Title: Alternatives to school exclusion: Interviews with headteachers in England.

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Abstract

In England, there is a lack of qualitative data exploring the approaches used across age phases and types of schools that seek to provide an alternative to school exclusion. The study used thematic analysis and semi-structured 1:1 interviews with forty-six headteachers to determine the strategies employed in their contexts. Three themes were identified: exclusionary systems, processes, and practices; limbo (schools in the mid-ground between inclusive and exclusive practices); and inclusionary systems, processes, and practices. The research highlights the vast range of alternative approaches to school exclusion used in different types of schools. It is evident that the impact of the lack of definition of 'inclusion' in Department for Education statutory guidance, coupled with schools being able to isolate and segregate children with special educational needs and disabilities for 'limited periods' that exclusionary practices can be adopted. The results have important messages for the Department of Education in understanding the range of inclusionary and exclusionary approaches used in schools. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of 'inclusion' being consistently defined and explained across departmental statutory guidance to support the adoption of inclusive approaches in schools.

Keywords

Thematic analysis, headteachers, school exclusion, mental health, inclusion, policy

Introduction

This article draws together unreported data from a two-year research commission investigating the impact of school exclusion on children's mental health and well-being in the North East of England by Martin-Denham (2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The original project examined the barriers and enablers to mainstream schooling from 174 participants including: 55 children; 41 caregivers; and 78 education and health professionals. The study generated a deluge of qualitative data, too much to be analysed and

reported in the initial publications. This article presents the unreported data on forty-six headteachers' views from various age phases and types of schools (see Table 1). The research objective was to determine, through reflexive thematic analysis, the range of approaches used in schools as an alternative to school exclusion.

School exclusion

The Education Act (1986, part 3, s23) introduced 'fixed period' and 'permanent' school exclusions, legitimising the removal of a child from school if they were deemed to be persistently or severely deviating from the school's behaviour policy, and where allowing them to remain would seriously harm the education or welfare of others (DfE 2017a). The Department for Education (DfE) (2020) states that a permanent exclusion refers to a 'pupil who is excluded and who will not come back to that school'.

The DfE (2018) reported that school exclusions were on a downward trend since 1995-1996, rising again 2012-2013. However, recent data from 2018/19 revealed only a marginal decrease of 11 permanent exclusions, whilst fixed period exclusion rose from 410,000 to 438,300 (DfE 2020). This dataset also highlights that children on special educational needs (SEN) support are five times more likely to be permanently excluded, reducing to 2.5 times when an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is in place. Additionally, the wealth of evidence in the UK shows that those excluded from school have an increased risk of poor educational outcomes (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Office of the Children's Commissioner 2017, Martin-Denham 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d).

Isolation and segregation

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2008) introduced 'internal exclusion' or 'remove rooms' as an in- school process for removing a child from a classroom, but not the school site. The guidance intended that children would receive a supervised education, for a short period, to reflect on their behaviour. Barker et al. (2010) believed that this school-based exclusion, known as isolation, was a response to' political pressure aimed at reducing school exclusions, raise standards, and remove children from classrooms during the school day. The guidance intended that children would receive an enhanced supervised education, for a short period, to reflect on their behaviour. Yet both the House of Commons (2018), and Martin-Denham (2020a) provided evidence that some children had been placed in isolation booths for most of the school year, and in the latter case many years of secondary education, without any teaching or support. Ofsted (2018) recently confirmed that children can be placed in 'isolation' for limited periods, where the practice is stipulated in behaviour policies, and is lawful, reasonable and proportionate. However, as the DfE (2016) does not define what is meant by a

'limited period' schools have been given carte blanche to determine duration themselves (Martin-Denham, 2020a).

Research evidence suggests that isolating children can increase deleterious health outcomes such as substance misuse, self-medication, anxiety and loneliness (Hall-Lande et al. 2007; Osgood et al. 2013; Martin-Denham 2020a, 2020d) and compound dysregulated behaviours (Martin-Denham, 2020a). The use of isolation is in direct conflict with DfE (2016) advice to schools of their role is to ensure children's health and welfare. Giving schools the option to isolate children has had the detrimental effect of schools becoming less inclusive (Gazeley 2010; West and Bailey 2013; Gorard 2014; Martin-Denham 2020a; 2020d). Furthermore, the evidence from the most extensive study on school exclusion suggests that placing children in isolation booths does not actually improve behaviour but makes it worse (Martin-Denham 2020a).

Part-time timetables

The Education Act (1996: s19) states that 'each local authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them.' The DfE (2020, 19) is explicit that 'all pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education'. They add that any part-time attendance must not be a long-term solution and must be recorded as an authorised absence. However, the Children's Commissioner (2017, 38) reported that some schools were unlawfully placing children on part-time timetables due to a 'profound and troubling lack of awareness of the law.' Indeed, a survey conducted by the Council for Disabled Children (2012) on illegal exclusions among children with SEN, found from their 400 responses that 60% of parents reported their child being on a part-time timetable.

Inclusion

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provided one of the seminal pieces of international legislation promoting inclusive education. The Salamanca Agreement (UNESCO 1994, 3) published on behalf of 92 international governments, outlines the policy shifts required to enable schools to 'serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs' (p.3). The agreement clarifies that to develop inclusive schools; there needs to be:

> 'articulation of a clear and forceful policy on inclusion together with adequate financial provision – an effective public information and positive attitudes – an extensive programme of orientation and staff training – and the provision of necessary support services' (21).

The statutory guidance for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) fails to define inclusion (DfE and Department of Health (DoH) 2015, 93) referencing that 'schools have wider duties to prevent discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.' Similarly, the statutory framework for the early year's foundation stage (DfE 2017b) does not refer to 'inclusion' let alone provide a definition. The National curriculum framework for key stages 1-4 (DfE 2014) omits a definition of inclusion. Still, it guides what teachers 'should' do to set suitable challenges, respond to pupil's needs, and overcome barriers.

