers were not aware of any available support.

Wise (2000, p.143) recognised that the actual process of talking with students holds real significance in developing relationships. Parents and carers identified that five of

the students had issues with communication in the home. Two parents reported that their children had a very poor understanding of what was said to them and this led to confusion and misunderstandings. Three students were described as retreating to their rooms while at home and one student was referred to as a 'lodger'. Only the parents and carers of George and Brett believed that they had ongoing and positive communication with their young person with SEMH difficulties. Vygotsky (1978) argued that social interaction is pivotal to cognitive development. However, in this study, the majority of homes had limited social interaction and, in some situations, communication had broken down entirely.

Parents and carers were very open in sharing that all students showed their frustrations, threats, and domestic violence in the home. Parents and carers expressed their concerns regarding serious personal problems associated with their children. Adam's parent (P/C Adam 2, 53-59; 63-65) reported self-harming, smoking, and eating and sleeping disorders. Cornwall and Walter (2006) identified that substance misuse and abuse can cause external problems and affect education. Finn's parent (P/C Finn, 2, 77-79) was the only one who voiced their concerns regarding drug use. There were safeguarding issues identified when taking young people with SEMH difficulties out into the community and there were concerns with regards to the non-administration of prescription medication. It was recognised that these concerns exacerbated SEMH conditions and, consequently, the home challenges and learning difficulties of the students increased.

5.6.1 Family Summary

In summary, all students in this study presented with a history of complex learning difficulties and this was compounded by individual personal problems at home. Students did not choose to share details of their personal lives in the home. When asked about this topic, they were reluctant and even resistant to share. They did not specify their reasons for this and further exploration is required. The role of the family as a factor that influences education was not always included in the research with students. However, in this study, parents and carers made particular contributions to the following areas: structure of the family, poor relationships, growth and physicality concerns, home support for education, poor communication, and individual personal

problems in the home. These individual issues were perceived by the parents and carers and, to a lesser extent, by the students as influencing relationships in the home and affecting both the school experience and education on OOSTEP. In this study, it was established that communicating with parents and carers and listening to their experiences and intuitions has been an essential success criteria and practice of OOSTEP. Parents and carers have been indispensable in providing an understanding of the family life that impacts education for SEMH issues. Students were reticent concerning their views on family and were often not forthcoming.

5.7 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the six core themes shared in the findings (Chapter 4). The themes correspond to, and have been supported by, the relevant literature explored in the literature review (Chapter 2). All these themes are interrelated and influence each student to different degrees. There is a noticeable progression from negative school influences to positive student development on OOSTEP. The success criterion of OOSTEP has been used to compare student, parent, and carer comments. The effectiveness of OOSTEP was illustrated in five of the six success criteria. However, further research needs to be conducted in order to identify the success criteria with regards to peer relationships and students' enjoyment of education. There appears to be a greater need to encourage students to have fun and enjoy their education, especially with their peers.

Chapter 6: Contribution to Knowledge

6.0 Introduction

The study adds to a growing body of knowledge based on educating students in England. This study also adds to the wider literature on student voice and how students, in conjunction with their parents and carers, are making contributions to the field of education.

6.1 Contribution to Voice

This study is unique in both its context and content as no other study was identified that corresponds with its research question criteria. There are an increasing number of studies that seek the perspectives of their participants, but relatively few that seek the voice of students with SEMH issues and, of these, there are only a small number of students who attend provisions for SEMH needs and even less who attend a specialist therapeutic school. There were no studies identified that explored the student voice on a therapeutic intervention programme.

Research regarding the student voice may focus on a single issue. However, this study invited students to identify what they perceived as worthwhile education and to discuss their school and OOSTEP experiences to this end. Accordingly, the research had to be as broad or narrow and as deep or shallow as the perceptions received. There are few research studies that include all relevant issues perceived to be of worth by all participants.

Student perspectives are positioned at the forefront of this study. However, in the study conducted by Hajdukova (2014), it was suggested that further insight, including an additional stakeholder group, would have produced a more accurate portrayal of experiences of SEMH issues. This study incorporates additional insights through parent and carer perspectives. There are studies of parent and carer contributions to research but few with children with SEMH issues in therapeutic education. There are no identified studies that have carried out research into parent and carer perspectives of students with SEMH issues who are at risk of exclusion and experiencing an alternative therapeutic education.

Students clearly demonstrated their competence to participate in voice research. Their insights, as the experts of their experience (Trotman, Enow and Tucker, 2019), identified their understanding and the worth they place on education. Students were able to recognise what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of their education experience. They observed areas of their experience that could be improved along with perceived good practice.

6.2 Contributions of the SRQs

The contributions of the six SRQs are brought together to answer the MRQ. Each of these portions are, in effect, interconnected strands that are closely linked with one another. Together they provide a holistic response and allow for the data collected in interview to be analysed and explicated. However, there are contrasts between the perspectives of students, parents, and carers and these reveal different priorities, beliefs, values, and understanding with regards to school and OOSTEP. Table 3: Contribution of SRQ for answering the MRQ identifies contributions to the field of education for SEMH issues. For ease of reference and clarification, the MRQ and SRQ are:

What is the worth of school and the Out-of-School Therapeutic Education Programme (OOSTEP) from the perspective of students at risk of exclusion and their parents and carers?

- SRQ: 1. What is the significance of student voice and what does it entail?
- SRQ: 2. What are the features of the category relating to SEMH issues?
- SRQ: 3. What is the implication of students being at risk of exclusion?
- SRQ: 4. How do students perceive school?
- SRQ: 5. How do students perceive AP and therapeutic provisions?
- SRQ: 6. What is the most appropriate research method to capture perspectives of students with SEMH issues and their parents or carers?

MRQ – To answer		Issues	Contribution
SRQ: 1	Student with SEMH contribution	Lack of research on SEMH issues	Students did not consider their family/home life worth sharing. However, they made a full contribution to other areas.
SRQ: 1	Parent contribution	Parents often not involved	Parents and carers share concerns regarding their children's learning needs and the effect of SEMH on their relationships in the home.
SRQ: 1	Student voice and well-being	Barrier to learn Need to listen and empower	Legislation has identified the student voice as mandatory. Empowering student voice is a key contribution for further improvement and development.
SRQ: 2	SEMH category and labelling	Barrier to learn SEMH labels	The SMEH category has changed the label to SEMH with an emphasis on mental health rather than behaviour. Labels are attributed. Suggest labels are removed and replace with support where needed.
SRQ: 2	Assessment for SEMH issues	Barrier to learning SEMH issues transfer Poor resourcing	Assessment for SEMH issues is discredited. The Code of Practice (2015) has been criticised for not providing support. School-based mental health services are being introduced and imposed on schools.
SRQ: 3	Exclusionary practice – risk of exclusion	Barrier to learn Exclusion as a personally damaging experience	Exclusion contributes to further SEMH issues. Students are disproportionately excluded. The risk of exclusion is a threat to students with SEMH in this study. They identified that they had been 'kicked out' of other schools. Alternative education removes the risk of exclusion from school.
SRQ: 4	School practice	Barrier to learn Ref- Findings	Students share their dislike of school, lack of learning support, behaviours, dislike of teachers, peer associations.
SRQ: 5	Alternative OOSTEP	Opportunity to learn and develop	There are plans for AP to be included as a parallel regulated system to mainstream schooling. OOSTEP is based on the influence of therapeutic education (based on standards). Key principles include: choice, opportunity, relationships, re-signification of personal development and, resilience.
SRQ: 6	Appropriate research method	Adapt interviews to suit SEMH needs	This research has been able to adapt a semi-structured interview method to the needs of students.

Table 3: Contribution of SRQs for answering the MRQ

The research design offered a method (SRQ: 6) relevant to the challenges of students and adapted to their individual needs. These students have been marginalised in the past because of their inability to access written research methods rather than their unwillingness to participate. The study gives an in-depth insight into their frustrations and violence towards a school system that they ridicule. This provoked a depth of feeling that was further compounded by the harrowing emotional stories told by parents and carers. The parents and carers had remained unheard. It is rare for a study of students at risk of exclusion to be included alongside their parents and carers in sharing their authentic voices. This research study presents the contributions of these two marginalised groups.

6.3 Contribution of School and OOSTEP Findings

The study findings summarised in Table 4 outline the contribution to both school and OOSTEP education. Principles have emerged that can give guidance for education for students with SEMH issues (identified in bold in the text box). The research data revealed that respite from school was vital for the students. It was necessary in order to avoid the damaging effects of an environment that was not suitable for their needs. The accounts of change were inspiring, and it was identified that individual choices, opportunities, relationships, and increased self-esteem can transform personal development. Moreover, the support that was received by parents and carers enabled them to manage, persevere, and take great pleasure in their children's achievements. This was a journey from pain and despair to optimism and hope for the future.

At a time of national confusion regarding SMEH provision, a local solution was identified that brought about personal change for students. Identifying the worth of education for SEMH issues enables further changes to be made in school and alternative education, resulting in decreased school exclusions.

The participants in this study have identified a stark contrast between the worth of school and the worth of OOSTEP education. Students shared their disparaging remarks about the school environment and spoke out regarding their lack of learning support, behaviours, teachers, and peer associations. Parents and carers shared concerns regarding their children's learning needs and the effect of SEMH difficulties on

relationships in the home. This was an area that students did not consider to be worth sharing.

