

**A Study of Pupils at Risk of Exclusion and
their Attitudes to School**

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to explore the attitudes of pupils at risk of exclusion from school in terms of barriers they perceive to increase their risk of exclusion and positive enablers they suggest which could reduce their risk of exclusion. It is a qualitative study and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 young people at risk of exclusion in one secondary school used as a case study.

Six thematic findings emerged from the data: pupil-teacher relationships, discipline, curriculum, physical surroundings, organisational structure and social relationships. Pupils discussed these themes in terms of perceived barriers to engagement at school as well as suggesting potential enablers which could improve their experience. Significant suggestions were the need for holistic and pastoral care from school staff, smaller class sizes and more interactive and kinaesthetic lessons.

The study outlines and analyses, in detail, barriers which emerged from the findings and then uses these alongside potential enablers suggested by the pupils to make recommendations for future practice.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the attitudes of pupils at risk of exclusion from school and try to ascertain what barriers they experience in relation to engagement with school, as well as focusing on specific enablers which young people state could help reduce their risk of exclusion.

Education and compulsory school experience is one of the most fundamental and formative parts of childhood. Secondary school is where it is intended that a young person learns to negotiate life independently acquiring important skills such as literacy, numeracy and social interaction. The majority of young people manage to do this successfully, yet some find the educational system difficult to negotiate. This often results in their academic exclusion. Given the link between school exclusion and long term social exclusion as well as criminality and social disengagement, there is significant risk for young people who are being excluded from school to end up being excluded from society, whether that be through criminal activity or lack of interest or ability to fit in socially.

Pupils at risk of exclusion are often regarded as uninterested in education and socially disruptive. The reasons behind the behaviour are less frequently considered. As such, Pupils at risk of exclusion have had little chance to express their stories. It tends to be after they have been permanently excluded that people have chosen to listen to what could have been done (Pomeroy 1999, Whitehead & Clough 2004, Hamill & Boyd 2002a, Munn, Lloyd & Cullen 2000). By this point, the studies have a more negative stance as any hope of reintegrating them back into mainstream school appears to be long forgotten. Instead, the research looks at their experience in mainstream school and tries to understand what led to their exclusion retrospectively. This study, in contrast, aims to have a more positive focus in that it gathers the opinions of those in mainstream school who are currently at risk

of exclusion. It looks at barriers which they perceive to contribute to their risk of exclusion and also the potential enablers which could help keep them in school.

Between September 2007 and February 2010, I was privileged to work directly with pupils at risk of exclusion and run a programme to help prevent their exclusion and focus on inclusion. This drove me to want to learn more about the experience of exclusion from the point of view of those actually experiencing it. I worked with young people on a one-to-one and small group basis focusing on emotional, social and behavioural support as well as supporting them with their curriculum work. A significant part of my role was to advocate on the young person's part and act as a liaison between them and the school institution that they were unable to navigate successfully. It became apparent to me that relatively simple but significant changes to school organisation and structure could change the schooling trajectories of these young people. It also became evident that pupils at risk of, and experiencing exclusion, lacked the opportunity to voice their opinions and be listened to. For this reason, I wanted to give the young people an opportunity to express their views on barriers that they perceived to inhibit their inclusion at school as well as the chance to suggest what potential enablers could keep them in school.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study has three main research questions which aim to explore the attitudes which pupils at risk of exclusion hold in relation to school. These were:

1. What attitudes do pupils at risk of exclusion have towards school in terms of a) educational value and b) atmosphere/culture of school community? Do differences exist in terms of pupil characteristics/ background?

2. What do pupils at risk of exclusions perceive to be barriers to their learning and participation in school, with particular reference to:
 - a) attendance
 - b) active participation
 - c) achievement
3. What do the pupils perceive to be positive influences within school or potential enablers that could prevent or reduce their exclusion?

The first research question is an overarching one which intends to capture an overview of pupils' feelings towards school.

The second question focuses much more closely on specific barriers which the young people experience in an attempt to understand or throw light on what they find difficult at school.

Thirdly, the last question focuses on potential 'enablers' within school itself that could potentially improve the participants' experiences at, and engagement with, school.

The primary objective of this study is to listen to the experiences of young people at risk of exclusion from school in order to understand what creates difficulties for them so that they are unable to negotiate the educational system successfully. The significance of giving young people a voice was highlighted in England in 2002 when the government first sought the views of young people on the topic of a human rights convention (Riley & Docking 2004:166). Following this, there was an increased interest in listening to the views of young people. Those at risk of exclusion hold a great wealth of knowledge about the education system which other pupils, teachers and professionals simply cannot have access to. They have the ability to highlight barriers and enablers which increase and decrease their sense of engagement with school and thus their risk of exclusion. It is with this in mind that this

study is conducted and it is hoped that the outcomes of the study may extend current knowledge, understanding and practice in working with young people at risk of exclusion.

1.2 Research Strategies

In order to explore the young people's attitudes to and experiences of school, the study adopts a qualitative approach as it permits a descriptive data collection which concerns itself with experience and individuals' constructions of meaning. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the best method to collect this qualitative data. This was decided upon as a less structured 'conversation' between interviewer and interviewee could elicit deeper responses from the young person and thus gather richer and more informative data. It also allowed the interviewer to probe further on significant issues that arose.

One school was purposively chosen as a case study for the research project. This allowed the interviewer to gather detailed data from one location as opposed to less detailed data from many locations. The school was chosen specifically due to the management's focus on inclusion and its commitment to reduce exclusion over the last five years shown through the school's efforts to increase inclusion through an innovative intervention programme run onsite by a charity.

To increase the reliability of the interview data, a further research method was employed. Information was gathered from the school's data system looking specifically at gender, family background and history of exclusion for each young person. This meant the validity of what the young people answered could be measured by triangulating quantitative data on pupil backgrounds with the qualitative data on their views of school, thus increasing the study's reliability.

1.3 Structure of Thesis

The study is split into five main chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the aim, scope and structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 reviews the existing and current literature about the topic of exclusion from school. Chapter 3 discusses and presents the methodology chosen for the study. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present and analyse the main findings from the research. Chapter Seven draws conclusions from the findings and it is in this final chapter that I make recommendations for reducing the risk of exclusion based on the pupil voice and findings from the present research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Exclusion from school is an all too common reality for a number of pupils each year. Much has been written and studied about it in an attempt to understand its causes and effects. This chapter aims to review some of the recent research and set this study in context. First I will consider the different modes of exclusion that schools employ, followed by a brief discussion of exclusion statistics which are used to assess the scale of the situation. I will then concentrate on risk factors of exclusion looking at particular groups who tend to be excluded, followed by the consequences for young people who face exclusion. Lastly, I will discuss the significance of pupil voice and exclusion from school, and review research done with excluded pupils who have been given a voice.

2.1 Modes of Exclusion

Exclusion is a disciplinary sanction that prevents a pupil from attending school. The two main types of exclusion from school are permanent and fixed term (Department for Education and Employment 2001). The most common form is fixed term exclusion where pupils are excluded for a fixed period of time. This usually lasts between one and five days, with the maximum time a pupil can be excluded being 15 days in any one term. Permanent exclusion is where a pupil is no longer allowed to attend the school and is removed from the school roll. In both cases, it is only the headteacher who is able to decide to exclude a pupil. If a pupil is permanently excluded, the local authority has the responsibility of finding them alternative education elsewhere.

A third type of exclusion which is widely accepted is that of unofficial exclusion (Stirling 1996:55). Unofficially excluding a pupil can be said to be “advantageous” for both the school and pupil. Whilst the pupil does not end up with the stigma of a formal exclusion on

their school record, it also gives the school the chance to manipulate their exclusion levels and not formally have it on their statistics. Unofficial exclusion is commonly employed by schools in a number of ways. Pupils can be encouraged to change schools in a managed move, whereby two schools swap pupils who get the chance to have a fresh start elsewhere (Vincent, Harris, Thompson, Toalster 2007). Another common practice of avoiding the stigma of exclusion for both pupil and school alike, is where schools invite parents to find another school for their child to go to instead of being formally excluded (Vulliamy & Webb 2000: 123).