Varying definitions of 'inclusion' have been discussed over the decades moving from 'inclusion' to 'integration' by the 1990s (Norwich 2012). Farrell (2000, 154) was more explicit describing inclusion as 'taking a full and active part in school-life, be a valued member of the school community and be seen as an integral member'. A differing perspective was provided by Lauchlan and Greig (2015). They shared that inclusion was taken to mean children are socially and educationally included, in an environment where they feel welcomed and can thrive and progress. Clark et al. (1999, 173) proposed that there should be a move away from trying to determine if schools are or are not inclusive. Instead, there should be a focus on, 'understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion which *operate* in all schools' (p. 173). Later, Florian (1998) agreed that inclusive education referred to a philosophy of education, promoting all children's education in mainstream school. Terzi (2008) shared that inclusion is a problematic concept used in different ways to refer to inclusive schools, inclusive societies, or policy to keep more children in mainstream school. Warnock (2005) rejected the idea that inclusion is all about educating children 'under the same roof'. Instead, she argued, it is more important to ensure that all children are engaged in a common educational experience and are learning and developing to the best of their ability, regardless of where that might be. The current position in the Children and Families Act (2014, 35(2-3)) is that 'those concerned with making special educational provision for the child must secure that the child engages in the activities of the school together with children who do not have special educational needs, subject to subsection (3)'.

Subsection (2) applies only so far as is reasonably practicable and is compatible with:

(a) The child receiving the special educational provision called for by his or her special educational needs

(b) The provision of efficient education for the children with whom he or she will be educated, and

(C) The efficient use of resources.

A literature study by Koster et al. (2009, 128) found that 'social integration' and related concepts of 'social inclusion' and 'social participation' did not differ across the 62 studies they examined. The definitions tended to highlight areas such as 'friendship, acceptance, interaction, relationships, social status and bullying' while some also mentioned 'performing a task together, initiation, interactive partnerships, pupils' self-perception of acceptance, perceived loneliness and perceived social competence (p.128)'. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2005) conducted various examinations of inclusion practices in schools and found that a few key strategies were vital to inclusive teaching: cooperative teaching; cooperative learning; collaborative problem solving; heterogeneous grouping; and effective teaching. In the context of this study, it is imperative to emphasise the complex relationships between inclusion, exclusion, and social inclusion. While social inclusion may not always refer specifically to the inclusion of SEND students, there is support for the notion that exclusive and anti-inclusive school practices are likely to be detrimental to all forms of social inclusion, as they have the potential to 'highlight differences and segregate students in ways that further promote divisions and reinforce negative stereotypes' (Juvonen et al. 2019, 250).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) was an international convention signed by the UK, and states that the rights of students with disabilities with regards to inclusion, should mandate that 'individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.' Approaches to inclusion from a school leadership perspective found that inclusive schools shared similar strategies regarding implementing inclusive practices 'to support capacity building and professional learning focused on addressing individual student and staff need,' (Abawi et al. 2018, 14). Alur and Timmons (2009, 15) insisted that if inclusion is to be achieved, the classroom teacher must plan for learners' diverse needs. The study emphasises that student needs cannot be met if the staff needs regarding inclusion, such as training, aren't also met. Horridge (2019, p. 415) noted the importance of health professionals communicating with multi-disciplinary teams to ensure 'each and every need of all children and young people is identified, accurately described using clearly understandable terms, documented and communicated to all who need to know.' Furthermore, Van Reusen, Shoho and Barker (2000) shared that if teachers did not undertake training regarding the inclusion of children with SEND, they were more likely to have negative attitudes towards inclusion; whilst increased training created more positive attitudes towards

inclusion (Zwane and Malale, 2018). However, significant gaps in course content in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes aimed at preparing teachers to support children with SEND, were reported by the Carter Review (DfE, 2015). The Driver Youth Trust (2015) agreed there were issues with access to high-quality training for teachers. They recommended an expert group be created to agree 'core content' which would sufficiently prepare trainee teachers to support children with SEND. The DfE (2019) released the 'ITT core content framework', which emphasised the importance of high-quality teaching for children with SEND, including mental health needs.

Materials and methods

Since the introduction of thematic analysis (TA) as an approach to analysing qualitative data, it has been widely used across subject disciplines (Lainson et al. 2019). Braun and Clarke (2006, 6) describe TA as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. Clarke and Braun (2018) reiterated that TA is a term that encapsulates a wide range of approaches, and, as such is a method rather than a methodology. In journal articles there continues to be a limited understanding of what thematic analysis is, the approach taken, and the explanation of how researchers have created themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2020). Despite this, TA is a well-used method due to the 'flexible, straightforward and accessible' nature of the approach (McLeod 2011, 146) and its effectiveness for analysing interview data (Hunt 2014).

Boyatis (1998) and Willig (2014) discussed whether Thematic Analysis (TA) is a distinct method, or rather an analytic procedure. Braun and Clarke (2020) clarified that TA is a method, a distinct way of analysing qualitative data that shares commonalities with other approaches that endeavour to identify patterns in data such as: interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); qualitative content analysis; and grounded theory. The TA approach has different versions known as variations, such as 'coding reliability,' 'codebook' and 'reflexive' (Braun et al. 2019). For this article, reflexive TA was the chosen approach, as it aligned with the researcher's assumption that analysis should be a reflexive interpretative process, with open and organic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2020). As Charmaz (2006) suggests, in reflexive TA, a code is used to develop initial themes that capture multiple observations as interpreted by the researcher. This approach allows for the exploration of a specific question yet to be analysed and reported.