	Themes Identified	Contribution of Findings
1	Education environment	Students have strong negative opinions regarding their school experiences. Schools is not the right place for some students as it can contribute to their problems. School transfers and change had been problematic. However, respite from school is essential for some. Choosing an education alternative such as OOSTEP can facilitate change and reduce and remove the barriers to education. Education environments need to be conducive to learner needs with SEMH.
2	Learning difficulties and opportunities	Participants feel let down as they are assigned a label of SEMH but do not understand the meaning. Students, parents, and carers have understanding of SEMH conditions but they have been unable to share this information. They need a voice. Engaging learning opportunities provide distraction and the ability to manage difficulties appropriately. Understanding of individual SEMH issues can come from students, parents, and carers. Choosing appropriate learning opportunities can shift students' focus towards these learning opportunities rather than their SEMH learning difficulties.
3	Behaviours and personal development	Outward behaviours manifested inner feelings of anxiety and stress. Poor behaviour is exacerbated in a coercive school environment. By removing their behaviour triggers, students can focus on personal development. Opinions and attitudes change, positive outcomes are achieved, and personal development is identified.
4	Staffing: teachers or mentors	Student-teacher relationships are identified as the single key issue for problems and behaviours in school. Students prefer a relationship of respect. Mentors on OOSTEP facilitate learning as these student-teacher relationships are based on mutual respect and working together.
5	Peer relationships	Students have difficulty making friends as social skills are a concern, although friendships are wanted. Confrontation and bullying are removed on OOSTEP. Out-of-school peer relationships continue and sometimes involve criminal behaviours. Students often find friends online. Parents and carers are encouraging of friendships. Friendships are sought after by students with SEMH issues.
6	Family relationships	Homes are very emotive places as single parents and carers struggle with the SEMH challenge and often require daily contact. The consequences of domestic violence are increased as the child 'gets bigger' and parents/carers are unable to manage their behaviour. As the child's personal skills are developed, there are identified improvements. Parents and carers need SEMH support. Their contributions are essential for partnership working.

Table 4: Contribution of School and OOSTEP Findings

The learning journey recognises the worth of education for students with SEMH issues as it shares the differences between in-school education and out-of-school education on OOSTEP. However, it also identifies a link between the themes identified in school and those identified on OOSTEP. A process of learning is identified between learning difficulties in school and learning opportunities on OOSTEP. Furthermore, a process of development is identified between individual behaviours in school and personal development on OOSTEP. Finally, a contrast of approach is identified between the fractured relationships with teachers in school and the relationships of respect on OOSTEP.

6.4 Personal Contribution

This study identifies a constructivist view in recognising how individuals interpret their education journey and the worth of their own experience. An interpretivist approach influences both policy and practice on OOSTEP, whilst students in school experienced a behaviourist approach to teaching, learning, and behaviour. Wearmouth (2017) identified that a frame of reference for SEND underpins the context for teaching and learning. SEND student needs are perceived as labels whereby learners are characterised as lacking something or being inadequate. Teachers in this study marginalised young people with SEMH issues in school through their view of these perceived needs. The word ‘special’ in the acronym SEND emphasises the dependency of the education need. OOSTEP, on the other hand, re-frames this in the context of students’ own interpretation of their wants and aspirations. The OOSTEP frame of reference for future re-engagement of disaffected students is based on their needs and wants, not on their perceived needs or labels that have failed them in the past. The implications of all contributions to knowledge will be identified and discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

7.0 Implications

This chapter outlines the implications of the contribution to knowledge (Chapter 6) for students. Three sections have been identified: policy, practice, and research. Each institution has its own unique challenges; this research negates the 'one size fits all' approach to education. There is a need for ongoing debate (Hayes, 2004) regarding the contributions and implications of the research findings.

7.1 Implications for Policy

The context of policy was placed amidst a call for urgent action (Taylor, 2012) to engage students in education and avoid school exclusion. However, issues of austerity and Brexit have dominated government policy in recent times. The resulting education policy can only be described as disorganised and fragmented. The implication for education has been the setting of school agendas in accordance with Ofsted frameworks without prior consideration and discussion. Hayes (2004) recognised a culture of compliance and absence of debate. The lack of criticality is reflected in the offer to young people. The warnings have not been heeded and students continue to be excluded from education for anti-social behaviour. This is compounded by increased involvement of young people in gang culture, knife crime, drugs, and using them in 'county lines' crime. Furthermore, other students are not receiving education due to managed moves, off-rolling, student disaffection, and school refusal. The barriers to learning identified as SEMH issues in this study can only be addressed at a national level by the Education Secretary, a position which has been occupied by five different people over the past five years.

This study has identified a barrier to education where the voice of its participants has not been heard (SRQ: 1) and their SEMH needs have not been addressed (SRQ: 2). The Children and Families Act 2014 promised students and their parents and carers active involvement in their education. The government has only recently acknowledged (DfE, 2019c) financial shortfalls and the need for an urgent increase in funding. According to the DfE (2019d), the transition from SEN statements to the implementation of EHCPs has taken four years. The failure to implement policy in a timely manner has

delayed progress and broken the promises made to students, parents, and carers in this study. The HCEC (2019) report concluded that the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015a) has recognised that the generation of students in this study has been let down and they have not received the rights and support that they were promised. However, the government published a joint green paper authored by the Department of Health and the Department for Education (DoH and DfE, 2017) for transforming children and young people's mental health. Newly funded Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) will deliver support and treatment in partnership with the DfE. The implementation of this policy is being imposed on schools and is supported by the Ofsted (2019b) framework which now includes mental health and pupil development. This appears to be a long rollout process (a quarter of students by 2023) similar to the rollout of 'No Health Without Mental Health' (DoH, 2011) that did not meet its expectations of support for SEMH issues.

The category of SEMH gives students a label that can be a barrier to learning. Brett identified that a label may imply deficiencies and shortcomings. It may contribute to teachers having lower expectations of student performance. Brett argued that labelling according to disabilities affects the students' efforts to be included and can carry a pejorative meaning, leading to devaluation of the labelled individual. Perry and Szalavitz (2017) suggested that individuals are not labelled. In 2014, there was a change in focus from behaviours to mental health (DfE, 2014). However, the label was amended from SMEH to SEMH so that the word 'mental' was not so prominent as this could have led to misinterpretation, inappropriate meaning, and devaluation. Learning support is used in further education to identify need but does not identify the type of need.

This study observed that exclusions were increasing at a disproportionate rate for students at risk. This is a further barrier to learning. The students, parents, and carers identified the threat (Trotman, Tucker and Martyn, 2015) and damage (Cole, 2015) caused by exclusionary practice (SRQ: 3). A flaw in the current policy is that schools are able to exclude students, release their registration, and return them to the LA at their discretion. In addition, there are managed moves and off-rolling of students from schools. The HCEC report (2019) identified that LAs have a statutory duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 and are legally responsible for student education.

However, there does not appear to be an appropriate accountability process for LAs who do not comply with the law. The Children's Commissioner (2019b) suggested that schools retain responsibility for the pupils that they exclude. Schools would then be required to provide for student needs including any AP.

The Riots, Communities and Victims Panel (2012) suggested worthwhile alternative education as a solution for disengaged young people. AP appears to be a forgotten part of the education system (HCEC, 2018). HCEC (2019) acknowledged that the government appears to have no strategy with regards to increasing alternative and post-16 provision. However, students identified alternative provisions as providing worthwhile education in safe environments that offer respite from the school experience. Alternative Free Schools have been identified as a way forward for an alternative education system (DfE, 2019a). Students at risk of exclusion have specified that schools are not an acceptable place for their education as they are so despised. The autonomy of independent alternative provisions contributes to their uniqueness and ability to respond to individual need. A hub of out-of-school alternative provisions (Downing et al., 2007; O'Shaughnessy, 2012) could support local needs. HCEC (2019) suggested that an LA commissioning officer would have the skills (Davies and Davies, 2012) to register all alternative education in county and provide access for additional opportunities between counties. The anomaly of students in AP not being able to continue their education post-16 needs to be rectified.

7.2 Implications for Practice

The significance of the literature review and the research findings are that they illustrate the barriers that compound SEMH difference. Students, parents, and carers recognised the worth of OOSTEP because it engaged the voice of learners with SEMH issues and presented them with choice and opportunity in a relational approach to education. It was proposed that solutions for SEMH needs should always incorporate the student voice. It was further identified that, in this study, OOSTEP provided respite from the damaging experience of school. Removing the traumas and stress of school allowed students with difficulties/disorders to focus on their futures without the burden of the risk of exclusion. In a metaphorical sense, each layer was 'peeled back' by the OOSTEP process (blue double-arrow denotes a two-way communication) to reveal the voice of the individual human being at the centre of the model. This allowed communication in the learning

process. Barriers to learning are removed through a choice to attend OOSTEP:

- Exclusion: the risk of exclusion from school was removed by attending OOSTEP.
- Opportunities: focused on students' wishes, interests, and strengths rather than on their perceived needs, weaknesses, and inadequacies.
- SEMH Labels: students' labels were removed, allowing for appropriate learning support and focus on the individual.
- Voice: students were listened to and their views were acted upon. This enabled student empowerment.