Further methods of unofficially excluding a pupil are where they are put into isolation for a day, number of days, or excluded from certain lessons, or are sent home for the day after an altercation for a cooling off period (Kyriacou 2003). Whilst in isolation or at home, the pupils miss out on core teaching with their peers and are therefore disadvantaged academically and socially.

2.2 School exclusion in context

During the 1990s, exclusion rates in England increased dramatically. Between school years 1990-1 and 1991-2, the Department for Education found there to be approximately a 32% rise in permanent exclusions, from 2,910 to 3,833 (Blyth & Milner 1996:3). The political climate in the late 1980s and early 1990s and educational reforms which began around this time can be seen to be partially responsible for this. The educational market place and open enrolment which gave schools the power not to take 'problem pupils' as well as an attitude of condemning pupils instead of understanding them contributed to this rise in exclusions (Blyth & Milner 1996:18, Searle 1996:42, Macrae, Maguire & Milbourne 2003:94, Stirling 1996).

By 1997-8 the number of permanent exclusions had risen to over 13,000 (Vulliamy & Webb 2000:22). With the election of New Labour in 1997, tackling social exclusion became a priority. However, Vulliamy and Webb (2000) argue that by keeping elements of the conservative administration reforms in place such as the “quasi market” structure, these worked against the inclusion agenda. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, New Labour placed high importance on the Standards Agenda which in turn placed immense pressure on schools to get good results. By focusing on league tables, targets and raising achievement, the government undermined its own inclusion agenda even more (Cullingford & Morrison 1996:12).

In more recent statistics, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) showed that there were 8,130 permanent exclusions in 2007-8 (DCSF 2009). The number of fixed term exclusions are thought to be much more difficult to monitor than permanent exclusions and are generally considered to be widely underestimated due to differences in record keeping between different local authorities (Gordon 2001). The DCSF estimated, however, that in 2007-8 there were 324,180 fixed term exclusions from school. This gives an idea of the scale of the problem for young people facing exclusion from school.

It is important to note that the statistics only give a partial picture of the reality of exclusion from school. Not only are they thought to be underestimated (Gordon 2001), but they do not take unofficial exclusions into account. In one authority, unofficial exclusions were found to be much higher than the number of official exclusions (Stirling 1996:55). This not only means many more young people experience exclusion from school than is initially obvious, but that many of these are not even entitled to the official appeal procedure or support given in official cases.

A further reason not to view these statistics as wholly representative is the clear variation between schools. Kyriacou points out that “what appears to be identical behaviour by

pupils” could lead to an exclusion in one school but in another one would not (Kyriacou 2003:57). Kyriacou notes this can be “attributed to differences in the school ethos relating to the purpose of schooling, the curriculum on offer, school relations with the outside world and decision making about exclusion” (Kyriacou 2003:57). Different schools clearly respond to events in different ways, have different systems and approaches and make different decisions. Munn, Cullen, Johnstone and Lloyd (1999) explain that a low exclusion rate may be deceptive. From statistics a school may appear to manage behaviour effectively, but in actual fact it may highlight the problem of unofficial exclusions and “conceal poor quality provision for pupils in trouble, such as sitting in corridors or other forms of “internal exclusion”” (Munn et al. 1999:15-16).

2.3 Risk Factors for Exclusion

Having defined what exclusion from school is and looked at different modes employed by schools to exclude, as well as considering exclusion from school in a wider context, it is necessary to look at what might lead to some pupils being excluded more frequently than others.

Exclusion from school has been linked to particular pupil characteristics and background factors. These include minority ethnic status, male gender, socio-economic disadvantage, special educational needs and children in care (Munn, Lloyd & Cullen 2000:19, Pomeroy 1999:3, Blyth & Milner 1996:5, Macrae et al. 2003:92). The following sections examine the links between exclusion and the predominant risk factors in greater detail.

2.3.1 Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a much discussed topic in the field of school exclusion. There has been a large tendency to exclude boys of an African-Caribbean origin (Gordon 2001, Stirling 1993, Parsons 1999, Munn et al. 2000).

Wright, Weekes and McGlaughlin (2000) confirm this but also note the increasing number of Asian pupils who are being permanently excluded with Pakistani boys in particular (Wright et al. 2000:8). Others at significant risk are children from Gypsy/Roma origin and travellers from Irish Heritage (DCSF 2009).

Attempts have been made to try and understand what it is that puts ethnic minorities more at risk. Osler and Hill (1999), looking specifically at African-Caribbean boys, suggest that they can struggle to identify with, or empathise with the curriculum on a cultural level and may feel isolated and disengaged from the work which could contribute to their exclusion (Osler & Hill 1999:47). Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson (2002) support this idea and note that “cultural discontinuity may create a cycle of miscommunication and confrontation” for students (Skiba et al. 2002:336).

Stirling (1993) also indicates that pupils from ethnic minorities may experience racial harassment or abuse from other students which could prompt behaviour which leads to their exclusion. In such cases teachers may not take the racial abuse into consideration when deciding to exclude or not and merely look at the behaviour of the ethnic minority (Stirling 1993).

This explains some of the reasons as to why pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds may find themselves at disproportionate risk of exclusion.

2.3.2 Gender

A well established risk factor for exclusion from school is being male. The DCSF report from 2007/8 noted that the 'permanent exclusion rate for boys was apparently 3.5 times higher than that for girls and that 'boys represented 78 per cent of the total number of exclusions each year' (DCSF 2009). For fixed term exclusions it was nearly 3 times higher for boys, who took up 75 per cent of all fixed term exclusions. It is clear, therefore, that "there is noticeable discrepancy between the number of boys and girls excluded from school" (Blyth & Milner 1996:5).

Gender identities have been much discussed in terms of interaction and engagement at school. The classroom has often been considered to be a female dominated environment (Jackson 2003). A recent preoccupation with trying to recruit male teachers as a means of increasing boys' achievement highlights the concerns around the bias of femininity in the classroom (Francis 2008:109). Carrington and Skelton (2003) argue that boys achieve better when taught by male teachers as they provide role models as well as teaching in a way that appeals to boys. In a female dominated profession, this suggests one reason as to why boys may be disadvantaged.

Being successful at school and achieving academically is something boys associate with being feminine and academic work, itself, is perceived to be more for girls (Jackson 2003:584). Boys are also thought to engage less with more passive styles of learning than girls and prefer a more hands-on approach (Jovanovich & Steinbach King 1998). This suggests that the classroom, which Francis (2008) argues has a predominantly female led teaching style, favours girls rather than boys.

A fear of failure is another key reason why boys disengage from academic work. Protecting their self worth is paramount and they use certain techniques to prevent others from

seeing them fail, such as, procrastination, withdrawal of effort, avoidance of work and disruptive behaviour (Jackson 2002). This helps explain why boys are more at risk of exclusion than girls.

Willis' classic text 'Learning to Labour' (1977) gives further insight to boys' attitudes to school. Willis indicates that boys' priorities are to "have a laff", protecting their status by being one of the lads. Competing against each other to provide the best joke or banter in the classroom is considered much more important than academic work or school activities. In fact, school was viewed as more of a 'blank' between opportunities for excitement by the lads (Willis 1977:38).

For girls, the risk of exclusion is lower than boys. However, it is important to consider those who experience it. Girls who are at risk of exclusion from school often challenge conventional gender stereotypes. As academic prowess and engagement is associated with femininity (Francis 2008), then girls who disengage from school defy social expectations. Osler, Street, Lall & Vincent (2002) note that girls at risk of exclusion often experience harsher punishments and treatment than their male peers would for aggressive/challenging behaviour due to gender stereotypes and expectations (Osler et al. 2002).

Therefore, gender plays a significant role for those at risk of exclusion, with boys being more at risk, but girls who are at risk facing severe punishment.

2.3.3 Socio-economic background

Another established risk factor for exclusion is coming from a low socio-economic background. It has been argued that those from a lower socio-economic background feel less sense of belonging at school and also are more likely to be excluded than those who are from a higher socio-economic background (Willms 2003). Parsons (1999) conducted a

study of nearly 400 schools across England and concluded that “social factors, in particular the number of children receiving free school meals, have a significant role in determining school exclusion rates” (Macrae et al. 2003:92-3). This is confirmed in more recent statistics as the DCSF 2007/8 Report states “children who are eligible for free school meals are around three times more likely to receive either a permanent/fixed period exclusion than children who are not eligible for free school meals” (DCSF 2009).