Wilson (1993, 342) describes thematic analysis as 'a strategy in phenomenological research that involves recognising common themes in contextual data.' As described by Morese and Field in 1995, themes can be abstract and difficult to identify, but significant concepts link parts of interviews together. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.10) described a theme as 'something important about the data in relation to the

research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'. Themes in reflexive TA are patterns of shared meaning, united by a central concept or idea (Braun and Clarke 2013; Braun, Clarke, Rance 2014). This means themes might draw together data that, on the surface, appear rather disparate. For this article, interviews were selected from the original data corpus (Martin-Denham 2020a) to create a data set, including headteachers who discussed alternative approaches to school exclusion. However, several qualitative researchers (DeSantis and Ugarriza 2000; Emmell 2015; Braun and Clarke 2016) hold a shared perspective that there is no agreed definition of a 'theme', or complete standardisation of procedures to identify them. They instead suggest that the researcher crafts the themes based on their interpretation during the data analysis. Ely et al. (1997, 205-206) proposed that themes reside in the researcher's head from thinking about, and understanding the data to create links. The 'themes' that arise from the TA are not summaries of responses on a topic or issue, or necessarily the most prevalent themes. Instead, they should be patterns that tie the observations together (Clarke and Braun 2018). The notion of a central organising concept or 'essence' was outlined in Braun and Clarke (2013) and Braun et al. (2014) to describe how themes should be thought of as key characters in the story the data tells. DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) asserted that themes are active creations of the researcher, not something that passively emerges; defining a theme as 'an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole' (362). Laison et al. (2019) went on to say that the knowledge is co-produced between the participant and the researcher through reflexive TA.

Recruitment and sample of participants

Purposive sampling was used for the original study to ensure the participants had experience and knowledge of school exclusion (Martin-Denham 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). To recruit the participants the research team contacted the schools by telephone and email inviting them to take part. As part of the process, the researcher created a tracker containing information to ensure inclusion of: a range of types of provision; Ofsted ratings; and gender of participants. Information was also sought from the funder to ensure that the schools included, represented those with high, low and no school exclusions in the previous three years. The participants were provided with information sheets and consent forms prior to the interview including: information on data processing; retention periods; and other privacy information (Information Commissioner's Office 2019). The sample for this article was selected retrospectively to enable the research question to be answered.   As detailed in Table 1 and Table 2, the

headteachers were employed in various schools, and both male and female participants were represented.

Table 1. Number of schools interviewed out of all schools in Sunderland

Type of school	Number of schools in Sunderland	Number of schools in the study	% of schools
Mainstream Primary	62	27	44%
Mainstream Secondary	18	10	56%
Special School	7	4	57%
Alternative Provision	6	5	83%
Total	93	46	49%

Table 2. Reported gender of participants

Type of School	Number of females	% of females	Number of males	% of males
Mainstream primary	21	78%	6	22%
Mainstream secondary	8	80%	2	20%
Specialist school	2	50%	2	50%
Alternative provision	3	60%	2	40%
Total	34	74%	12	26%

Ethical conduct

The original study secured ethical approval from the University of Sunderland Ethics Committee (Martin-Denham 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). The participants all provided voluntary, informed consent both in written form and verbally prior to the interview commencing (Berg 2001; King et al. 2019). The BERA (2018) guidelines were adhered to ensuring all participants knew their rights before, during, and post the research.

Procedure

The semi-structured 1:1 interviews took place between September 2018 and June 2019, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes. The interviewer did not impose any time limits to allow the participant to provide in-depth responses to the open-ended questions (O'Leary 2004).

A Dictaphone was used to record the interviews which were then transcribed verbatim, anonymised and stored securely in Office 365.

Analysis approach

Braun and Clarke (2006 p.35) used six phases of analysis to guide the analytical process, as described in Table 1.

Table 3. Phases of thematic analysis

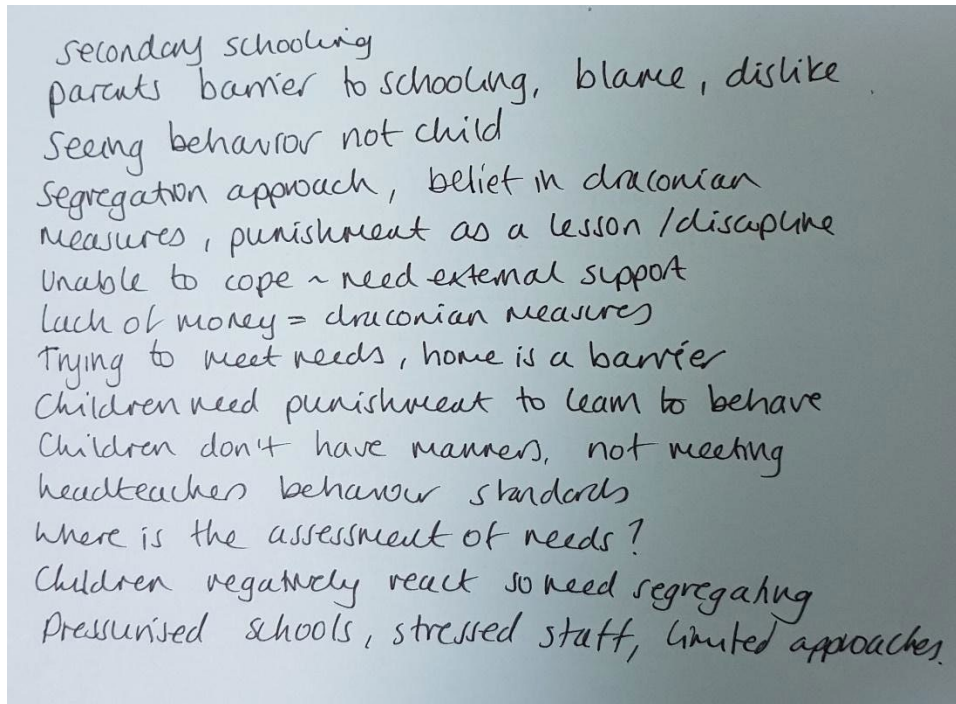| Phase	Description of the process
1.Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting initial thoughts and ideas.
2.Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating relevant to each code
3.Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4.Reviewing themes	Checking the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Generating a thematic map of the analysis
5.Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells. Generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6.Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples. The final analysis of selected extracts. Returning to the research question and literature to produce a scholarly report of the analysis.

The themes and patterns within the dataset were identified using inductive analysis through reading and re-reading the data. The data-driven approach allowed for the coding of the data without any pre-existing coding framework or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Latent thematic analysis was used to examine for significance, broader meanings, and interpretations in the interviews, and the data was organised to illustrate this (Patton 1990).