Respite was enabled through moving from a place and attitude of schooling to a place and attitude of OOSTEP. The model signifies that a therapeutic approach breaks through the barriers facing students. Alternative provision (section 2.5) and therapeutic education (section 2.6) were discussed alongside the principles, standards, and practices that enabled them to be brought together as a therapeutic provision (OOSTEP). The alternative therapeutic practice identified as OOSTEP has been addressed in answering SRQ: 5.

OOSTEP is affiliated with The Therapeutic School and advocates practice that supports child development, care, education, and therapy. OOSTEP focuses on relationships between individual students and their parents and carers. The students in this study have complex needs and their families and communities are also complex. However, the healing of these very vulnerable young students required a simple, step-by-step approach. SEMH difficulties were viewed as multifaceted rather than a single, broad issue. This necessitated the use of a small-step approach.

Implications for Practice of the Six Themes

This study has identified six themes as key contributions to the field of practice for SEMH issues. Students, parents, and carers observed the worth of these themes in education for students with SEMH issues within two settings (school and alternative provision). Discussion of the themes raised by the participants' voices and noted in the literature have been discussed in each of these settings (Chapter 5). The implications are found to be different in practice when comparing school and OOSTEP.

Environment

- The environment of school was described by students at risk of exclusion as such a despised place, that even the word ‘school’ was repugnant to many of them. It was suggested that ‘school’ should be given an alternative name.
- The benefit of OOSTEP was identified as providing a respite from school and, as such, was considered to be a separate entity by the students. OOSTEP was a bespoke, negotiated learning opportunity which was chosen by each of the participating students.

Learning

- The learning needs of students with SEMH issues is complex and requires early identification and intervention. This will ensure the appropriate support is received from early years. Training and partnership working with agencies is essential.
- Perry and Szalavitz (2017) identified that the nature and timing of developmental experiences shape the label and the individual.
- Students on OOSTEP were given choices and they took responsibility for these choices. Learning then became exciting and engaging. SEMH difficulties are appropriately managed and become less of a focus.

Development

- Student behaviour was identified as a reaction to learning difficulties and retaliation to unfair practices and risk of exclusion. Parents and carers, who were responsible for childrearing, recognised that they were often not consulted regarding student behaviours and development.
- Students chose a safe placement and learned to understand and manage their difficulties. On OOSTEP, they started to show greater personal development and maturity.

Staff

- Students identified themselves as victims of an education system that they considered unfair. Students portrayed teachers as arrogant and accused them of imposing unfair treatment such as isolation, physical assault, verbal abuse, and school exclusion. This engendered feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness. In retaliation to this treatment, students either refused to co-operate, became violent, or withdrew from schooling.

- OOSTEP instructors and mentors, along with college and AP staff, were recognised and valued for showing students respect and fairness. Relationships are key for change as they provide a means of healing through powerful therapies of love and belonging. The attributes of initiative, courage, and resilience are necessary for student development and are modelled by staff members. Opportunities appear to alleviate the pain and difficulties of previous experiences as staff focus on the individual student.

Peers

- Peers and friendships were very important to students. Many of them found making friends extremely difficult and bullying at school caused them much distress.
- No bullying was reported on OOSTEP or on AP and perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from further investigation in this area. However, out-of-school peer relationships involving criminal activities continued to a be a distraction for some students.

Family

- Parents and carers stated that they felt unsupported by schools in providing for the needs of students. Students were very reluctant to speak about their home lives, whilst parents and carers welcomed the opportunity to share.
- Parents and carers identified that visits to the family home and face-to-face contact by OOSTEP key workers was beneficial.
- Students' difficulties are often misinterpreted and need to be understood in the context of their home lives and previous involvements. Their worldview is shaped by the attention and nurture they have received.

These learning implications make a significant contribution to the practice of education for students with SEMH.

7.3 Implications for Research

Valuable learning was discovered through the interviews with students, parents, and carers. Two key principles guided the interview process in this study:

- The implementation of the voice of students with SEMH issues was key to engagement.

- Parents and carers provided essential insight into learning for students with SEMH issues.

This section throws greater light and clarity on SRQ: 6: ‘What is the most appropriate research method to capture perspectives of students with SEMH issues and their parents or carers?’

7.3.1 Student Voice

The desire to hear the voice of students was underpinned by the belief that they had the ability to express themselves and interpret their perceived reality and experience. Literature such as Cooper (1993b) had already identified the concerns of reaching out to disaffected and marginalised young people (Curtis et al., 2004; Riley and Docking, 2004, O’Connor et al., 2011). Capturing the voice of children and ‘foregrounding’ these disaffected voices (Sartory, 2014) has been encouraged. Indeed, there is now a statutory obligation to ensure child participation through the Children and Families Act 2014. In this study, the students were identified as the voice of authority and experience as they offered first-hand perceptions of children with SEMH issues and at risk of exclusion from schools in England (Cole, 2015; Paget et al., 2018). The aim of this study was to give students a voice and present their unheard accounts (Cefai and Cooper, 2010). The students were able to give insights into the worth of school and identify the effectiveness of OOSTEP.

7.3.2 Interviewing Young People with SEMH issues

Following the research pilot, the semi-structured interviews were changed to accommodate the needs of the participants. My original pilot interview design had a more rigid approach, using a series of questions to give structure and direction. A more flexible ‘informant’ style, as advocated by Cooper (1993a), was developed for the students to share the worth they placed on their education experience. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) make reference to Powney and Watts (1987) who had previously identified an ‘informant style’ of interview that allows the child the freedom to respond as and when they feel fit. I had identified a number of broad areas of enquiry, along with a series of trigger questions to be used if necessary. It became apparent that challenging students would not co-operate with a set structure and that the interview needed to be as open and as flexible as possible to accommodate individual SMEH student needs.

As a teacher at The Therapeutic School, I was well acquainted with the students. I valued our association and their role in the development of new understanding. I provided a ‘child-centred’ approach, focusing on their individual needs and ensuring an appropriate environment. The existing relationship was crucial in providing an understanding for a positive interaction or a positive alternative to the planned activity. Knowing the child and being cognisant of varying attitudes can go some way towards overcoming uncooperative and challenging behaviours. Cooper (1993a) identified that students, as a consequence of their social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, will frequently deviate from what is perceived as normal. Some children with SEMH issues were skilled in sabotaging and disrupting the activities of unsuspecting teachers and researchers, whereas others would postpone their interviews post-agreement after experiencing certain challenges on the day due to their social, emotional, and mental health difficulties. Students regularly feel that they do not want to participate or cannot cope with personal issues and thus withdraw from any planned activities. This erratic behaviour and inconsistency is identified as the norm for many students. Due to the nature of these complex students, there is always a need to be flexible in order to accommodate their varying needs and moods. Their inconsistent responses to interviews were comparable with their inconsistent responses to learning opportunities in education. Interview locations sometimes varied according to the needs of the student and the recording of interviews was made as unobtrusive as possible in the same manner as the pilot interviews. On balance, the students felt comfortable being interviewed and some requested to continue their interviews during our next session together.

10 practical steps that I used for supporting the interview process:

1. Ensure that the interview takes place in a location designated by the participant where they felt safe.
2. Ensure that the participant is relaxed and at ease to avoid anxieties.
3. Utilise a semi-structured interview, regularly providing explanation and clarification to ensure personal understanding.
4. Guide, explore, and establish a relatively free-flowing interaction.

5. Pick up on important emotive issues by gentle probing and ascertain what matters most to participants from the topics they raise.
6. Allow adequate scope for the interviewees to develop their own ideas where possible.
7. Encourage stories to be shared regarding personal experiences.
8. Be mindful of individual abilities and concentration levels.
9. Reassure participants that they will have further opportunities to share their views.
10. Be grateful and share your appreciation for their time and effort.

Conducting research with young people, especially the students identified in this study, requires careful consideration of the participants' understanding and needs. Greig et al. (2007, p.96) identified that listening to the voices and views of children is one of the most neglected aspects of child research. It is acknowledged that many students have comprehension difficulties and it is therefore essential that the researcher gives time and patience in this process, particularly when explaining research principles. It is imperative that students, parents, and carers are made aware of the research aims and objectives. They must also be reminded throughout the interview process that they have a right to withdraw. However, I am perplexed as to why previous researchers who have interviewed students have not identified the challenges they must have encountered with such complex and unpredictable individuals. It appears that there will always be concerns regarding reliability and consistency of approach when conducting research with young people with SEMH difficulties. Due to their changeable nature and attitude, students can sabotage an interview at any time.

7.3.3 Parent and Carer Voice

This study has been strengthened by including the additional insights of parents and carers who have supported the students throughout their education journey. These interviews elicited intense feelings as the parents and carers revealed the emotional road they had travelled with their children with SEMH issues. In light of this, the thoughts of Broomhead (2013) are most apt: 'you cannot learn this from a book'. The perspectives of parents and carers has been invaluable in this study. I gained an in-depth knowledge and understanding during the interview process that complemented the relevant literature. The experience of interviewing parents and carers prompted a

real awakening to their grief and anxiety. One of the principles of worth that parents and carers wanted to share was the lack of empathy they had been shown throughout their school experience with their children with SEMH issues. Parents and carers were able to identify, explain, and clarify their perspectives (Grey-Elsharif, 2010); they shared SEN stories (Broomhead, 2013) and gave specific insights into managed moves (Flitcroft and Kelly, 2016; Craggs, 2016) and permanent exclusion (Walsh, 2017). Parents and carers lived the education journey with their children and thus shared in their pain, frustrations, and lack of support.