Class and socio-economic background intersect and overlap with the discussion on gender. Having looked at how gender impacts school exclusion (with boys in particular), it is important to note how class and gender are intrinsically linked.

The “working class lad” that Willis discusses in his classic text (1977), is as much to do with class and background as it is concerned with gender. He describes a “counter-school culture” which describes the traits of masculinity which are embraced by working class boys (such as competing for authority, making other lads laugh and disregarding/challenging the authority of teachers and the school (Willis 1977)). The boys’ behaviour, which is acceptable on the “shop floor”, is unacceptable in the middle class institution of school and it is this cultural dissonance which comes from being from a lower socio-economic background which Willis describes as being a reason for the boys’ exclusion. More recently Hatcher (1998) looks at the relationship between class, social background and engagement at school. He notes that socio-cultural values between classes are partly responsible for pupils’ attitudes to school. Middle class young people “risk social demotion” if they do not go on to higher education, whilst working class young people are able to “maintain their class position, and even achieve some upward social mobility, simply by completing compulsory secondary education” (Hatcher, 1998: 10).

A further issue linked to class is the idea that young people are confident in their own locality. When they have to go to a different locality, they feel insecure and that they do

not belong there (Alexander 2008). Some young people particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds may feel that a middle-class school is a threatening environment to go into, thus making them feel insecure and that they do not belong there (Alexander 2008). This applies to class and culture as well. Young people travelling from areas of lower socio-economic status to areas of higher economic status are likely to feel insecure and find the environment threatening experiencing a lack of belonging. For some, therefore, it might be the middle class institution of school itself that provides this threatening environment causing feelings of inferiority and a lack of belonging.

2.3.4 Special Educational Needs

“Pupils with SEN (both with and without statements) are over 8 times more likely to be permanently excluded than those with no SEN” (DCSF 2009).

Special educational needs are difficult to define (Florian 2007:1). In 2001, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice defined someone with SEN as having “a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them” (DFES 2001:6) and may be “a result of a physical or sensory disability, an emotional or behavioural problem, or developmental delay” (Cabinet Office 2005: 26). Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are at particular risk of being excluded from school whether through official exclusion or placement in a Pupil Referral Unit (Florian 2007:50).

Social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) are particularly difficult to define as it is not clear when a pupil with a social, emotional and/or behavioural problem becomes a pupil with special educational needs (Munn et al. 2000:134). Hamill and Boyd (2002b) identify that pupils with social and emotional needs are more likely to experience low self esteem, lack motivation, lack concentration, experience difficulties with learning, have poor interpersonal skills and experience more feelings of hopelessness (Hamill and Boyd

2002b:92). Although difficult to define, it is therefore clear why pupils with SEBN are at particular risk of being excluded.

Cole, Visser and Upton note that there is a growing trend for young people to be exposed to more social deprivation, to have more complex needs relating to dysfunctional families and communities, as well as more children being abused and being exposed to more aggressive behaviour (Cole, Visser & Upton 1999: 29). With more young people experiencing such deprivation/abuse, the number of pupils with complex social, emotional and behaviour needs and SEN designations is also likely to increase. Consequently, the need to meet the SEBN of the pupils is more significant (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre 2004). Addressing and overcoming emotional and psychological barriers to learning is an important part of reducing the risk of exclusion for pupils with SEBN (Hart et al. 2004).

2.3.5 Other risk factors for exclusion

Children in care are another group of young people disproportionately at risk of exclusion from school. A child living in a children's home is eighty times more likely to be excluded from school than a child living with his or her family (Firth & Horrocks 1996:76). Low expectations and demands on the part of the care giver (local authority) are often cited by the young people in question as reasons behind this (Firth & Horrocks 1996:85).

School age pregnancy/young mothers is another group at risk of exclusion, as well as pupils who have English as an additional language (Booth 1996). These are both different types of exclusion from fixed term and permanent. According to Booth, pregnant girls commonly attend referral units or withdraw from the education system altogether, by which they experience exclusion "by default" (Booth 1996:33). In a similar way, pupils who have

English as an additional language are excluded by being placed in low sets and are often denied certain parts of the curriculum (Booth 1996: 33-34).

Additionally, an in-depth study revealed that exclusion was associated with factors such as:

- *“poor acquisition of basic skills, particularly literacy*
- *Limited aspirations and opportunities*
- *Poverty*
- *Family difficulties*
- *Poor relationships with other pupils, parents or teachers*
- *Pressure from other pupils to behave in ways likely to lead to conflict with authority” (Kyriacou 2003:58)*

With many of these being prevalent, it explains why exclusion from school is such a current and pertinent issue.

2.4 Consequences of exclusion

Having established what the risk factors are for exclusion, it is necessary to focus on the implications for young people at risk of exclusion.

Exclusion, in its broadest sense, is defined as “being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society” (Macrae et al. 2003:88-9). Put more simply, “exclusion implies rejection” (Kyriacou 2003:55).

Looking at a school community, it is clear that pupils who are either excluded or at risk of being excluded are likely to feel rejected and that they do not belong to the community.

Wilson (2004) explains that “social networks also influence connectedness. The larger a

student's network of friends, the stronger his/her connection will be to school" (Wilson 2004: 298). In fact, this idea of belonging and being accepted is paramount to engaging successfully at school. Osterman (2000) notes, "being accepted, included or welcomed leads to positive emotions such as happiness, elation, contentment and calm, while being rejected, excluded or ignored leads to often intense negative feelings of anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy and loneliness" (Osterman 2000:37) and can thus negatively influence feelings towards school.

Chavis and Wandersman (1990) discuss the importance of feeling accepted and feeling a sense of community as something which creates a positive influence on people's perception of their environment and engagement with their surroundings (Chavis & Wandersman 1990: 67). Conversely, if someone is excluded then they do not experience positive feelings/perceptions concerning their surroundings. Communities rely on people engaging in civic participation and identifying with community in a positive way. This has been termed as social capital (Morrow: 2001: 38) whereby people actively engage in community and invest time and personal interest in it to propel it forward. The more a person feels excluded, the less they will identify with community identity, and the less they will engage in civic participation (Morrow 2001). This leads to a breakdown in social capital, citizenship and identification with others in the community.

Osterman (2000) explains the link between lacking belonging and disruptive behaviour:

Rejection or the sense of exclusion or estrangement from the group is consistently associated with behavioural problems in the classroom (either aggression or withdrawal), lower interest in school, lower achievement and dropout (p. 343).

When pupils feel a lack of belonging their self esteem is directly affected (Ryan, Stiller & Lynch 1994). This has implications beyond the school community as low self esteem is proven to be linked to at-risk behaviours including alcohol, tobacco, drug use, depression,

suicide, violence including using weapons, early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy and poor peer relationships (McNeely & Falci 2004:290; King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan 2002:294).

Furthermore, the link between exclusion from school and criminality is also widely accepted. A survey of young offenders in 1996 by the Audit Commission shows that “42 per cent had been excluded from school” (Vulliamy & Webb 2000). This is further shown by Graham and Bowling’s survey (1995) where they found that “almost all boys and nearly two-thirds of girls excluded from school admitted some type of offence” (Vulliamy and Webb 2000:121).

Stirling points out that as well as this social degeneration and link to crime, the stress it places on the family unit could cause family breakdown and result in more young people being put into care (Stirling 1996:60). Thus, exclusion from school often predicts a route to long term social exclusion, offending and criminality. It paints a very bleak picture for those young people at risk of exclusion.

Yet, whilst there is a lot of research to suggest this bleak outlook for young people at risk of exclusion, there is less on what pupils themselves see as factors compromising their engagement at school which could help understand what could minimise these risks for them.

2.5 Pupil voice

Asking young people at risk of exclusion from school their views on what compromises their engagement at school could not only be revealing and insightful, but is a basic human right to which they are entitled. Children should be given the right to express their views

freely in all matters affecting them and opportunities should be provided for the child to be heard regarding these views (UN 1990).