Phase 1: Familiarising with the data

The audio files were repeatedly listened to, followed by re-reading transcripts, noting initial interpretations of the essence and meaning of the headteacher's views, as shown in Figure 1. At this

stage, it became clear that headteachers had differing alternative approaches to school exclusion, varying from internal segregation to inclusive, individualised provision and practice.

Figure 1: Initial notes


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secondary schooling
parents barrier to schooling, blame, dislike.
seeing behaviour not child
Segregation approach, belief in draconian
measures, punishment as a lesson /discipline
Unable to cope ~ need external support
Lack of money = draconian measures
Trying to meet needs, home is a barrier
Children need punishment to learn to behave
Children don't have manners, not meeting
headteachers behaviour standards
where is the assessment of needs?
Children negatively react so need segregating
Pressurised schools, stressed staff, limited approaches.
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Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The researcher used initial notes (Figure 1) to create a generic image of general approaches used as an alternative to school exclusion in schools (Figure 2). This stage of the process was carried out alongside phase 3 to organise the data systematically and meaningfully. Next, initial codes and potential themes were identified.

Figure 2: Alternative approaches to school exclusion
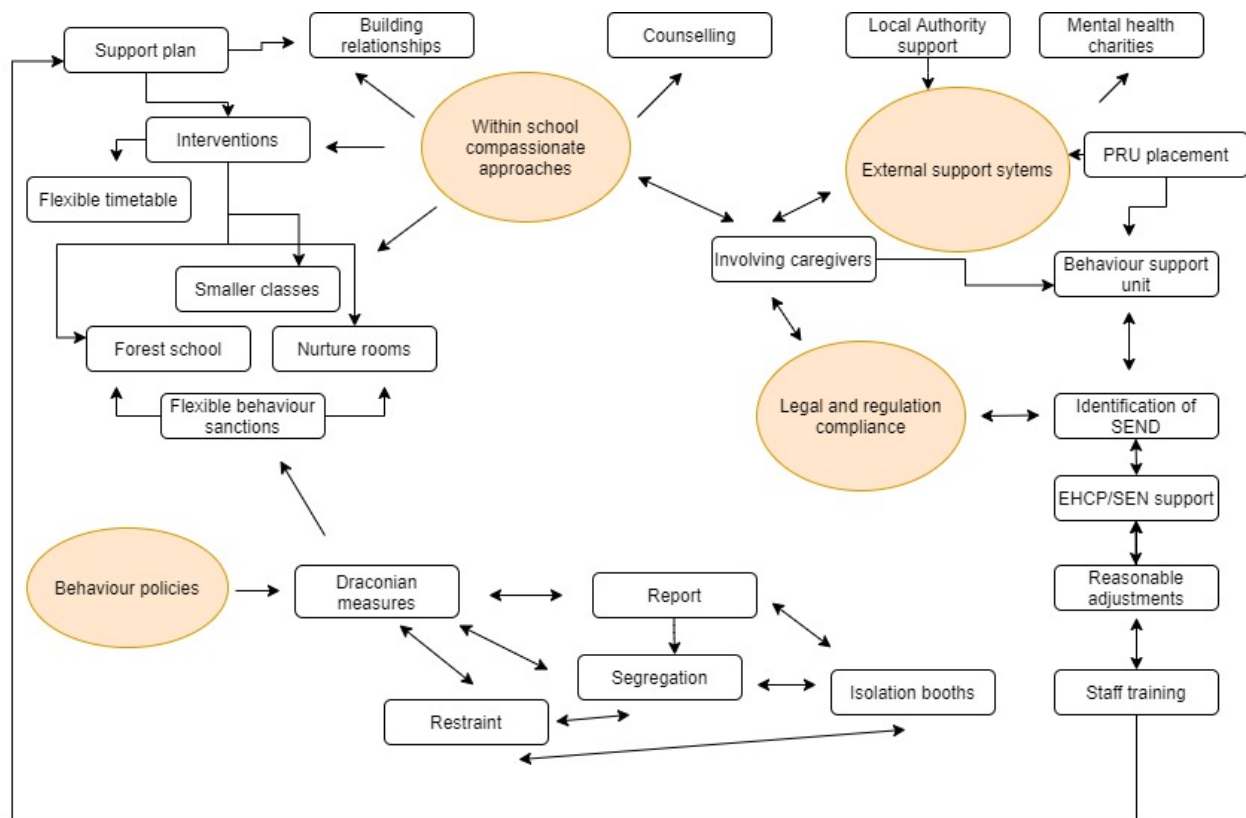
Phase 3: Generating initial themes

The transcriptions were transferred into Microsoft Excel for ease of coding. Each segment of the headteacher's relevant responses was captured as data extracts. As the inductive analysis was used, line-by-line coding allowed for codes pertinent to the research question. The original plan was to use NVivo 12, but problems with remote working and access to the software made this not possible. Excel was used to organise the coded data systematically and allowed the whole data set to be allocated codes (see Table 2). Main themes and codes were created, developed, combined, and modified while interpreting the data for significance.

Table 4. Coding the dataset

Participant	Gender	Provision type	Main theme	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
ALT1	M	AP	Positive approaches	Assessing and identifying needs	Caregiver(s) as partners

ALT2	F	AP	Inclusive systems	Planning for individual needs	Debriefing to prevent escalation
ALT3	F	AP	Inclusive approach	Nurture groups to regulate child	Sensory room
PRIM1	F	PRIM	Legal obligations	Behaviour policies followed	Bespoke support
PRIM2	F	PRIM	Exclusionary practice	Move child to external schooling	Flexible curriculum
SEC5	M	SEC	Exclusionary practice	Isolation booth	Segregation
SP1	F	SP	Inclusive mental health ethos	External agency involvement	Caregiver(s) as partners

Note: ALT (Alternative provision headteacher), PRIM (Primary school headteacher), SEC (Secondary school headteacher), SP (Specialist school headteacher).

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

This stage was the review of the preliminary themes in phase 3. This involved cutting and pasting parts of transcripts into Microsoft Word. The dataset was colour-coded so that the age phase and type of provision could be easily identified. The themes and subthemes were checked against data extracts and examined as a collective dataset to check: they made sense; for overlaps; themes within themes; and to collapse similar codes together. The end of phase 4 thematic map of themes (exclusionary, limbo and inclusionary) is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The developed thematic map, showing three main themes

What alternative approaches to school exclusion do headteachers provide in school?