In conclusion, the parent and carer voice was an important contribution to this study. Parents and carers gave further insight into areas that had elicited only limited responses from students. They also gave a more comprehensive account and deeper understanding of education for SEMH issues. There was a heartfelt honesty and richness in the stories that they each shared. I felt humbled by the sensitive information I was privy to and the trust that they had placed in me as a person. Researching the parent/carer voice was an incredible privilege and one that I had not experienced so powerfully before in all my years of teaching.

There are many similarities in the findings that were shared by both perspectives. The often tragic yet resourceful stories of parents and carers in the home is seen as an important contribution to this research. Circumstances dictated the need for the parent and carer voice to be included and there are only a limited number of studies that explore student and parent/carer accounts together. The parent/carer perspective offered greater insight and understanding of the students' experiences. Parents and carers share the students' feelings of anxiety; they identified that their views were discounted by professionals and perceived that they too had no voice. Stories regarding school included regular disruption in addition to frequent changes, detachment, lack of security, and attachment concerns. Parents and carers spoke with optimism about the students' personal development, choices, opportunities, and achievements on OOSTEP.

Chapter 8: Dissemination and Further Research

8.0 Dissemination

The research process for this study is as important as the finished product. However, the process will benefit relatively few students unless the study is disseminated to a wider field and further research is undertaken.

8.1 Personal Dissemination

The study is considered in the light of my experience as a teacher and manager of OOSTEP. I have conducted research in a number of small school-based assignments, but I have not experienced such a prolonged and intensive research study. It is clear that the dynamic process of researching has an ongoing effect on practice and it has been a constructive process of improvement with regards to OOSTEP. Since the interview process, there have been developments relating to the alternative provision and several initiatives have been instigated according to individual needs. Programmes continue to be developed in accordance with new careers and work experience guidelines, including the availability of an online school and a focus on the new Ofsted (2019a) framework.

I am aware that data analysis programmes could further develop the research practice of the OOSTEP team. There is the prospect to develop this research into a longitudinal study, incorporating a variety of mixed methods and greatly expanding the scope of understanding and practice of SEMH issues. My interest is in the impact on practice and making a difference in the lives of students and their families. Pollard and Filer (1999), in their ethnographic longitudinal study, identified a way of relating holistically with young people with SEMH issues. This work has provided a rich, comprehensive account of how they reached out to children in several different ways over a prolonged period of time. As an OOSTEP team, implementing such a project would be a worthwhile goal to benefit our young people with SEMH issues.

Knight (2014) discussed dissemination of research and identified King's (2003) reference to awareness, understanding, and action as a fuller interpretation of other references. Before extending this to a national audience, some knowledge was

disseminated to local colleagues as the thesis developed. Initial studies have made a significant contribution to the development of therapeutic education at The Therapeutic School. Two research pilots were undertaken to identify therapeutic standards for both a therapeutic school and as a childcare environment. An MA dissertation on therapeutic schools was based on the first pilot (Parker, 2011). As part of reaching out to the research community, I have made contributions to my own university research days and in presenting a poster on 'Disaffection and Disengagement'. This was followed by a seminar presentation on the initial research proposal regarding OOSTEP where I received valuable words of encouragement and was able to answer questions on the implications of an out-of-school education programme. Exposure to wider dissemination was initiated through presenting at The Consortium for Therapeutic Communities Annual International Conference in 2016, which gave me further encouragement and a greater insight into other work in this field (Parker, 2016). Since that time, I have presented papers at BERA (Parker, 2017; Parker, 2019). My intention was to present conference papers at prestigious research forums in order to receive critical support. Through these national events, I have been able to discuss my research and its possible benefits for policy and practice. These avenues and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) presented opportunities for debate, although there appeared little prospect of developing national policy and practice. Government policy is not significantly influenced by research from academia as I had previously expected.

The aim of a professional doctorate is to disseminate knowledge and understanding in the academic field and within academic journals. It is envisioned that this study should have an impact beyond my local OOSTEP team and The Therapeutic School. This study has had far greater relevance than was first thought at its inception. It is now felt that there is significant application with regards to the national agenda. A therapeutic alternative education programme (OOSTEP) could have an impact on the disengaged who are presently in school, those excluded from school, and those who have dissociated themselves from school as school refusers.

8.2 National Dissemination

The best opportunity thus far to disseminate the findings of this study at the level of national policy and practice has arisen through the National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools (NASS). This association (NASS, 2019)

works in partnership with key national and regional organisations. It acts as a voice for special schools, raising concerns with regards to the issues affecting young people with special educational needs and their families. As a member of NASS, The Therapeutic School has proposed the benefits and worth of OOSTEP as a local solution to a national problem. NASS represents its members to central and local government and to key external stakeholders such as Ofsted. Furthermore, NASS is represented on key working groups such as 'Special Academies' and 'Children's Homes Quality Standards' and it is a member of the 'Special Education Consortium' and the 'National SEND Forum'. NASS has presented itself as a real opportunity for its members to be part of a groundbreaking and high-profile project. This important voice was identified as being critical to the dissemination of the ideas in this thesis.

At the NASS Annual Conference on 10/10/2019, the OOSTEP project won the 'NASS SEND Incubator Award for Innovation', a most prestigious award (Appendix 21). In May 2019, NASS launched the first ever SEND Incubator (NASS, 2019). This is a package of support, designed to 'turn promising ideas into fully-fledged services', which can be shared commercially or charitably (NASS, 2019). NASS petitioned for innovative ways of supporting children with SEND in NASS-member schools. The aim is to help develop promising new practice and evidence its impact so that it can then be shared across other special and mainstream schools either as a costed service or for free. The 'Incubator' is the first of its kind and the OOSTEP project fulfilled the criteria of an intervention for delivering support and learning 'in a Dragons' Den approach' and having a positive impact on children with SEND. As the successful applicant, the OOSTEP project will receive:

- a tailored programme of workshops,
- one-to-one support
- expert input to develop their innovation from September 2019 to May 2020
- ongoing support for innovation rollout

By summer 2020 there will be:

- a refined and developed approach or service
- a clear plan for scaling it up
- an evaluation of the impact and becoming financially sustainable
- a route towards ongoing funding and support

The OOSTEP pathway can now be clearly disseminated. Winning the ‘NASS SEND Incubator Award’ provides a route for future national, regional, and local policy and practice in making a difference in the lives of students.

8.3 Further Research Identified

Key areas identified for further research from the SRQs in this thesis are set out as questions:

1. What is the impact of personal loss and attachment difficulties on students? (SRQ: 2)
2. What are the implications and impact of incorporating MHSTs into education provisions for students? (SRQ: 2)
3. Are there inconsistencies with regards to the diagnosis of learning difficulties in education? (SRQ: 2)
4. Students experience many distractions on their education journey. What preventative measures are available to support students in combating anti-social behaviour, knife crime, county lines crime, and hate crime? (SRQ: 3)
5. Are the skill sets of AP mentors different from the skill sets of school teachers? (SRQ: 4)
6. Students desire friends. How can individual and group associations be initiated? (SRQ: 4/5)
7. Change has been highlighted as a major issue for students with SEMH issues. What is the contribution of quality induction and transition planning through the education process? (SRQ: 4/5)
8. Would developing learning opportunities through hubs of alternative provision benefit LA commissioning? (SRQ: 5)

How could a longitudinal study further the understanding of OOSTEP? (SRQ:

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Final Thoughts

9.0 Conclusion

As a teaching practitioner and insider-researcher at The Therapeutic School, I have been able to develop my passion and engage students who are at risk of exclusion. Through OOSTEP, I have been able to gain greater awareness and understanding of students' individual education experiences and the barriers they face. By listening to the student voice, I have been able to discern their desires and aspirations, enabling them to fulfil their potential through worthwhile bespoke curriculums. This is subsequently included in policy and identifying the effectiveness of OOSTEP. Through developing a relational understanding with students, my own learning as a teacher has expanded considerably. I seek to facilitate the creation of a safe place for students to recuperate, to heal, to trust, to develop, to learn, and to achieve. I engage students in developing their strengths and discovering new opportunities for their future pathways. I encourage and sustain learning partnerships with parents and carers so that they can become positive role models and citizens in their home communities. My teaching responsibility extends into advocacy; I provide support for whatever issues the students deem worthwhile to enable them to achieve their potential. The joy comes from initiating a change of heart that engenders self-worth, happiness, and well-being in students who had lost hope in their future selves. All other areas of the study are additions to my teaching experiences and part of a process of engaging students in learning.

The research was an exploration into the worth of school and OOSTEP for students at risk of exclusion. The research was placed in the context of national civil unrest, rising school exclusions, and anti-social behaviour in the lives of young people with SEMH issues. The national political warning after the 2011 riots was of an increasing marginalised and disaffected feral 'underclass' that were uncontrollable and on the edge of society (Gove, 2011). The majority of juveniles convicted were young people with SEMH difficulties. Initially, the political advice was to provide for the needs of these young people through alternative education and reduce school exclusions. Warning signs in the past have been ignored and the national problems have been compounded. Exclusions in English schools have increased and there is a disproportionate number of excluded students. However, further national concerns have been highlighted over

recent years: children going missing from school, the proximity of gangs, knife crime, and a drug culture where young people with SEMH difficulties are targeted to transport drugs in ‘county lines’ crime. It is identified that not only have young people with SEMH issues and their families been let down, but time has been lost that could have benefited individual lives.