In reality, children and young people experience little opportunity to express their views in school in matters affecting their lives. Instead, the education system regards them as children and all decisions regarding them are made by adults in authority, be it teachers or parents (Marshall 1996). In fact, schools operate predominantly in an “adult-centred framework with little impact on the status of young people” (Rose and Shevlin 1993:156). As Hamill and Boyd (2002a) note, “many young people remain silent and are not in a position to influence policies and practice that shape their lives” (Hamill & Boyd 2002a:111).

There has, however, been an increased interest in listening to young people’s voices from 2002 when the government began to seek the views of young people (Riley & Docking 2004). Importantly, for this discussion, it was in the same year that the DfES sought the views of young people from ethnic groups who were at risk of under-achieving (Riley & Docking 2004:166). This was an important step for listening to pupil voice as marginalised young people were given the opportunity to express their views on a significant scale. Around the same time, Riley and Docking (2004) point out, initiatives emerged at school level to promote confidence in student voice through introducing citizenship into the National Curriculum and proposals in 2002 to “consult pupils in Ofsted inspections” (Riley and Docking 2004:166)

However, Hamill and Boyd (2002a) suggest that these initiatives might not be enough for the types of pupils at risk of exclusion as the young person concerned is often a “vulnerable, unhappy individual who finds it difficult to communicate his/her feelings, let alone exercise their rights to participate in the decision making process” (Hamill and Boyd 2002a:111). Bond (2006) confirms the difficulty pupils with social, emotional, and

behavioural needs, in particular, have with trusting authority as well as having difficulty in expressing their feelings (Bond 2006). It is therefore necessary to deal with pupil voice in a sensitive manner, yet still vital as it is important that “schools should reflect the democratic society at large” (Flutter & Rudduck 2004:135).

In fact, those young people who are vulnerable and marginalised not only deserve a voice as their basic human right, but also have the potential to shed light onto why they find the education system difficult to cope with in a way that perhaps no one else could. Indeed, they may well be the only ones who can illuminate this fact and have the potential to help teaching staff shape things differently to bring a true reduction in exclusion and less disaffection in the classroom. It is, therefore, vital to listen to these young people as they “reveal the ways in which the education system operates so as to create difficulty for some of its students” (Pomeroy 1999:466).

Pupils, therefore have the possibility of being “catalysts for school-wide change” (McIntyre, Pedder & Rudduck 2005:156). Yet, this is only possible if schools listen to what McIntyre et al. term both the “comfortable” and “uncomfortable learnings”. In order for pupil voice to be significant, schools need to be open to hearing both praise and criticism and using it constructively as a means of shaping the future. Only then, will pupil voice have an impact. In order to explore this further I will now review some of the recent research conducted with pupils who have been excluded from school to understand some of the contributing factors to their exclusion.

2.5.1 Pupil “Learnings”

Various themes stand out from research conducted with pupils who have been excluded. Many young people considered their relationship with adults in school to be a contributing factor to their exclusion (Pomeroy 1999). This was due to staff not listening to them,

feeling victimised by staff and feeling that there was an unequal power relationship in the classroom (Pomeroy 1999, Hamill and Boyd 2002a, Lumby & Morrison 2009, Munn et al. 2000).

Pupils who had been excluded felt that they were labelled by teachers as “thick”, “stupid” and “not wanted in school” (Riley & Docking 2004:168). They felt other pupils were held in higher esteem by the teaching staff and that they occupied the lower position in the classroom hierarchy (Pomeroy 1999:475). This has the potential to lead to self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the young people meet the low expectations that they think the teachers have of them, thus leading to their exclusion (Brophy 1983). This is obviously bound up in feelings of low self-esteem which also is considered to contribute to disengagement and exclusion (Ryan et al. 1994, Cullingford & Morrison 1996).

Where teachers were considered to have all of the power in the classroom, the excluded pupils felt it caused them to disengage (Lumby & Morrison 2009). Being treated as an adult, on the other hand, was valued by excluded pupils and has been shown to increase engagement (Lumby & Morrison 2009). Recognising pupils’ “non-child status” was considered important in increasing engagement as well (Pomeroy 1999).

Thus, teachers who built a relationship with pupils beyond the initial teacher-pupil relationship were considered to be influential in excluded pupils’ lives (Pomeroy 1999) as well as having the power to directly increase pupil engagement and achievement (Goodenow 1993).

Assuming pupils’ perspectives (Pomeroy 1999), using familiar language and context (McIntyre et al. 2005) and the use of humour (Lumby & Morrison 2009) were considered to be useful in helping pupils engage in the classroom. Building relationships outside of the

classroom through residential trips and activities was thought to be a good way of encouraging this (Riley, Ellis, Weinstock, Tarrant & Hallmond 2006:28).

Making the curriculum relevant was also deemed to be important in increasing excluded pupils' engagement. Hamill and Boyd (2002a) state that "a relevant curriculum is both a preventative and interventive measure in relation to disruptive behaviour" (Hamill & Boyd 2002a: 154). In fact, an engaging curriculum can directly influence pupils' engagement and participation (Ennis 1995: 453, Brandt 1995). In reality, many excluded young people discussed a dull, irrelevant curriculum which left them bored and disengaged thus contributing to behaviour which resulted in their exclusion (Hamill and Boyd 2002a, Pomeroy 1999, Munn et al. 2000, Whitehead & Clough 2004, Brandt 1995).

2.6 Reasons for this study

Having defined and considered exclusion from school in context, the risk factors and consequences of exclusion, as well as the importance of pupil voice and recent research conducted regarding this, it points to an area of research which would be interesting to explore. The majority of literature looks closely at those who have been excluded and their experiences of school. The attitudes of those at risk of exclusion who are currently experiencing marginalisation in school are not widely researched. The importance of this particular study is already apparent as it could throw light onto how to improve things in school for those who do not 'fit' and help teachers, school leadership and local authorities make significant changes whilst they are still at school potentially keeping them from exclusion and thus long term social exclusion. Finding out the opinions of pupils at school could create a new understanding of how to meet their needs. By looking specifically at attitudes pupils at risk of exclusion have towards school regarding educational value and

atmosphere/culture of school community whilst examining whether there are differences depending on the number and lengths of exclusions, family background, gender and reasons for exclusions, as well as looking at enablers that could minimise their risk of exclusion, I propose that it will create some rich data that will shed new light on the opinions of disaffected and vulnerable young people and things that could keep them in school.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Objectives

The study has three main research questions which aim to explore the attitudes which pupils at risk of exclusion hold in relation to school. These were:

1. What attitudes do pupils at risk of exclusion have towards school in terms of a) educational value and b) atmosphere/culture of school community? Do differences exist in terms of pupil characteristics/ background?
2. What do pupils at risk of exclusions perceive to be barriers to their learning and participation in school, with particular reference to:
 - a) attendance
 - b) active participation
 - c) achievement
3. What do the pupils perceive to be positive influences within school or potential enablers that could prevent or reduce their exclusion?

The first research question is an overarching one which intends to capture an overview of pupils' feelings towards school. This will explore whether differences do exist in pupils' attitudes, in terms of a number of background characteristics, including gender, family background, and history of exclusions from school. No explicit hypotheses around the ways in which pupils' views may (or may not) vary have been formulated; this research question is intended as an exploratory investigation of pupil attitudes and potential variations in these.

The second question focuses much more specifically on concrete barriers, which the young people experience, in an attempt to understand and illuminate what they find difficult at school.

Thirdly, the last question focuses on specific potential 'enablers' that could potentially improve the participants' experiences of, and engagement with, school.

This chapter will firstly address specific issues of conducting research with children and young people. I will thereafter outline the research strategy employed for this particular research project. Lastly I will describe and justify the choice of methods for this project, taking into careful consideration its limitations and benefits.

3.2 Research with children

Children have historically been excluded from large scale studies and it has often been adult respondents who have commented on children's lives on their behalf. It is, in fact, only recently with a new demand that children should become "actors in their own right" that they have more frequently been included as respondents in research about the matters which affect them such as education (Scott 2008: 87).