Phase 5. Defining and naming themes:

The final stage was to 'identify the essence of what each theme is about' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 92). This part of the process examined what the themes were saying, and how the subthemes supported the central theme. The ongoing analysis created slight changes to the naming of the themes, as shown in Figure 4. The author removed parental blame and shame as it did not relate to the research question. The 'reactive and proactive' subtheme was deleted, as it was no longer needed due to its essence being captured by the other two themes within 'limbo.'

Figure 4: The final themes

What alternative approaches to school exclusion do headteachers provide in school?
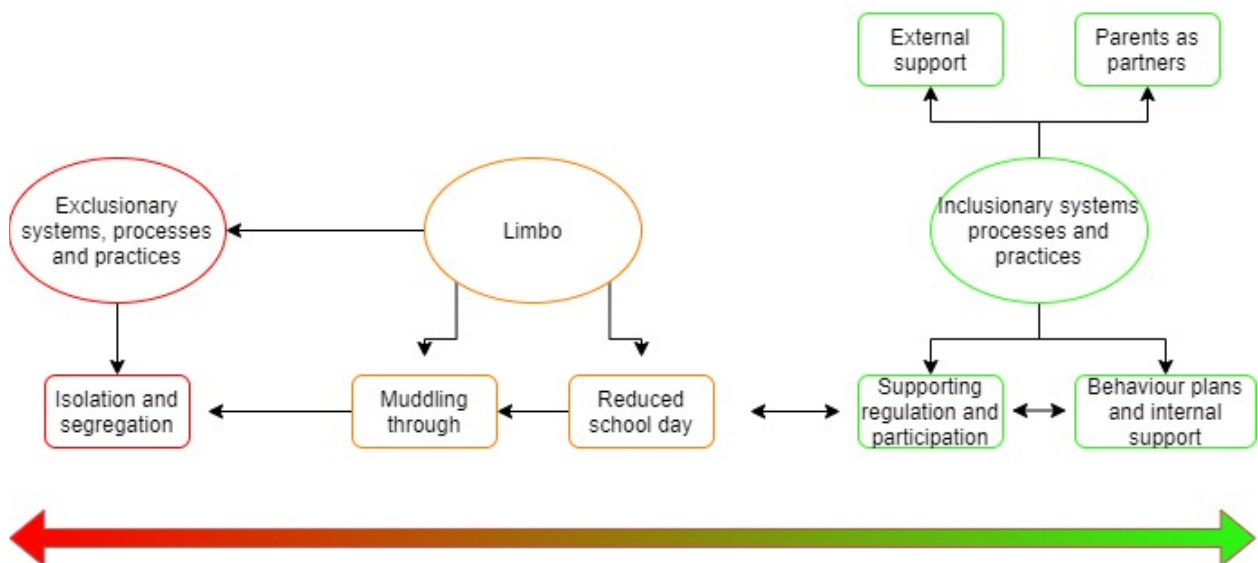
Findings

All headteachers were able to discuss the alternative approaches to school exclusion they provided in their schools. Through TA, three themes were identified: exclusionary systems, processes, and practices; limbo; and inclusionary systems, processes, and practices. The theme 'limbo' was determined to capture some schools in the mid-ground between inclusive and exclusionary practices. The horizontal arrow and the themes are colour coded to indicate the perceived level of inclusion for children.

Exclusionary systems, processes and practices

Isolation and segregation

Exclusionary approaches were more prevalent in secondary schools through systems, processes and practices of isolation and segregation. The most common alternative to school exclusion in secondary education was the use of isolation booths. The HTs identified that this approach was the most suitable method to punish children who did not conform to behavioural expectations set out by the school. There were indications that the children are not taught, but instead complete work set with supervision:

> 'We have an inclusion unit, if children are not behaving to the standards we expect, a few hours or a day or a week depending on the seriousness of what has gone on, could be a bullying issue or an assault on another pupil or just general misbehaviour. A lot of student's hate being in there so they will do anything to not be in there, it's a quiet environment you sit in there on your own in silence.'

Other headteachers conveyed other sanctions, including being placed on report, or processes for detentions:

> 'We've obviously got the basic consequences system where you go through report cards. Then we hit serious incidents. We will do isolation with the heads of years first, if it is not extremely violent. But then we've got internal exclusion, which is over the other side of the school. We are trying to cut down on our fixed term exclusions because I think that's what they want; they want a day off school.'

and

> 'We have a detention system for punctuality, a detention system from the teacher, a subject detention, to leadership detention. At any point we could put them in isolation; isolation is a

small boothed room which is not very nice, where they are working quietly with school behavioural managers, some of whom are leaders. They might be in there for the rest of the lesson, the morning, or the day.'

Several headteachers felt isolation was needed do allow the child to regulate their behaviour, and to give respite for other children and teaching staff: 'If it kicks off and they're disrupting the learning of others and mental health problems for all concerned, we have to remove them from that until things calm down' and, 'We have the isolation room, where they have that consistent link with the cover supervisor. That, again, is not a permanent approach; they do then reintegrate into lessons. That is a way of everybody getting a break; the young person as well as members of staff.' Contrary to the original research (Martin-Denham 2020a), the headteachers suggested that segregating and isolating children was not used as a permanent approach. Yet some children in this previous research reported being in isolation booths for several years, compounding their negative behaviours.

Despite the acknowledgement of some HTs that isolation was a non-ideal solution, other HTs did not always speak about exclusionary practices in a negative fashion, and often attempted to rationalise the decision to place students in isolation. One headteacher remarked that children were fortunate to have isolation booths as an alternative to school exclusion:

'We have internal exclusion, it has eight booths in it, it's where they are removed, they will receive all the work that the class would have received, but they do it in isolation. There is support in that room, and that member of staff also do some reflective practice about why they are here, say they have had an argument with the teacher or sworn at the teacher, years ago you would have put somebody out for that.'