This was important and timely research since it identifies a local solution to the national concerns raised in 2012 regarding students at risk of exclusion. The OOSTEP innovative initiative combines my personal experience and my academic, vocational, and leadership skills with a skilled team of practitioners. Student engagement is identified through the voice of previously disengaged students who were at risk of exclusion. The extreme behaviours of these troubled and troublesome students characterise personal histories of an apparent unteachable generation in school. However, an alternative education programme that is local, bespoke, out-of-school, and therapeutic-based has enabled students at risk of exclusion to engage in education.

All students were registered at The Therapeutic School and attended OOSTEP as the 2015/16 cohort. The students are 14–16-year-old boys who, due to their behaviour or refusal to attend school, attended the alternative education programme. OOSTEP has a student-centred approach to education; the innovative and bespoke programmes cater for individual interests and use out-of-school alternative education provisions, including vocational settings. The programme prepares them for post-16 transition. The researcher is a practitioner who manages OOSTEP. Through an insider practitioner-researcher position, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven SEMH pupils and their parents and carers.

The literature review provided a theoretical base for the study. It identified the value of the constituent parts which provided understanding for the notion of OOSTEP as a pedagogy that engaged students. The combined understanding and implications of the student voice, SEMH labels, SEMH difficulties, and the risk of exclusion were all considered to be barriers to learning for students with SEMH issues. These challenges were compounded by the consequences of school practice identified through the student voice in this study. An understanding of therapeutic education and alternative

education are combined to underpin the notion of OOSTEP as out-of-school, bespoke, and child-centred learning.

The contribution to knowledge in the field of education for students with SEMH issues was identified in this study as:

- Pupil voices identify the worth of their schooling and their education on OOSTEP (SRQ: 1).
- The parent and carer voices provided validation, clarity, and additional depth to the student perspectives (SRQ: 1).
- School findings identify and correspond with previous themes in literature (SRQ: 4).
- The importance of respite from school (Cooper, 1993a) that is found on OOSTEP enables students to cope with, overcome, and remove barriers to learning (SRQ: 5).
- The importance of focusing on student wants and aspirations, enabling choice in determining positive attitudes for learning (SRQ: 5).

The themes that have been identified through the voices of students with SEMH issues, parents, and carers apply to both school and OOSTEP in different ways:

- Environment: school and OOSTEP. School is not the right environment for some students and OOSTEP offered respite from school and a fresh start in safe, secure learning environments.
- Learning: learning difficulties to learning opportunities. Participants share understanding of individual learning difficulties. Appropriate learning opportunities are built on the wants, choices, and aspirations of students.
- Conduct: behaviour to personal development. Personal development grows as attitudes change and negative behaviours decline.
- Staff relationships: teacher and mentor relationships. Relationships with staff on OOSTEP are based on working together and mutual respect.
- Peer relationships: friendships are desired by students, but they often do not have the skills to form and maintain friendships.
- Family relationships: domestic intimidation and violence often accompanied growing children with SEMH issues who are frequently living in dysfunctional

family structures. Support was welcomed and parents and carers were fundamental to supporting learning by partnership working.

The contribution to knowledge has implications for policy, practice, and research. Over the last 25 years, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) has guided international, national, and education-specific legislation that has promoted education rights for students with SEMH issues and encouraged them to share their voice. The Children and Families Act 2014, implemented by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015a), now makes it mandatory to focus on child participation of students with SEMH issues at all levels of education provision.

This evolving political agenda has driven policy and the development of education for SEMH issues. Research by Cefai and Cooper (2010) indicated that students are capable of expressing their views and feelings. More recent work by Hajdukova (2014) and Casey (2015) supports this view. Cole (2015) and Trotman, Enow and Tucker (2019) have highlighted issues around the increase of school exclusion rates. Outcomes of this research point towards alternative provision as a means of addressing this issue.

The research methodology was part of the contribution to knowledge and is important for both researchers and student research participants. The method of interviewing students acknowledged and appropriately accommodated their idiosyncrasies. The semi-structured interview method engaged an informant approach which allowed students to share their stories of their educational journey. Interviewing parents and carers contributed significantly to the depth of understanding regarding their individual child with SEMH difficulties. However, interviews had a profound and therapeutic effect on the parents and carers as their voices were heard and they were contributing to their children's ongoing education journey.

Future voice research would give additional clarification in removing the barriers to teaching and learning for students with SEMH issues, identifying support for family needs and developing guidance for policy and practice that could include establishing alternative provision in order to avoid school exclusions. Through the dissemination of learning, the OOSTEP approach has the potential to influence future education and future research for SEMH issues. A 'flipped' education system provides a bespoke, out-

of-school, and therapeutic alternative education programme for students with SEMH issues, a local solution to a national problem regarding student disengagement and school exclusion.

9.1 Final Thoughts

My 35-year teaching journey has been dedicated to making a difference. The study has provided a depth of understanding that has proved invaluable and gives both expectation and hope for the future. As a result of this research, I have listened to the heartfelt voices of two marginalised groups: the student with SEMH issues, at risk of exclusion and their parents and carers. Sadly, a carer passed away during the research. She had previously stated that her experience of SEMH difficulties was far too painful to share. The voices of parents and carers were heard and this allowed them to share their invaluable life experience of understanding and support. The study sample identified the extreme differences in the worth of schooling and OOSTEP for students. Choices and opportunities can change the direction of a young person's life from misery and distress to joy and happiness. The understanding inaugurated by Cooper (1993a) is being developed and applied to a contemporary audience of students. This rigorous academic work has proved to be a worthy enterprise in exposing the barriers to education through the voices of students. I am grateful for all the participants' contributions as they are used to prevent schooling getting in the way of education for students with SEMH issues. This thesis is a statement of thinking at the present time and will be further supported and disseminated to a national audience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: OOSTEP Student Timetables / Curriculum Offers

		Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
Monday	am	Business	Therapy	Core	Ind	GCSE Maths	Horticulture	Computers
	pm	Enterprise	Core	Independent	Golf	Model Making	Independent	Cycle Repair
Tuesday	am	Business	Core	Employment	Building	Core	Core	Cycle Repair
	pm	Enterprise	Independent	Boxing	Fitness	Model Making	Activity Choice	Music
Wednesday	am	Music	Core	Enterprise	Farm Animal Care	Core	Core	Core
	pm	Music	Ind	Mechanics	Farm Animal Care	Ind / Travel	Horticulture	Go Karting
Thursday	am	Gym	Motor Vehicles	Core	Cycle Repair	Sports Centre Squash	Independent	Core
	pm	Core	Motor Vehicles	Fitness	Cycle Repair	Independence	Local History Visits	Golf
Friday	am	Core	Music	Building Skills	Boxing	Museum Visits	Science	Ind / Travel
	pm	Ind & Travel	Football	Building Skills	Ind & Travel	Activity Choice	Activity Choice	Ind / Travel

Key: Core – Maths / English, Hort – Horticulture, Building - Construction, Ind – Independence, Employ - Employability

Appendix 2: Main Research Question (MRQ)

and

Sub Research Questions (SRQs)

The structure of thise thesis will be linked to the six SRQs which will and subsequently will answer the MRQ. The thesis is structured to answer the SRQs questions in the following chapters as identified in Appendix 2 : Defining the thesis through SRQ.

Chapter 2 will investigate literature related to RSRQs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and developed through a conceptual framework for this thesis.

Chapter 3 will be devoted to answering RSRQ: 6, to justifying the methodology that will be adopted for collecting and analysing data.

Chapter 4 will identify the Ffindings from the data.

Chapter 5 will be an analysis and discussion of the findings (all RSRQs: 1, 2, 3, & 4)

Chapter 6 Wwill include - Llimitations of the research (RSRQ: 6) and the Ccontribution of Ddoing student, parent, and carer voice research.