Children can be extremely valuable as respondents in structured and unstructured surveys such as interviews or questionnaires (Scott 2008: 88). They are able to give insight to a world that adults cannot access without them. When using children as respondents, however, it is important to take their age and cognitive ability into consideration and ensure appropriate methodology such as level of language and comprehension. Children's cognitive ability does increase with age. Piaget's four-stage cognitive development theory asserts that children aged 7-12 employ "concrete operational thought" which means they are able to "think in relative terms" whilst "still dependent on concrete experiences of events and objects rather than abstract or hypothetical ones" (Greig & Taylor 1999: 29). Once children are 12 years and older they adopt "formal operational thought" which means they are "capable of formal logic and abstract thinking. They can imagine

possibilities and hypothesise about relationships” (Greig & Taylor 1999: 29). In this sample the children are aged between 11 and 16 years old and thus, by this age their cognitive ability is more developed and it is considered that they are able to make a valid contribution particularly in a qualitative format (Scott 2008:90). It is clear, however, that an 11 year old and a 16 year old are likely to have different cognitive abilities and in order for the interview schedule to be inclusive the questions needed to be set so that all of the participants could access their meaning and respond to them. Equally, it was important and significant to take into consideration the fact the participants identified were at risk of exclusion and as such may have weak literacy and comprehension skills (Kyriacou 2003:58). In the sample selected there were pupils with cognitive learning difficulties and with emotional and social difficulties. This meant the questions needed to meet their level of understanding and interaction and not be too complex. I will elaborate further on how this was done when discussing the research tools later in the chapter.

In a setting where children’s voices are seldom heard, it is believed that this child-centred research can play a significant and enlightening role. This type of research can potentially illustrate the ways in which the adult-centred education system “operates so as to create difficulty for some of its students” (Pomeroy 1999: 446).

3.3 Research Strategy

Given that the rationale behind this study was to discover what the attitudes of young people at risk of exclusion were in relation to their school experience, the important focus in collecting data was to listen to their voice and give them an opportunity to express their views. It was considered necessary, therefore, to obtain comprehensive detailed data encouraging the young people to be as open and articulate as possible. Thus, a qualitative

approach seemed most suitable as a research strategy. Newby states, "Qualitative research deals much more with the processes that drive behaviour and the experiences of life" (Newby 2010: 92). Exclusion from school is a complex and intricate social situation and a qualitative approach, which is "soft, descriptive and concerned with how and why things happen as they do", was an appropriate choice (Newby, 2010: 116). The importance of pupil voice cannot be underestimated in this research study and choosing to use a qualitative approach meant the researcher was able to gather the pupils' attitudes and views in depth to produce "thick descriptions" which give an insight into "real life" for the young people concerned (Geertz 1973; Denscombe 2007: 312).

Having outlined why a qualitative approach was chosen as a research strategy, I will now discuss which research method was chosen as well as justifying its choice. Given the desire to give young people a voice, the most appropriate method available was that of the interview. Moser and Kalton describe interviews as "a conversation between interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent" (Moser & Kalton 1971: 27). The idea of a conversation between interviewer and respondent seemed best suited so that the interviewer could elicit information from the young people about their experience of exclusion and thus could shed light on things they feel might reduce that. Additionally, the interview in qualitative research is particularly helpful for "gathering facts; accessing beliefs about facts; identifying feelings and motives; commenting on the standards of actions (what could be done about situations); exploring present or previous behaviour; eliciting reasons and explanations" (Cohen, Manion, Morrison 2007:182). Thus the interview was deemed wholly appropriate in this study as a tool to understand feelings and motives from the young people about their relationship with school as well as eliciting reasons and explanations as to why the relationships is as it is.

As pupils in this sample held specific insight into exclusion from school that others could not, as they were the ones experiencing it (or being at risk from experiencing it), the interview tool meant that the interviewer could gain understanding into these issues (Denscombe 2007: 175).

It was decided that a semi-structured interview was the most appropriate methodological tool due to the flexibility that the approach held. This meant the young people could “make digressions and expansions” on matters that might not have been included in a structured schedule (Cohen et al. 2007: 182) as well as allowing the interviewer to probe further into interesting and insightful topics in order to provide a richer and ‘thicker’ data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the necessity of obtaining “thick” data in a qualitative research project in order to increase reliability by obtaining a “base of information” that anyone else interested in a similar study can start from (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 124-5). Bryman (2008) also argues how important thick data is in providing reliability for a study. I will elaborate further on the importance of reliability towards the end of the chapter.

By using semi-structured interviews, it was felt that the respondents would be free to discuss things they considered important. Additionally, it gave me as the interviewer the opportunity to further investigate interesting topics further which arose spontaneously in the interviews. Considering the typical characteristics of pupils at risk of exclusion (such as poor literacy and numeracy skills (Kyriacou 2003:58) as well as difficult and sensitive family backgrounds (Munn et al. 2000)) it also was decided that this was the most appropriate form of gathering data as the interviewer could explore the delicate nature of the topic of exclusion with sensitivity and draw out the most important issues for the young people.

Limitations of using this form of data collection were considered carefully. Given the demands on time of collecting and analysing qualitative data it is usually necessary to have a much smaller sample than a quantitative approach would allow. Additionally, in

qualitative data the geographical constraints are much more extensive and limit the research in terms of location (Denscombe 2007). This means that the results would be on a much smaller scale than a quantitative method would allow. With the information gathered being specific to one location and a relatively small sample, it means that there will be a limited transferability of findings. This will be discussed in depth towards the end of the chapter.

The benefit of the research being limited to one location and on a small scale, however, is that it can provide important, detailed and 'thick' information for the specific locality. Thus, in limiting the research to a more concentrated locality instead of a less concentrated total group distributed across many locations, it was able to create a fuller picture of young people's experience. The intention behind this was to gain many insights from looking at an individual case that could have wider implications rather than to gain few insights from widespread data collection. In other words the "aim is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular". (Denscombe 2007: 36). The school chosen as the case study school was known to me by the fact that I worked there and as such was not only easily accessible but also considered to be a suitable location. In this instance the school chosen was selected as the case study because of its recent focus on inclusion. Five years ago the school management had identified high levels of fixed term exclusions as a problem and had since been looking at strategies to reduce this. In 2007 the school, partnered with a charity, introduced an inclusion project for those pupils who were identified as being at risk of exclusion. I was employed as an inclusion worker and ran one-to-one and small group sessions for those at risk of exclusion. These sessions covered the development of behavioural, emotional and social skills as well as curriculum work. The school also changed the focus of behaviour workers to Behaviour for Learning Mentors who worked in a much more proactive role than the previous reactionary one. In 2009, a family worker was employed to develop the inclusion work and liaise between school and families to try and

increase attendance and reduce exclusion. Given the focus on exclusion and inclusion it was deemed an appropriate setting to determine what the young people at risk of exclusion thought.

3.4 Research Instruments

3.4.1 The interview schedule

The interview schedule consisted of three main sections which aimed to address the three main research questions.

Section A *What attitudes do pupils at risk of exclusion have towards school in terms of a) education value and b) atmosphere and culture* was then split into thematic sections with questions based on educational value and atmosphere and culture.

Section B *What do pupils perceive to be barriers to learning in terms of a) attendance b) active participation and c) achievement* followed the three sub-themes where the questions focused on attendance, active participation and achievement.

Section C solely addressed the question *'What do the pupils perceive to be positive influences/enablers that could prevent/reduce their exclusion?'* All of the questions in this section were focused on answering this question.

The breakdown of the interview schedule is depicted in the following table:

Table 1: Interview Schedule

Number	Description of Items	Thematic Domains
<i>Section A</i>		
1-3	General perception of school	Atmosphere and culture
4-6	Motivation for going to school	Atmosphere and culture
7-9	Quality of education	Educational Value
10-11	Pupils' self esteem and worth	Educational Value
12-13	Teacher/Pupil care	Educational Value
14-18	Quality of lessons	Educational Value
19-22	Pastoral support	Atmosphere and culture
23-27	Belonging	Atmosphere and culture
28-31	Personal investment in school	Atmosphere and culture
32	School as a democracy	Atmosphere and culture
<i>Section B</i>		
1-2	General barriers	Barriers
3-8	Truancy and reasons	Attendance
9-12	Exclusion	Attendance
13-15	Engaging lessons	Active participation
16-17	Influences from teachers/peers	Active participation
18	Sense of achievement	Achievement
19-22	Future ambitions	Achievement
<i>Section C</i>		
1-2	General positive enablers	Enablers
3-4	Things to increase motivation	Enablers
5-6	Perfect lessons/teachers	Enablers
7-9	Belonging and taking pride	Enablers
10-12	Increasing achievement	Enablers
13-15	Implementing changes	Enablers

As the interviews were being held with children, the setting for the interviews was given particular consideration in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible so that they felt able to be more forthcoming with their answers. The interviews were held in an onsite

youth club/cafe bar which young people use at lunchtimes to buy drinks and snacks and spend time with their friends. It is run by a charity (the school's community partner) and is viewed as a less threatening environment. As an incentive to take part the young people were offered a free drink and a voucher to claim a free hot chocolate at the youth club during a normal lunchtime session. By holding interviews on sofas in a relaxing and familiar environment it gave the pupils chance to be more at ease than in a more formal environment.