A primary HT who had no school exclusions policy explained how she had a child in the school with very challenging behaviour. To keep the child in a mainstream school, he was segregated from other children:

'We work to manage him outside of the classroom. Any other school I believe he would have been excluded we want to keep them without excluding. This may be by going to a unit for part of the time. I am vehemently against exclusion; you have to look behind the behaviours to see what's happening with the child and work it out. I don't want exclusions in my school.'

An alternative approach was reported by another primary HT that children could elect to work outside the classroom when they were unable to cope in class if they felt unable to, 'They can ask a teaching assistant to take them out, and they have got a space outside the classroom where they can work.'

Some primary schools were reliant on Team Teach for using a behaviour management strategy. Mostly they referred to it in terms of restraint:

> 'If it was an emotional outburst where they might really hurt other children or themselves we might Team Teach in that situation, to make sure that that child and other children are safeguarded. We bring the child along here, and myself and the deputy head would sit and talk to them. It's not about blaming them; it's about understanding the reason why this behaviour has happened.'

and

> 'If a child has gone very quickly and we haven't been able to intervene in time, then we have a lot of members of staff who are team teach trained, so we would use the Team Teach de-escalation. But if that doesn't work and the child won't remove themselves we would then in a very managed way we would remove them and calm them down.'

Team Teach was also used in a secondary school, but due to funding cuts, they no longer offer the approach, acknowledging there could be better approaches to use: 'I think the cost of Team Teach training, it's any reasonable force, given school budgets now, is prohibitive. I think that some people that have had the training may be more likely to use it when alternatives might be better. So, we are trying to do a lot of work on defusing situations, which works in a classroom setting but not so much in the playground and at social times.'

Inclusionary systems, processes and practices

Most HTs discussed how alternative approaches to school exclusion were needed due to children's challenging behaviours.

Supporting regulation and participation

The alternative provision HTs frequently shared their approaches to supporting children's anxiety to prevent school exclusion by providing bespoke spaces: 'We've also got a reflection system. They go out of the room, fill in a sheet and then have a conversation about why they couldn't cope' and:

> 'We've got calm rooms upstairs, three in total. One is a sensory room which we use with students who just need time out to calm down. Then we have a music room, as a bit of therapy during break and lunchtime, they love that. Then we've got spaces at the end of corridors with settees and things.'

Sensory rooms were most used in primary schools, with HTs stating the importance of children having space to, 'Calm down' and that, when they can see the child becoming dysregulated or to diffuse a situation, 'It stops things building up.' They remarked sensory spaces being used dependent on the needs of the child, 'We encourage them to leave and go somewhere to calm down, often the sensory room' and, 'We encourage them to leave and go somewhere to calm down, often the sensory room; it would be very much about what works for an individual child. You've got to let children calm down before you can talk to them about what's going on.' Another primary HT felt, 'The sensory room is used for a range of children, though at times the children can be reluctant to access the facility, 'We have one in the pupil referral unit (PRU) at the moment, and he takes two of us to move him, and he is in year one.' One primary HT discussed a sensory room and a nurture group being used as a space where children could have time away from a busy classroom to talk about friendships and relationships: 'Talk about all those different issues as well. We suggest sensory breaks, we have children with sensory trays as well so if they finish their work it is a kind of incentive to get the work done so they can have their sensory tray, so they have things like foam glitter sticks.' The forest school approach was also evident in primary school provision for children unable to cope during the school day's social times, 'It's never as a punishment for the children, and it's always framed as helping for the younger ones.' Specialist provision schools also adopted sensory spaces, 'We use various strategies, sensory integration, and we try and have behaviour plans where we know what that child might need, should they become dysregulated. It's finding where the triggers are.'

In specialist provision, safe spaces' were provided to allow children to regulate and reduce their anxiety:

'We have two rooms, not isolation rooms but a reflection room which students can choose to go to for various reasons if they are very anxious and need a nice calm, safe space they can ask to go there with a member of staff.' Finding the cause of the anxiety was an approach shared by another HT before the child becomes dysregulated: 'We do have a breakout room, but I am very rigorous about the way that is used, sometimes teachers misuse it. I tell them it shouldn't be used when a child is kicking off; it's for way before that' (specialist HT).

A secondary HT maintained the importance of an inclusion base: 'In the inclusion base, we have staff trained in different areas. We have a mindfulness area; they get a time out card; they sit there for five minutes until they have self-regulated to go back to class. That works for some and doesn't work for others.'

The importance of smaller numbers of children in schools was raised by several primary HTs, 'Going with a couple of other children into a smaller space and a member of staff that can help them play.' For children with challenging, violent and aggressive behaviours a primary HT shared they: 'Cannot cope on the yard can't cope on their playing games with other children because their anger just gets the better of them. We take them into the courtyard area with four or five children and play in a much smaller area.' The necessity for reasonable adjustments to be made for children with disabilities was also raised:

> 'Reasonable adjustments are made in the classroom; some children like to have fidget toys built into the plan, we use resources like egg timers bubble cushions you name it we use it, so reasonable adjustments are made in the classroom for the child. We then use the classroom assistants for support, we have the go-to person and worry boxes (primary HT).'

A secondary HT highlighted employing staff to observe for behaviours that may escalate: 'We would have a member of staff in the class with them, so if they see any triggers they can take them out, we also offer escorting children to and from lessons or during breaks and lunchtimes. We also offer staff support as well; tell them to try different strategies.'

Behaviour plans and internal support

The primary and specialist headteachers had a clear focus on creating a plan that would detail potential trigger points for the child, leading to them becoming dysregulated. Primary HTs felt behaviour plans were essential as an approach to preventing school exclusion: 'It's very much trying to identify what the reason is for the threat of exclusion. Having very clear behaviour targets, not just a bit of paper but a working document for the behaviour policy for that child' and 'We have got a behaviour plan in place so it is clearly identifying, with the different areas, what the issues are and what the triggers might be and what action is put in place.' A further primary HT asserted the importance of the plan being negotiated with the child and family: 'So in our school; they will get quite a detailed support plan. It's an individual support plan that is agreed between teachers with parent views and child views so that everybody contributes.' Another primary HT found the behaviour plan useful, as it: 'Avoids the trigger points, has rewards within it. It's the skill of the class teacher to notice when these things are going to happen, which is often to the detriment of the other children in the class.' This view was further supported by another HT in the same age phase stating the importance of: 'Looking at the individual, the triggers and what can be put in place; I call that a 'positive handling' plan. Sitting with a child and working out what rewards would work to motivate them; something that's different.'