Ch #	Chapter Title	SRQ #	Question Rrelated to themes
2.	Literature Review	SRQ: 1.	Student Vvoice
		SRQ: 2.	SEMH
		SRQ: 3.	At risk of exclusion
		SRQ: 4.	Schooling – themes of worth
		SRQ: 5.	AP / TC – themes of worth
3.	Methodology	SRQ: 6.	Justifying the methodology
4.	Findings	SRQs 3, .4	Doing SEMH research
5.	Discussion	SRQs 1, .2, .3, .4.	Concepts and& themes
6.	Limitations and& Recommendations	RSRQ: 6.	Methodology
7.	Policy and Practice	RSRQ: 1.	Doing SEMH, Pparent and& Ccarer Rresearch
8.	Conclusion	SRQs 1, .2., 3., 4.	Concepts and& themes

Appendix 3: National & International Reports Supporting Child Well-being

National & International Reports Supporting Well-being		
Date	**Well-being Report**	**Reference**
1989	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, Articles 12 and 23)	UNCRC (1989)
1994	The 'Salamanca Statement' – rights of SEN education	UNESCO (1994)
2002	Required teachers to consult with students	Education Act 2002
2004	The Education Act 2004 educational and social service departments, 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) agenda	Cole and Knowles (2011, p.39)
2010	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programmes in secondary schools	Cole and Knowles (2011, p.44)
2007	United Nations identifies the worst profile of child well-being in the world's 21 richest countries	UNICEF (2007)
2009	Children's Society identifies well-being	Layard and Dunn (2009)
2011	Biggest programme of reform in SEND education and health in 30 years with pupil voice at the centre of the reform	DfE green paper (2011)
2013	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), includes mental health	NICE (2013)
2013	Child welfare	NICE (2013)
2014	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 'How Children Say the UK is Doing'	UNCRC (2014)
2015	Framework for school inspections which includes a focus on pupil views	Ofsted (2015)
2015	The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD): child welfare	OECD (2015)
2015	Mandate that students must be involved in making decisions about their education	SEN Code of Practice (2015)
2016	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a focus on the inequality in children's rights	UNCRC (2016)
2018	30% of children were in poverty in 2016-17	Children's Commissioner (2018)

Appendix 4: Education History and Social Criteria

The review identifies the importance of the social criteria that are part of a student's SEMH difficulties. The relationship between education, society, and citizenship was one of the central concerns of Plato who believed that the individual should be subordinate to the state and that the highest form of service is service to the state. Locke, Rousseau, Dewey, Whitehead, and Russell struggled with this concept; they all agreed that the purpose of education should be to empower the individual rather than be controlled by authoritarian regimes. Cornwall and Walter (2006, p.7) called for 'The ethos of a positive learning environment, and well organised, child centred teaching and organisational practices.' They identified educational approaches that encouraged individuality and participation socially during the 60s, 70s, and 80s by Neill, Holt, and Rogers respectively. Individuality, as Cooper (1993a) proposed it, is to build confidence, make responsible decisions, and to feel valued by others in society.

The well-established work of Maslow (1968) identified self-esteem, or the need to be valued, as one of the five biological drives crucial for self-actualisation. Cooper (2004a, p.58) stated that 'only once healthy self-esteem is established can individuals become truly self-directing as autonomous, responsible individuals in a pro-social but independent way'. Piaget (1928) and Vygotsky (1978) argued that social interaction is pivotal to cognitive development. Cooper (1993a, p45) discussed education disaffection from the viewpoint of students. He focused on the specific experiences of a group who were excluded from mainstream school. Cooper explained how this interactional process is a social phenomenon that can be either inclusive or exclusive. The experience of exclusion from school is also an experience of social exclusion. Murray and Phillips (2001) explained that there exists an ascribed 'underclass' that are socially marginalised in our society. Waiton (2016) argued that an idea of a feral 'underclass' has more to do with the perceptions and interpretations of adults who label and criminalise young people than the actual changing nature of youth. He called for the re-establishment of meaning and authority in education. Policymakers should refrain from the idea of vulnerability of either teachers or students, and instead socialise young people to embody a mature sense of discipline and tolerance. Waiton called for adults to lead the next generation through establishing a sense of meaning, purpose, and tolerance.

Appendix 5: Alternative Provision Literature Developments

Significant literature and events in the development of Alternative Provision			
Date	**Ref**	**Content / Event / Statement**	**AP Focus**
1991	Morley	'Alternative education. Dropout prevention research reports'	AP report
1999	Rutherford & Quinn	'Special Education in Alternative Education Programs'	Programmes
2008	DCSF	Based on understanding the value of APs	Value
2002	Education Act	Schools have power to divert a pupil off-site for education to improve behaviour	Legislation
2003	Kendall et al.	An evaluation of alternative education initiatives	Evaluation report
2008	DCSF	AP pilot schemes	AP pilot schemes
2009	Sodha & Guglielmi	Identified characteristics of innovative and effective practice	Innovative and effective
2009	Hodkinson &Vickerman	Key issues	Good practice
2010	Wetz	Review AP	Promoting AP
2010	Evans	Review AP	Promoting AP
2011	Gutherson et al.	Davies & Daszkiewicz	Effective AP
2011	Evans	Review AP	Good practice
2011	Ofsted	AP Report	Good practice
2012	NAEA	Identified the contribution APs make to future life chances	AP contribution
2013	Ward	Review AP	Review
2015	Norwich & Eaton	Identified the implications of new (SEN) legislation in England & AP	Review
2016	DfE	'Educational Excellence Everywhere' – 5-year plan (Academies & Free school programme). AP system should improve standards and outcomes for pupils	Good practice
2017	DfE	'Unlocking Talent and Fulfilling Potential'	Good practice

Appendix 6: Application – Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY of DERBY

Request for Ethical Approval for Individual Study / Programme of Research by University Students

Please complete this form and return it to your Independent Studies Supervisor or Co-ordinator as advised by local guidance. Feedback on your application will be via your Independent Studies Supervisor or Co-ordinator

1. Your Name:	**David Malcolm Parker** Student ID: 029358909	2. Programme name and code **Education Doctorate: EdD PX3AA**
3. Contact Info	**Unimail address: daveparker02@hotmail.com** **Tel No. 0116 2692718** **Address: 23, Hungarton Drive , Syston, Leicestershire. LE72AU**	
4. Module name and code	**Philosophy and Practice Research: 7EU003**	
5. Name of project supervisor (Director of Studies): Val Poultney		
Supervisor: Val Poultney		
6. Title or topic area of proposed study		
The title of the proposed study is 'Special Education Need learner voices identify the worth of bespoke Therapeutic Education.' The question posed is 'What is the worth of bespoke OOSTEP Therapeutic Education? Through the voice of SEN Learners.'		
7. What is the aim and objectives of your study? The aim of this study is to focus on the worth of OOSTEP Therapeutic Education to those Special Educational Need (SEN) pupils participating as learners. It is the voice of the SEN learner that is central to this study. The study will establish the worth or value of therapeutic alternative education, to those involved in the learning process.		

Appendix 7: Research Timescale

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">2014</th><th colspan="4">2015</th><th colspan="2">2016</th><th colspan="2">2017</th><th colspan="2">2018</th><th colspan="2">2019</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="14">Review the literature</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Ethical Application & Letter of Approval</td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Pilot interviews</td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="4">Prepare interviews: discuss, organise & consent</td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="4">Individual interviews take place: identify support & safeguarding</td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="6">Transcription, coding & data analysis</td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="4">Theme generation, review & naming</td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="4">Write up results & discussion</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Timeframe from Ethical Application

The interviews will be conducted by me and data will be collected from each participant in the research. The timescale for the research is anticipated to be over a 2-year period, but this has been left open to allow for any unforeseen events.

Initial schedule of interviews: 2014 Autumn, 2015 Spring, 2015 Summer, 2015 Autumn, 2016 Spring, 2016 Summer. Autumn Term 2014 - will encompass pilots. Interviews for terms will be arranged in a cycle for each cohort (each learner and stakeholder).

The interview cycle includes:

An initial interview, followed up with an intermediate interview, and then a final interview for each learner.

Two interviews are anticipated for the parents and carers of each learner.

Two interviews are anticipated for the tutors and instructors of each learner.

One interview is anticipated with an agency or LA official as a final review for each learner. No interviews are anticipated after Autumn 2016.

NB Due to amendments and a delay for Ethical Approval, the interviews started in the 2015-16 academic year.

Appendix 8: Letter of Approval

Date: 21st November 2014
Name: David Parker
Dear David,
Re: Request for ethical approval for study entitled 'Special Education Need learner voices identify the worth of bespoke Therapeutic Education.'
Thank you for submitting your application for the above mentioned study which was considered by 3 reviewers and ratified by Chairs' action on behalf of the College of Education Research Ethics Committee (CEREC) on 21st November 2014.
Your study has been **approved with recommendations**; please see below. No additional submission will be required for this project, unless you change the methods detailed in this submission significantly. Additional phases of your research will require further ethical applications.
Recommendation:

- Recommended that you continue to review ethical issues surrounding your position relative to the participants and how this may influence the research.

I wish you every success with your study.
Yours Sincerely

Dr Neil Radford
Chair of the College of Education Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 9: Study Leaflet & Forms

OOSTEP Education

A research project

September 2014 to December 2016

I am David Parker the OOSTEP Manager and a research student at Derby University. This leaflet tells you about this research. I hope the leaflet will also be useful, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

Parents / Carers:

Please would you explain the research to your child and talk over whether they want to take part. I will also explain the purpose of the research to the young people during sessions and answer any questions they may have.

Why is this research being done?

In June 2012 OOSTEP education was started at the school to support learners who were not or could not access the full curriculum at the school. OOSTEP education is part of the therapeutic school, a member of the Acorn group of schools and is a private provider contracted to provide a service. The school wishes to offer a quality education for all of its pupils and be able to address all individual needs. To facilitate this purpose a team of OOSTEP staff have negotiated individualised education timetables and use alternative education provisions to enhance education opportunity for all pupils.

This is an invitation for you to take part in this research study. Please will you help with my research?

Project Leaflet continued - Content

Page 2

Who will be in the project?
Pupils, Parents / Carers, Teachers and Agency / Local Authority Officials will take part in the research.
What will happen during the research?
All participants in the study will be interviewed to enable Special Education Need learner voices to identify the worth of bespoke Therapeutic Education. Learners will be interviewed at the start, middle and end of the project.
What questions will be asked?
The research will explore the perceptions of SEN students and significant adults in understanding the worth of an individualised alternative education programme.
6 key areas / perception will be explored in the interviews.