All questions were designed using simple language and syntax so that the participants could comprehend as much of their meaning as possible. The majority of questions were open-ended to try to elicit as much information as possible in the typical style of semi-structured interviews. By using a less structured form of questioning it was hoped that the young people would feel more at ease and able to give their true opinions on the subject matter. The more free structure meant the pupils could then be prompted with additional questions if necessary, or a topic could be probed further if of particular interest. In cases where the participant did not understand, or wanted further clarification on the meaning of a question, the question was paraphrased or put into a more tangible and less hypothetical situation/vignette to aid understanding and comprehension. For example when asked what would make the young person want to go to school and they said they did not know, it was substituted with scenario of them lying in bed in the morning and then imagining what would make them want to jump out of bed and run to school. With this scenario, the young people who had previously been unsure were able to think of something important to them which mattered enough to go to school for.

3.4.2 Quantitative (secondary) data

Quantitative data was taken from school records to see whether there was any link between the pupils' answers and the number of exclusions, length of exclusions, family

background, gender and reasons for exclusions. Information was gathered on age, ethnicity, Special Educational Needs (SEN), Free School Meals (FSM), number of exclusions, length of exclusions, Behavioural, Emotional and Social (BES) difficulties and home address. It was considered important to consider these factors for each young person interviewed to see whether any of the groups/factors provided a commonality of response in the questions asked.

The information was collected from the school data system and was as accurate as possible. The limitations of using this system is apparent as it relies on school staff to update the records which is not always reliable. Staff acknowledged that the system was not up to date as some pupils had very few records of behaviour incidents yet were well known to the staff as having regular incidents in school.

Another important reason for collecting this data was to increase the reliability and validity of the qualitative research. By providing additional data from an independent source it can confirm, through triangulation, whether the data collected from the interviews is reliable (Newby 2010: 122). If, for example, a young person said they had never been excluded, but the school data showed that they had been, it could suggest that the rest of that young person's testimony may not be wholly truthful. This triangulation is important in proving the reliability and validity of the study as the data is measured against another source and the pupils' answers are not just taken at face value.

3.5 The pilot study

In order to improve the validity and reliability of the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted in December 2009 with 15 pupils from two secondary schools. The interviews were held at a local youth club with 3 young people each from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. This

provided a comprehensive cross section of ages to ensure that the research tools were appropriate for all ages. The young people chosen for interview were considered to be at risk of exclusion from school and were chosen for interview for this reason to test the research tools as accurately as possible with a population similar to the intended one for the main study. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in every instance to provide consistency in questioning and to test for meaning and understanding.

Whilst conducting the pilot, particular interest was paid to:

- the overall time taken for completion
- consistency in comprehension and understanding
- consistency in answering patterns
- the level of the contents and whether it was appropriate
- sensitivity of research topic

The interviews took between 20 and 45 minutes to complete with the variation being dependent on the participants' answers and willingness to engage with the topic and interviewer. The time each interview took was deemed appropriate and the participants engaged well with the questions. The three sections of the interview schedule meant that there were two natural breaks for the students to stop for a moment and relax and gave them clear markers of how far they had progressed through the questions. For the pupils involved, many of whom, struggle to concentrate or sit still, these breaks were useful and helped them stay on task.

Overall there was consistency in understanding from the participants. Some more complex questions caused problems for some of the pupils but by paraphrasing or giving further explanation the questions became accessible. Question 1 in Section B was one of the questions which some found difficult to understand or answer. Some participants needed

more explanation or the question paraphrased. It was decided, however, to keep the question in its original wording because it drew some interesting and insightful responses from those who did grasp its meaning first-hand. It also became clear for others with slight paraphrasing and they too were able to answer with full understanding (or at least as far as I, as researcher, was aware). This meant that everyone was able to answer the question in the same way and every individual pupil's voice was heard.

Some participants noted the similarity between question 6 in Section A and question 2 in Section B. Both effectively ask the same question about factors that may prevent the participant from wanting to go to school. However, it became clear in the pilot study that asking the question for a second time provided different and more insightful responses from the participants. For example, one boy explained that there was nothing that made him not want to come to school in Section A but outlined bullying as a problem in Section B which kept him from wanting to attend school. Other pupils showed this increased honesty in Section B therefore it was decided to retain the question to discover this deeper data. The contents of the interview schedule appeared to be aimed at the appropriate level. Pupils from Year 7 were able to answer all of the questions, albeit with some extra paraphrasing and prompting at times, whilst pupils in Year 11 were also able to engage positively with the interview schedule.

There was consistency in answering patterns whereby themes emerged from the questions asked. Discussion of teachers and the participants' engagement/relationship with them was a clear example of this.

The sensitivity of the research topic was important to consider. The participants were open and willing to engage in discussions about exclusion and truancy and appeared largely to be keen to share their views. In Section A the first 10 questions were designed to be very simple, to introduce the topic and gather background data. This meant the pupils were able

to answer these questions without any difficulty which helped them feel at ease and relaxed in the interview. It became clear that, once relaxed, the pupils felt more comfortable to elaborate on points which were important to them. Being assured that their answers were to be anonymous also helped in this respect as they felt they could be freer in their response without the fear of any repercussions from teaching staff. I will elaborate on ethical issues in section 3.10 in this chapter.

3.6 Research Setting

Riverton High School is an average sized specialist technology college with circa 1000 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and have English as their first language. According to a 2009 Ofsted report, most students who attend the school live in areas where the social and economic advantage is higher than most, they have a higher average attainment when starting at the school and a low proportion of pupils receiving free school meals. There are also very few looked after children. The school itself is set in a quiet market town in the North of England. It serves pupils from the town but a significant number of pupils travel in on buses from areas of lower socio-economic standing from a nearby city, Tinsbury. This provides a more interesting and complex social make up and cohort than is initially apparent.

3.7 Sampling strategy

For the main study, six young people who were considered to be at risk of exclusion in each year group at the school were identified as potential participants. This was done through a purposive sampling strategy in the “full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 113). Purposive

sampling is a typical feature of qualitative research as it means the researcher can choose the participants who possess particular qualities or features suitable for the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 114). They are, in short, “most likely to produce the most valuable data” (Denscombe 2007: 17).

Participants were therefore identified on the basis of school data which detailed fixed term exclusions and recorded behavioural incidents. In some instances where school data had not been updated or was not showing correct information, participants were identified in conjunction with pastoral staff of the school. In this way a small amount of convenience sampling was also used. Key Stage Managers, Behaviour for Learning Mentors and Learning Mentor highlighted students who were suitable for the study but who did not have correct data recorded about their behaviour incidents and exclusions. There are obvious limitations to using this convenience sampling such as bias or discrimination from the professionals concerned. Given the sometimes unreliable data from schools (as discussed in Chapter 2 whereby internal or unofficial exclusions often go unreported in schools) it was deemed necessary to take the pastoral professionals’ advice. The school appeared to have no record of when pupils were put into isolation or withdrawn internally from lessons and not every behavioural incident was documented. Equally, behaviour resulting in exclusion for one pupil may not have the same outcome for another pupil when family situation/background is taken into account. For this reason the sample selection has not been wholly based on data but with collaboration with the pastoral staff resulting in the most informed and fair sample possible. To minimise the limitation of the sample choice, participants had to meet one of the following criteria before being considered and selected.