Within alternative provision contexts, individual approaches for each child were clearly stated, ensuring they all had behavioural targets in place that were continuously monitored and amended to suit them.

Parents as partners

Very few headteachers shared working with parents as an approach to preventing school exclusion. No headteachers from secondary education mentioned collaboration with parents in any sense. Other headteachers talked about the importance of working with parents to decide what preventative action could be taken, 'We speak to parents often to have conversations about what we can do' (specialist HT) and 'We involve the parents as much as possible, look your child is struggling with this' (primary HT). Weekly calls were used as an approach to work with parents to build relationships and to provide support to the child, and wider family: 'Tutors are expected to make weekly calls to our parents, carers of their tutees. Part of that is building that relationship, providing support where needed' (alternative provision HT).

Multiple primary HTs reported involving parents from the onset of concerns to get them on board with working together to support the child: 'Sometimes it is difficult because children might see different parents at different times, and they have different parenting styles. Sometimes getting both on board has been difficult' and 'Partnership with the parent- I think we do that well. Putting the time in nursery and, you know, I am on the yard at night and morning so they can tell me things quickly.'

> 'We usually involve the families straight away; I don't think any child has ever done anything where we think woah that definitely deserves an exclusion, it's more the behaviour that's disruptive, angry and potentially dangerous that builds up. We involve people right from the start, identify it early and work with the parents all the way through so it's never a shock if it gets to that point.'

External support

A secondary HT described external support they had previously used to support children in building relationships:

'There used to be some good stuff like 'Wear kids' for disaffected kids. They were good. They would come into the school and take them out to like McDonald's for their dinner, talk to them and then bring them back. We had a great relationship with them. They were good, but they went with budget cuts.'

The primary schools sought free external support, ranging from family learning to programmes to build self-esteem: 'Family learning courses are absolutely fantastic, and we perhaps target the parents of

some of the children who are at risk of exclusion to cover work in school. It's been life-changing, and we are very lucky that that hasn't cost us anything.'

In specialist provision, a HT recalled drawing on external providers such as Autism Directions, 'They can sometimes see the needs of the child in a way that you might have missed.' Other external support came from health services, 'We involve CAMHS or CYPS, depending on what's appropriate for the needs of that child' and, 'We access behaviour support, and we look at if we should bring early help in, or CAMHS, so it's the external services. It's addressing the root cause of the behaviour.'

'We have got placements on offer in construction, on a farm and in-house here, which is the best thing about moving into here. We have sport, maintenance and nursery placements; it's good because a lot of our students aren't ready to leave here to do things off-site' (Specialist headteacher).

Limbo

Muddling through

A few of the Alternative provision HTs felt that, following a 12-week placement in a pupil referral unit (PRU), some schools were reluctant for the child to return to mainstream education: 'I don't think the school wants to change to meet these children's needs because it isn't a priority, that's how the system is.' This view aligns with that of a secondary HT who stated that 'They go for 12 weeks to the PRU, and it doesn't work, sometimes they come back worse. It's a waste of money and not doing it anymore.'

Some of the primary HTs believed mainstream school was not the right place for the child at risk of exclusion due to the complexity of their needs, but delays with Education, Health and Care Plans caused issues: 'One child has significant mental health needs and an inability to cope with social situations, changes to routine and interactions with other children. This child exerts so much that they can collapse and go to sleep' and, 'A couple of children are autistic children. They have got chew toys as well because otherwise, they would just chew everything else. We do what we can.'

Other HTs disclosed similar concerns:

> 'We have had children who have needed that one-to-one support and we've had children who have been so emotionally unstable that they've not been able to stay in school. You have to look at the health and safety risks, to that particular child and their peers. There are times when a child has had to be removed out of the classroom because sometimes frustration can manifest itself in throwing chairs or whatever. At that point, safety supersedes everything' (primary HT).

and

'We have applied for a PRU place, and we put that on the back burner. Though I think he's going to need it. A lot of things have happened to this young man, and he is at extreme risk of all sorts of things. I've got special things in play at lunchtime, we've got special arrangements in the classroom, so the behaviour policy sort of applies to him, but we appreciate that he can't manage a whole morning of lessons' (primary HT).

Other primary HTs' comments also indicated they delayed seeking support for the child or involving caregivers in a timely manner: 'We monitor the behaviour, and we have a consequences system. There will be children who have consequence logs, C1 or C2 but once they start going to C4, then we do tend to talk with parents and talk to the child and look at what the issue is' and, 'I would see parents and come up with a support plan and put that under a view for three months and if it's really bad maybe every month.'

There were also reports of some behaviour systems being used to manage rather than understand children's behaviours:

'The behaviour system roughly will work as the children being given a certain number of chances within the class, then the teachers will give them consequences under the behaviour model. We have got an evidence base on CPOMS, which allows teachers to notice patterns evolving in children's behaviour. If the pattern starts to evolve then the pastoral lead will take it upon herself to start working with that child and involve the parents' (Secondary HT).

Reduced school day

The data suggests there are children who are unable to access a full school day of learning, who instead have a part-time timetable. This part-time offer was often for children in limbo, awaiting an EHCP needs assessment or those who had significant mental health needs. Some of the primary schools had reduced timetables in place for those children for whom full-day attendance was felt to be unrealistic, as they needed more 1:1 support, 'I have to look at creative ways of staffing, and flexible timetables and one-to-one seem to be working really well.'

'We have currently one child who is on a reduced timetable, they are on the SEN register we are currently applying for an Education Health Care Plan. The reduced timetable is staggered to

meet his needs. We talk about the provision of things that he particularly enjoys in the day. It works really well, so when he's thriving, it's not an issue but looking at the flashpoints that are causing those issues, match the timetable around it.'