1. How do you view your Education experience in the past?
2. Can you identify any personal changes during time spent as a learner on OOSTEP education?
3. Can you identify any possible Social / Family related changes during time spent on OOSTEP education?
4. What possible education related changes have you noticed whilst on OOSTEP education?
5. Do you think that OOSTEP will influence your future participation in education?
6. Can you identify any other considerations of worth related to OOSTEP education?

Further questions may be used to support the 6 interview areas of focus in this semi-structured interview.

Page 3

What will happen to you if you take part?

If you agree, I will tape record some of the interview sessions and type them up later. I am not looking for right or wrong answers, only for what everyone really thinks.

Could there be problems for you if you take part?

I hope you will enjoy talking to me. Some people may feel upset when talking about some topics. If they want to stop talking, we will stop.
If you have any problems with the project, please tell me.
Will doing the research help you?

I hope you will enjoy helping me. The research will mainly

collect ideas to help the education of children in future regarding the worth of out of school education.

Who will know that you have been in the research?

I will not tell anyone that you are part of the study. I will keep tapes and notes in a safe place, and will change all the names in my reports and the name of the school – so that no one knows who said what. However, it is to be made clear that participants should not tell me about anything that is private (safeguarding issues) and that if they do then I would have to report this on.
All information collected will be kept confidential according to the British

Education Research Association guidelines, BERA (2011) http//www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines However, I need to point out to participants that the researcher can give no absolute guarantee of security of materials stored on e-systems.

Page 4

Do you have to take part?

You decide if you want to take part and, even if you say 'yes' you do not have to answer all of the questions. Interviews can be withdrawn up to 1month after each interview. All you need to do is contact me.

You can tell me that you and your child will take part by signing the consent form.

Will you know about the research results?

I will send you a short report at the end of the research.

Who is funding the research?

This is an independent study to be submitted towards an Educational Doctorate

The school is supporting the research and will benefit through the improvements that are made to out of school education / OOSTEP.

The project has been reviewed by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and is supported by the University of Derby

Thank you for reading this leaflet.

If you have any further queries or questions regarding the research study please do not hesitate to contact me

David Parker
07972683227
or email at daveparker02@hotmail.com

APPENDIX 10: Consent Forms

EDUCATION RESEARCH: University of Derby

[redacted] School consent to take part in a research study.

In June 2012 OOSTEP education was started at the school to support learners who were not or could not access the full curriculum at the school. The school wishes to provide a quality education for all of its pupils and be able to address all individual needs. To facilitate this purpose a team of OOSTEP staff have negotiated individualised alternative education and alternative education provisions are used to enhance the opportunity for all pupils. The research is supported by the University of Derby and will strive to gain answers to the following statement.

'Special Education Need learner voices
identify the worth of bespoke Therapeutic Education.'

- **The research will explore the perceptions of SEN students and significant adults in understanding the outcomes of individualised alternative education programmes.**

- **All information collected will be kept confidential according to the British Education Research Association guidelines, BERA (2011) http//www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines**

- **All data collected will be appropriately stored and retained for a period of five years according to the University of Derby's policy on Academic Integrity.**

- **The research has been approved (21/11/2014) by the University of Derby Research Ethics Committee for the Doctor of Education programme.**

- **A report on the research findings will be made available on the school website.**

The research is part of a Doctor of Education study.

Kind regards

David M. Parker

[redacted] School: Consent Form

Research from the University of Derby:

'Special Education Need learner voices
identify the worth of bespoke Therapeutic Education.'

	Please tick
I confirm that I have been given and understand the information sheet for the above research study and have received answers to any questions raised.	
I understand that those participating in the research are volunteers and that they are free to withdraw at any time, up to one month after data collection, without giving an explanation or their rights being affected in any way.	
I understand that the researcher will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence.	
I give permission for the researcher to access any educational logs and reports that will be available as a consequence of the learner being educated at [redacted] School. Permission is also given to use discussions from focus groups that may be held including Annual Review or Transitional Review meetings, including participants pre-meeting questionnaires.	
I agree that …… School will take part in this research study.	

..... **.....**

Signature Date

.....

Position

Thank you, David Parker daveparker02@hotmail.com **07972683227**

Appendix 11: Pupil Participation

Consent form for a pupil to participate in the

OOSTEP Research Study

I have read the information leaflet about the research. ☐ (please tick)
I agree to be interviewed ☐ (please tick)

Parent Carer name _____

Signed _____ date _____

Pupil's name _____

Signed _____ date _____

Appendix 12: Student Interview Questions

Interview Question: What is the worth of school and bespoke therapeutic education? Through the voice of SEN learners.
Student perceptions: OOSTEP is the term used to describe bespoke therapeutic education

6 key areas of worth regarding OOSTEP:	Supporting questions if required:
How do you view your education experience in the past?	**How would you describe your past educational experience?**
	Do you know why you are registered at The Therapeutic School?
	What do you know about your Statement of Special Educational Needs?
Can you identify any personal changes during time spent as a learner?	**How has your physical health changed?**
	How has your behaviour changed?
	How have you changed as a person?
	Has your control of emotions and feelings changed?
	What personal changes have you noticed in yourself?
Can you identify any possible social/family-related changes?	**How have your relations with family/carers changed?**
	How have your friendships changed?
	How has your engagement with peers changed?
	In what ways have you accepted support from adults?
	How has your participation in OOSTEP helped prepare you for social situations?
What possible education-related changes have you noticed?	**How has your attendance changed?**
	How has attention in lessons and provisions changed?
	Has your ability to work with others changed in OOSTEP activities?
	What learning have you most and least enjoyed?
	What achievements and new skills have you gained?
Do you think that OOSTEP will influence your future participation in education?	**How is OOSTEP preparing you for future education and vocational pathways?**
	Could OOSTEP be improved for you as a learner?
	How has OOSTEP supported you, as a learner, back into school/college?
Can you identify any other considerations of worth related to OOSTEP education?	**Are there any other considerations of worth that you have identified regarding the effect OOSTEP may have had on you as a SEN learner?**

Appendix 13: Parent and Carer Interview Questions

Interview Question: **What is the worth of school and bespoke therapeutic education? Through the voice of SEN learners.**
Participant perceptions**: OOSTEP is the term used to describe bespoke therapeutic education**

Key areas of worth regarding OOSTEP:	**Supporting questions if required:**
To identify perceptions of a SEN learner and their previous education experience.	How would you describe the past educational experience of the learner?
	Why is the learner registered at The Therapeutic School?
	What do you know about the learner's Statement of Special Educational needs?
To identify any possible personal learner changes of worth.	How has the learner's physical health changed?
	How has the learner's behaviour changed?
	How has the learner changed as a person?
	How has the learner's control of emotions and feelings changed?
	What personal changes have you noticed since the learner started?
To identify any possible social/family-related changes of worth.	How have relations with family/carers changed?
	How have friendships changed?
	How has engagement with peers changed?
	In what ways is support accepted from adults?
	How has participating in OOSTEP helped prepare for social situations?
To identify any possible education-related changes of worth.	How has attendance changed?
	How has attention in lessons and provisions changed?
	How has ability to work with others changed?
	What learning has been most and least enjoyed?
	What achievements and new skills has the learner gained?
To identify any possible changes of worth for future participation in education.	How is OOSTEP preparing the learner for future education and vocational pathways?
	How can OOSTEP be improved for the learner?
	How has OOSTEP supported the learner back into school?
To identify any other considerations of worth related to OOSTEP education.	Are there any other considerations of worth that you have identified regarding the effect OOSTEP may have had on a SEN learner?

Appendix 14: Debriefing Information

University of Derby: Research De-Briefing Information

Dear Sir / Madam
Thank you for taking part in this research study. All information that has been provided will be handled in confidence and used only for the purpose of this research. If you have any further queries or wish to withdraw from this study please do not hesitate to contact me on 07972683227 or email at daveparker02@hotmail.com

In the event of withdrawal please contact me up to a month after data collection so that I can allow time for your information to be withdrawn from the study. I thank you for your participation.

Kind regards

David M. Parker

Appendix 15: Interview Sequence 2015 to 2016

Interview Sequence 2015 to 2016																
				AUTUMN TERM 2015												
		AG	A	C	CG	B	BG	D G	D	F G	F	E G	E	G G	G	
05/08/2015																
02/09/2015																
02/09/2015				2												
10/09/2015				2												
21/09/2015						4										
27/10/2015																
02/11/2015																
05/11/2015																
12/11/2015				1												
01/12/2015																
08/12/2015																
				SPRING TERM 2016												
14/03/2016																
14/03/2016						2										
17/03/2016																
				SUMMER TERM 2016												
05/04/2016						2										
06/04/2016																
08/04/2016																
15/04/2016																
22/04/2016														3		
27/04/2016																
04/05/2016																
14/09/2016																
25/05/2016																
16/06/2016																
17/06/2016																
22/06/2016																
	P	AG	A	C	CG	B	BG	D G	D	F G	F	E G	E	G G	G	

Appendix 16: Transcript

PUPIL B: [redacted]

Transcript xxxxx 21092015 (4:44)

Right, lets go right back to the beginning I have some questions I will only ask you if you want to do, OK. When you think about your education in the past, what do you think about? Um!