The participant must have:

- been referred to the onsite inclusion project
- at least 5 recorded behaviour incidents
- been excluded once if in year 7, twice if in year 8, 3 or more times if in Years 9, 10 and 11.
- been recommended by staff (if they had more known behaviour incidents in school or exclusions than evident from the school data system)

3.8 Sample

Of the 30 participants 15 live in nearby city, Tinsbury, and travel to Riverton for school. 5 participants receive free school meals, 7 have Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties, 4 have learning difficulties ranging from moderate to severe. 12 of the participants have Early Years Action and one has School Action Plus. 6 of the participants are female. One is a looked after child. 22 are of White British origin whilst there are two Other Asians, one Black African, one White Black Caribbean, one White Asian, one Black Caribbean, one Other Pakistani, and one Any Other Black background.

The tables show some of this information below (See Appendix 1 for further information):

Table 2: Year 7 Pupil Demographics

Name	Sex	Address	Ethnic origin	FSM	SEN	BES difficulties	Other	No. of Behaviour Incidents	No. of Exclusions
Anna	F	Riverton	White British	No	School Action +	Severe learning difficulties	LAC	2	0
Freya	F	Tinsbury	Black African	No	Early Years action	N/A	First Language Shona	1	4
Nicole	F	Tinsbury	White British	No	Early years action	Moderate learning difficulty	N/A	9	1
Harley	M	Riverton	White British	No	Early Years action +	BES difficulties	ADHD	0	0
Jacob	M	Riverton	White British	No	Early years action +	N/A	Dyslexic	0	0
Tom	M	Tinsbury	White Black Caribbean	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	0

Table 3: Year 8 Pupil Demographics

Name	Sex	Address	Ethnic origin	FSM	SEN	BES difficulties	Other	No. of Behaviour Incidents	No. of Exclusions
Ed	M	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	13	1
Sam	M	Tinsbury	Other Asian	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0
Matty	M	Tinsbury	White British	Yes	N/A	N/A	Temp staying with father	14	0
Jamie	M	Tinsbury	Other Asian	No	N/A	N/A	Home language Punjabi	0	0
Pippa	F	Tinsbury	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0
Jason	M	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	3

Table 4: Year 9 Pupil Demographics

Name	Sex	Address	Ethnic origin	FSM	SEN	BES difficulties	Other	No. of Behaviour Incidents	No. of Exclusions
Anthony	M	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	1
Jonny	M	Tinsbury	White Asian	Yes	Early Years Action +	BES difficulties	N/A	3	3
Jack	M	Tinsbury	White British	No	Early Years Action +	BES difficulties	Attachment disorder	8	0
Kieran	M	Tinsbury	Black Caribbean	No	Early Years Action	BES difficulties	N/A	11	7
Max	M	Riverton	Other Pakistani	Yes	Early Years Action	BES difficulties	N/A	10	4
Tim	M	Tinsbury	Any other black origin	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	7	2

Table 5: Year 10 Pupils Demographics

Name	Sex	Address	Ethnic origin	FSM	SEN	BES difficulties	Other	No. of Behaviour Incidents	No. of Exclusions
Carla	F	Riverton	White British	No	Early Years action +	Moderate Learning difficulties	Literacy weak, attendance problematic	15	6
David	M	Tinsbury	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	1
George	M	Riverton	White British	No	Early Years action +	Severe BES difficulties	Dual Reg at PRU	10	1
Nick	M	Riverton	White British	No	Early Years action	BES difficulties	Living with grandparents	30	9
Kirsty	F	Tinsbury	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	5
Sarah	F	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	9	1

Table 6: Year 11 Pupil Demographics

Name	Sex	Address	Ethnic origin	FSM	SEN	BES difficulties	Other	No. of Behaviour Incidents	No. of Exclusions
Robbie	M	Tinsbury	White British	Yes	N/A	Moderate learning difficulty	Literacy weak	2	3
Hayley	F	Riverton	White British	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2
Toby	M	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	2
Luke	M	Tinsbury	White British	No	N/A	N/A	Dual reg at offsite provision	2	5
Lewis	M	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	Literacy/Numeracy weak	2	7
Emma	F	Riverton	White British	No	N/A	N/A	CAHMS involvement	10	3

3.9 Reliability and Validity

Reliability in the research project is paramount. In order to judge the reliability of any project it is necessary to consider, first of all, the limitations of the research methods.

Firstly a qualitative approach is open to criticism as it can be seen as being “too subjective and impressionistic” (Bryman 2008: 391). In order to make sure the qualitative approach in this study was robust and to reduce any limitations, it was ensured that the research was as widely researched as possible and that it was recorded as accurately as possible (Bogdan & Biklen 1992: 48). The choice of research tools and their limitations were also considered carefully.

The interview approach, although very useful for providing rich data can also be problematic. As mentioned previously, the very nature of the discussion about school and exclusion is a sensitive topic and the participants may feel unable to answer some of the questions or edit their answers according to how open or honest they wished to be.

Another noteworthy point is that some participants may feel intimidated or concerned about talking candidly to an adult about school and could see the adult as an authority/teacher figure. This again could question the integrity of response. My role as the interviewer could also be a concern in this instance as I had worked in the setting for three years as an Inclusion worker which could bias how the young people saw me as a teacher figure/adult in authority in the location.

To counter some of the aforementioned limitations, it was ensured that the respondents were made to feel as relaxed as possible with the knowledge that they could withdraw from the study at any point. In this way, if they felt unable to answer a question they could withdraw instead of feeling forced to give an answer or indeed make up an answer instead. Prior to starting, the respondents were given the option whether to participate with full understanding that they did not have to. The interviews were also conducted in a familiar environment in a relaxed manner so the respondents felt at ease. This was with the intention of minimising the limitation of an adult/authority figure asking the questions.

A different approach such as using a questionnaire could have eliminated some of these concerns and guaranteed more freedom of response due to anonymity. However, this would have reduced the richness of response and eradicated any possibility of further discussion or probing into particularly enlightening data. For this reason the semi-structured interview was chosen over a questionnaire approach.

Secondly, the choice of researching a case study needs to be considered. Case studies are incredibly insightful due to the extent of detail and level of research they produce. There are important limitations to consider; the greatest being transferability and generalisation (Dencombe 2007: 43) and the fact that it is not possible to make assumptions that the findings from the data will apply to a wider setting. This means that the experiences of young people at risk of exclusion in this study will not necessarily be the experience of a

young person at risk of exclusion elsewhere. The common barriers identified and enablers suggested cannot be simply generalised for all pupils at risk of exclusion. In order to try to reduce this limitation and make this case study as reliable as possible so that wider conclusions can be drawn it is important to be aware that this case study is in the first instance specific to the school it is dealing with. By careful and thorough analysis it may then be possible to suggest themes which have wider significance and this will be done by ensuring themes emerge from many of the respondents as well as comparing it to the previous literature.

Validity and credibility in research is essential whether the study is based on a qualitative or quantitative research. (Silverman 2000, 2006). There are two main areas to consider with regards to validity. These are internal and external validity. Firstly, internal validity is concerned with the accuracy of the data collected. The information gathered must be true and reliable for the study to be considered convincing. External validity, on the other hand concerns itself with the validity of the data for a wider population. In other words it questions whether the findings can be representative of a wider audience. This is where the study can make a contribution to a wider field. Cohen et al. discuss this "transferability" as the possibility "to assess the typicality of participants and settings to identify possible comparison groups and to indicate how data could translate into different settings and cultures" (Cohen et al. 2007: 137).

In this study the internal validity was tested to see how accurate the research instrument was by first and foremost conducting a pilot study. This enabled the researcher to check whether the research tool actually gathered the information it intended to measure and thus whether it was "neutral in its effect and consistent across multiple occasions of its use" (Denscombe 2007: 296). A further way of ensuring validity was to use triangulation.

This additional source of data allows the data to be verified and thus the reliability and credibility of the study to be increased.