And

'We look at a reduced timetable if it's more manageable. We look at periods of time where we could have someone to one with that child.'

Another primary school had a shortened school day and were able to be flexible in timings: 'We have done, with parental consent, a reduced day. Start at 10 am and go home at 2 pm. Sometimes it's lunchtime that's a problem, so can we have something different happening there.' For a specialist school, they had alternative timetables including out of school hours: 'We have alternative timetables so they could come in on the morning and night times, which means they are out of the social loop and can get to 4 hours of solid learning.'

Of the schools who have reduced school day for children, it did not come across as a temporary solution as made explicit in the (DfE 2020) attendance guidance.

Concluding remarks

In this study, forty-six headteachers took part in semi-structured interviews to discuss alternative approaches to school exclusion. The study set out to determine, through reflexive thematic analysis, the range of approaches used in schools as an alternative to school exclusion. The results were created by constant comparison and revisiting the data extracts used to verify the thematic coding and support the following conclusions.

The findings of this study suggest that alternative approaches to school exclusion can be categorised into three distinct categories: exclusionary systems, processes and practices; limbo; and inclusionary systems, processes and practices. The conclusions highlight the importance of statutory school guidance that clearly defines 'inclusion' and legislation that mandates schools to identify, assess and effectively respond to children's special educational needs and disabilities.

Exclusionary systems

The impact of isolation booths on children's mental and physical health is well-documented (Hall-Lande et al., 2007; Osgood et al. 2013; Martin-Denham 2020a) and has resulted in schools becoming less

inclusive (Gazeley 2010; West and Bailey, 2013; Gorard 2014; Martin-Denham 2020a). This research has revealed that only one headteacher in the study suggested assessing and identifying underlying special educational needs and disabilities as an alternative to school exclusion. This finding deepens our understanding that some children are unable to cope in school; strengthening the view proposed by Horridge (2019) that their needs are not made visible and therefore cannot be met in schools. Secondary HTs in this study accepted exclusionary practices as a necessity, and in some cases, felt it was useful or helpful in preventing negative behaviours though this contradicts previous findings by Martin-Denham (2020) that segregating and isolating children compounds their dysregulation. While there was no suggestion from the HTs that isolation was used as a permanent solution, they rarely gave an explicit value regarding the maximum length of time a child could be held in internal exclusion.

Limbo

The theme of 'limbo' was used to describe schools that are neither exclusionary nor inclusionary but are holding children in their care (Abawi et al. 2018). The views of alternative provision HTs were mainstream schools do not want children with behavioural challenges on their school roll. It was also apparent that some primary HTs felt mainstream schooling was not the right placement for some children, but until an EHCP was secured, they were doing what they could to support them. However well meaning the schools were in holding the children in their care, research by Martin-Denham, 2020 suggests that when children are not coping in school the detriment to the mental health of both the child, their siblings and caregivers increases (Martin-Denham, 2020a, b, c, d). There are clearly children who require early intervention, but school processes mean that only when a child is frequently receiving sanctions do the caregivers become informed about behavioural concerns. These schools are in limbo, whereby their systems and processes do not allow for timely assessment and identification of the diverse needs of individual children in their care.

Inclusionary systems

In contrast to the secondary schools, the primary and specialist schools frequently adopted what they viewed to be inclusive approaches focussed on regulation of behaviour to enable participation in school life. When children displayed anxiety, challenging behaviours or to prevent escalation of behaviour, the schools would provide a range of approaches to support the child in becoming regulated. The spaces included sensory rooms, music rooms, nurture groups, forest school and reflection rooms. They all felt that the provision of these bespoke spaces, coupled with reasonable adjustment and in-class regulation resources such as fiddle toys, allowed the children to cope in mainstream school. The transition for

children in mainstream primary school, who survive due to access to therapeutic spaces, will need an equitable provision in secondary education. The use of behaviour plans and targets were frequently used to identify individual difficulties and behaviour triggers that present as a risk for school exclusion. The alternative provision headteachers, and some of the primary headteachers, prioritised working alongside caregivers as soon as difficulties became apparent. Being available to caregivers is fundamental to preventing school exclusion at the school site or remotely. Finally, through external support, the headteachers were able to begin to understand how to better respond to individual behaviours as they present in children.

Statutory guidance

The statutory guidance for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) fails to define inclusion (DfE and Department of Health (DoH) 2015, 93) referencing 'schools have wider duties to prevent discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.' Similarly, the statutory framework for the early year's foundation stage (DfE 2017b) fails to refer to 'inclusion' let alone provide a definition. In addition, the National curriculum framework for key stages 1-4 (DfE 2014) omits a definition of inclusion only guiding teachers that they 'should' set suitable challenges, respond to pupil's needs, and overcome barriers. These omissions in statutory guidance could explain why the evidence in this study suggests some schools are exclusionary in their systems, processes and practices as there is no mandated statutory duty to be inclusive.

The behaviour and discipline guidance DfE (2016) needs to define what is meant by 'limited period' to prevent schools being able to determine the duration that children can be placed in segregated and isolated environments. In secondary schools, in particular, there is a focus on placing children on report, detention, and then isolation; and with every step, the risk of school exclusion increases. Highlighting differences and segregating children can only further promote divisions in the school community (Juvonene et al. 2019). Instead, there needs to be a focus on individualised support, academic and social development as set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and identification and assessment of underlying special educational needs and disabilities. To achieve this, it is imperative that investment is made for high quality training for in-service teachers and support staff, to enable them to continue to, or to begin to, provide inclusive schools for children.

Limitations

As with all qualitative research there are limitations. It is accepted that conclusions drawn from qualitative research may not be generalisable (Kvale 1994; Barbour 2001). The study is limited as it is a

sample of headteachers from one local area. However, the research does share the views of headteachers from different types of schools and genders. Many of the headteachers commented that they were pleased to have been given the opportunity to share their experiences of supporting children on the edge of or who had experienced school exclusion.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the headteachers who took part in the study. Without them the research would not have been possible.

Conflict of interest

Declaration of Interest statement. No financial interest or benefit is arising from this research.

Note

This journal article forms the background to a policy brief.

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