Right from the start, what are your first recollections of education, of going to school?

Of going to school, Crap. I did not like school.

And what was the reason for that?

Because nobody never helped me in school. The teachers used to just chuck me to the back of the classroom and leave me there.

And you say that from? Say that from xxxxxxxxxx, from xxxxxxxx Lodge.

What about your earliest school?

Same again that is what they used to do put me in the back of the classroom and leave me there because they knew I did not know how to do it and they used to help all the other kids except me that is what they used to do to me at Rolston chuck me to the back of the school because I was the dumbest.

And how do you feel about that?

I wasn't really bothered, it didn't bother me because they would just moan when I would kick, smashed the school up. So it did not bother me.

When you say you kicked the school up, because you felt that they weren't doing anything? Because they weren't, I smacked the whole school up.

What sort of things did you do in class? You were at the back?

They would just leave me at the back and if I asked for help or put my hand up they would not even come over to me they would blank me.

And you would play up?

Yes I would play up and when they came over to ask why I was playing up they would and that lot and then they would send me home and say I was messing around and all that when I actually weren't. When they were chucking me to the back of the classroom it weren't helping me and then they would say to Grandad that he had been hitting a kid or something and lie. I got blamed loads of times for hitting boys. And kids that I didn't even hit.

Did you hit kids though? Some of them but that was only when they hit me, I would only hit them if they hit me.

This was at your first school?

It was at xxxxxxxxx my first Primary school.

Appendix 17: Theme Coding

THEMES		SCHOOL	OOSTEP
1	**Environment**	School Environment (SE)	OOSTEP Environment (OE)
2	**Learning**	Difficulties (SD)	Opportunities (OO)
3	**Personal Development**	Behaviours (SB)	Progression (OPr)
4	**Staff**	Teachers (ST)	Instructors (OI)
5	**Peers**	School Peers (SP)	OOSTEP Peers (OP)
6	**Family**	School and Family (SF)	OOSTEP and Family (OF)

Themes & Sub-Themes

THEMES		SCHOOL	OOSTEP
1	**Environment**	School environment (SE)	OOSTEP environment (OE)
		SE-1. Worth of school SE-2. Attending school SE-3. Pain	OE-1. Worth of OOSTEP OE-2. Attending OOSTEP OE-3. Respite and re-engaging
2	**Learning**	Difficulties (SD)	Opportunities (OO)
		SD-1. Labelled difficulties SD-2. Statement / EHCP SD-3. Insights and triggers SD-4. Getting bigger SD-5. Professionals SD-6. Lack of progress SD-7. Medication	OO-1. Personal choice OO-2. Opportunities for learning OO-3. Outcomes and achievements OO-4. Future transition and pathways
3	**Personal Development**	Behaviours (SB)	Progression (OPr)
		SB-1. Anti-social behaviours SB-2. Absconding and attendance SB-3. Schools unable to cope SB-4. Removed from school	OD-1. Attitude change OD-2. Change in behaviours OD-3. Development and independence OD-4. SEMH concessions
4	**Staff**	Teachers (ST)	Instructors (OI)
		ST-1. Teachers acting	OI-1. OOSTEP Staff

		unfairly ST-2. Behaviour management ST-3. Positive teacher action	OI-2. AP staff OI-3. LA professionals
5	**Peers**	School Peers (SP)	OOSTEP Peers (OP)
		SP-1. Peer relationships SP-2. Bullying and being bullied SP-3. Positive peer relationships SP-4. Peer relationships out-of-school	OP-1. Peers on OOSTEP OP-2. AP relationships OP-3. Relationships with peers away from OOSTEP
6	**Family**	School and Family (SF)	OOSTEP and Family (OF)
		SF-1. Structure of family SF-2. Poor relationships SF-3. Getting bigger SF-4. Support education SF-5. No talk and poor communication SF-6. Individual problems	OF-1. Attitude change OF-2. Behaviour change OF-3. Independence OF-4. Ongoing challenges

Appendix 18: Analysis Grid Findings (CHAPTER 4: Grid 1 School Experience)

Sect	Findings Identified	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Tot		GA	GB	GC	GD	GE	GF	GG
	Sch Exper																
1	Description	3	35	42			16				13	8 21 22	12 13	51 56		19	
	Too painful												51-57		2		
2	**Learning Diff**																
	Statement															29, 30	32
	Label	5	99 247,248								9		114-116	18,19 30-32			
	Condition		286-295											86-89		38-43 991 02	72-75
	Bigger										52			29,30		71-75	
	Not Listened to																46,47 89-90
	Academic	14				62		8						24			
	Medication													65-75		55-57 61,62	
3	**Behaviour**																
	Describe beh	14,15 22-24	17-20	813, 14 68			13,14 68	15-17				15,16 111, 112	42, 43	24-26 85, 86			
	Att Absconding													78- *8991			
	Pickup												27,28	32,33			

Appendix 19: Personal Review of Findings

School	OOSTEP
School environment: Toxic for SEMH 1 Physical size and numbers, feel vulnerable 2 Neglected; physical and emotional abuse; bullying 3 Not safeguarded, abuse starts and continues 4 Feel isolated/disconnected socially and emotionally 5 Feel helpless – isolated, stress and anxiety 6 Not fit for purpose- sensory and SEMH need	**OOSTEP environment: respite from school** 1 Removed physically and emotionally from school environment 2 Feel safe and secure – no past to deal with 3 Fresh start – new beginning 4 Self-esteem no longer battered 5 Dissociation, no rumination with past 6 Removed from feelings of failure
Learning Difficulties – feel intense to LD 1 Learning diff make students vulnerable 2 Compounded by SEMH label and no Voice 3 Assessment diff: prof no expertise/inform 4 Experience isolated rejection, lonely, diff 5 Needs emphasised by teaching failures 6 Disaffected, disengaged – refusing to learn	**Learning Engagement Opportunities** 1 Identify desires and aspirations 2 Want to do educ: worthwhile, meaningful 3 Learn things by doing – learning style 4T&L that they can succeed 1st thing-2nd 5 Given permission empowered and control 6 Outcomes of choice and opportunities
Behaviour: reflection of attitudes 1 Hate/anger – reflection of thoughts and feelings 2 Learn to fight and refuse flight, staff and peers 3 Pain and suffering; inconsistency and change 4 Teachers the enemy, aim of educ activity 5 Change, inconsistency, frustrations, stress 6 Inner pain, suffering and anxieties	**Behaviour: personal development** 1 Change opportunity; positive and creative 2 Improved learning - emotional awareness 3 Feel secure, find purpose and self-esteem 4 Reassured, nurtured, accepted as OK 5 Pursue meaningful goals, adopt new attitude 6 Become happier, fulfilled and community
Teachers: power relationship 1 Representative of failed school system 2 No respect and hate for teachers 3 Seen as authoritarian/demanding 4 Create labels and act accordingly 5 Dev strategy to punish, inflict pain 6 Centred on control – no relationship	**Mentors: care/support relationship** 1 Focus on desires of students 2 Mentors listen to voice, chill and share 3 Positive unconditional regard 4 Child-centred – focus on child wants 5 Build emotional resilience and self-esteem 6 Positive learning experience and outcomes
Peers: attachment & friendship 1 Failed friendships, unable to make and retain 2 Attachment rejection, bullying and pain 3 Lonely, vulnerable, phy and mental w/draw 4 Virtual friends – open to being groomed 5 Prey for gangs/criminal street activity	**Peers: diff socialisation** 1 Increased self-esteem as relate to peers 2 Association with others to learn example 3 Withdraw from poor influences 4 Social norms diff and unscrambling thinking 5 Continue to influence both pos. and neg.
Parents / Carers: dysfunctional family 1 Prof rejection, lack of understanding 2 Lonely and isolated – poor communication 3 Failure – not the same as other children 4 Culture of poverty/neglect/isolation 5 Family/carers: no voice, suffer in silence	**Parents / Carers: relationships improve** 1 P/C have a voice – share understanding 2 Given hope, support and empowered 3 Change of attitude as they see 'they can' 4 Communication increases in the home 5 Happier and support for future pathway

Appendix 20: Executive Functions as identified by ADHD Solutions (2019)

Each function is encouraged on OOSTEP so that students canwere develop:

1. Self-regulation: to regulate and manage their emotions better in an offsite provision. This was evidenced by the positive behaviour and absence of restraints.
2. Participation and& Eengagement: to participate in provisions and be active verbally, physically, and mentally.
3. Planning: Iideas, Sstrategy and& Pproposals
4. Organisatione: Oorder and sorting out one's affairs
5. Focus: be on-task &and being occupied rather than remain more on task and not to be off- task and so distracted that they as to have to be removed from their education. To be more target- focused and be more directed by goals.
6. Flexibility: have the ability to be less rigid, be open to change, and have the ability to work with different people.
7. Punctuality and Aattendance: be more aware of punctuality, and for attendance; and organising self through time- management.
8. Memory: recollect and& recall -– develop short- term memory, and working memory , as often (they often have a very good long- term memory).
9. Discern: distinguish between different people: – to be able to read others' facial expressions, metacognition, to cope with different people around them.
10. Response: respond and& be receptive -– not to be inhiabited in their reply to others and be responsibleility &and accountableility.

Appendix 21: NASS Award 2019 for Innovation