It is harder to address the external validity of the research due to the nature of the research being a case study, concerned with one specific location and with a relatively small sample typical of small case study and qualitative research. Initially the findings of this study can only be generalised for the chosen setting, people and situation (Bogdan and Biklen 1992). As Lincoln and Guba discuss, however, in qualitative small scale research there is the idea of “transferability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the research is a small scale and specific study, it does become possible to think about the findings relating to “similar students in similar schools/settings” (Denscombe 2007: 299). It is possible, then, that the attitudes of the participants in this study could suggest how other participants may respond in similar locations, contexts and situations. This, in conjunction with the previous literature and research, could show how the results have validity for a wider population. By ensuring the ‘thickness’ of data, this can serve to increase the reliability and transferability of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to “thick description as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux” (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 378). This means that transferability is possible by suggesting that similar pupils in a school and location with similar characteristics (as described earlier in this chapter) could experience similar views. This is what Bryman identifies as “moderatum generalisation” whereby conclusions may be drawn about how similar groups experiencing similar circumstances may respond to questions about school and barriers to learning (Bryman 2008: 392).

In terms of reliability in the administration of the research methods, the pilot study was conducted with participants of a similar nature and was done by the same interviewer with the same questions as the initial starting point for the semi-structured interviews. Special

attention was given to the phrasing and use of language to determine whether the questions held the appropriate meaning for the respondents concerned.

3.10 Ethics

It is vital that a research project is conducted in an ethical manner. The principles outlined by Denscombe (2007: 143-145) illustrate measures to ensure this:

- “The interest of participants should be protected”
- “Researchers should avoid deception or misrepresentation”
- “Participants should give informed consent”

Since the respondents were children and young people, particular notice was taken to protect their interests. At all times, the sensitive nature of the study was recognised and particular attention was given to omit any questions which might cause anxiety or distress to the young person concerned. In this way the interests of the participants were protected. Given the sensitive nature of the discussion about exclusion and touching on personal information that they respondent may have found embarrassing or difficult to talk about, they were told they could stop at any point if they wanted to. Anonymity was also an important consideration, and the participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected in order to encourage them to be as open and honest as possible to make the data collected more reliable. For this reason, all of the names used in this study have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Participants were invited to a separate room to take part in the study. This was in an onsite youth club style provision, which although on school site is seen as a more relaxed environment and away from a typical ‘classroom’ and school environment. It was in a place that the participants had been before and felt comfortable with. This meant the

participants were away from teaching staff and other pupils to enable them to be honest about their feelings and give them chance to discuss things without worry of being told off or getting into trouble; thus further protecting their interests.

For transcription purposes the interviews were recorded and permission for this was granted by the young person before this happened. They were assured that the recordings would only be heard by the researcher and then transcribed. There would be no further use for the recordings.

In accordance with principle 2, great care was taken to ensure that there was no deception or misrepresentation on the part of the researcher. Bryman highlights the importance of this “authenticity” on the part of the researcher which not only ensures accurate findings but also lifts the quality and credibility of the study itself (Bryman 2008: 379).

Before any participant agreed to take part in the research they were informed about the purpose of it. This was done by giving them a letter which was read through with them and was something they could take away with them (see Appendix 2). They were also informed that they could withdraw from the research at any stage without having to explain why.

The respondent was then given the option to participate or not. This meant that all respondents had given informed consent (as outlined in principle 3). All of this was done in knowledge and agreement from the school staff who had granted permission for the young people to take part acting as a responsible adult on behalf of the young person.

3.11 Thematic division of findings chapters

In this study six major themes are identified and are discussed in three findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5 & 6). In Chapter 4, I will examine pupil-teacher relationships and discipline as barriers to young people’s engagement and as potential facilitators. Chapter 5 discusses

curriculum, physical surroundings and the structural organisation of the school day, whilst Chapter 6 focuses on social relationships. In each chapter I will discuss how pupils' attitudes to school emerge throughout the themes, as well as analysing specific barriers to learning and potential enablers that the respondents identified within each theme.

CHAPTER 4: Pupil-Teacher Relationship and Discipline

This study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What attitudes do pupils at risk of exclusion have towards school in terms of a) educational value and b) atmosphere/culture of school community? Do differences exist in terms of pupil characteristics/ background?
2. What do pupils at risk of exclusions perceive to be barriers to their learning and participation in school, with particular reference to:
 - a) attendance
 - b) active participation
 - c) achievement
3. What do the pupils perceive to be positive influences within school or potential enablers that could prevent or reduce their exclusion?

In the following chapters, I will discuss the findings in terms of the six main themes which emerged from the interview data analysis in order to answer the overarching research questions. In this chapter, I will focus in particular on pupil-teacher relationship and discipline as specific barriers and potential enablers for young people as well as looking at their overall attitudes to school as a result of these.

4.1 Pupil-Teacher Relationship

4.1.1 Teacher's role

An overwhelming number of pupils interviewed referred to their teachers as being one of the worst things about school. This was particularly true for those in Year 9, 10 and 11 who talked about 'boring teachers' and how 'when teachers are boring I don't learn'. For younger pupils it was a more specific concern with a particular teacher:

'Umm Geography because Mr Michaels is really strict' Freya, Year 7

'Mr Allen because he tells...because sometimes he gets really cross' Jacob, Year 7

The young people interviewed gave high place to the teacher's role in relation to their experience of school. If teachers are perceived to be the worst thing about school, it implies that they are a powerful force that shapes a child's experience at school; they have the potential to be the worst thing but conversely also have the potential to be the best thing about school too. Riley et al. (2006) noted, 'The importance of interplay between pupils and school staff cannot be underestimated, particularly for pupils on the margins' (Riley et al. 2006: 28). This means a powerful enabler in reducing pupil exclusion is teacher and pupil relationships. In order to understand how critical this enabler is, I will first concentrate on the barriers the young people considered to be significant regarding their pupil-teacher relationships and then consider how teachers can have a positive influence on young people and reduce their exclusion rates.

4.1.2 Reputation

A number of young people referred to being labelled with a bad reputation by certain teachers with little chance of changing this perception of them:

'He doesn't give people a chance and if you've been bad once he won't forgive you ever and just keep treating you the same.' Anthony, Year 9

There is a complex relationship here. The young person concerned, expects a higher moral and mature understanding from the teacher but is faced with a lack of compassion or belief that they can be good. This supports Lumby and Morrison's findings as argued in Chapter 2 where they note an application of asymmetrical rules whereby teachers do not have to follow the rules they impose on the pupils (Lumby & Morrison 2009: 590). Teachers can, for example, be rude and disrespectful to pupils with little or no consequence but they

expect respect and cooperation from the pupil at all times. If a teacher has been disrespectful to a pupil then the pupil is expected to behave in a cooperative manner. Pupils in this sample do not believe they have experienced the same treatment in return. If they have been bad once then they perceive that they receive a lack of respect in the future. Lumby & Morrison note that this “asymmetrical imposition of rules is ‘not supportive of learning’” and that in contrast where a more equal relationship between pupil and teacher is maintained, there is a more successful engagement with learning (Lumby & Morrison 2009: 590).

This is shown to have further implications for Max in Year 9 who is not only unable to gain ‘forgiveness’ from one teacher, but is forced to explain his behaviour before he has even met staff:

‘like if a new teacher comes she already knows everything about me...like I think I already told you before about the time when a new teacher came and she called me and she goes, I’ve heard all about you and the stories I’ve heard, if they happen in my lessons you’ll be going to Ms Booth [headteacher] straight away.’

There is a prevalent belief amongst those interviewed that teachers expect a certain type of behaviour from them, as Max further explains:

‘The teachers already know...already think I’m going to be bad in the lessons’

This belief means Max is less likely to engage with his learning, as Goodenow explains, “Students’ perceptions of support, interest and respect they received from their teachers was the most influential single component of belonging and support in terms of association with effort and achievement” (Goodenow 1993: 37).

Luke, Year 11, makes reference to a teacher being ‘against me all of the time’, with Pippa in Year 8 explaining, ‘I just don’t think she really likes me’. In particular, the young people who

had higher levels of exclusions such as Max, Luke, Carla, Nick, Kieran and Lewis made important reference to this idea. It suggests that those who have had a repeated experience of exclusion struggle to cope with the 'bad' reputation in school and it seemingly cultivates a more cynical attitude towards authority, thus hampering educational value as well as the young people's sense of belonging in the school community. This reveals a difficult relationship between pupil and teacher where a "large power distance" is perceived (Lumby & Morrison 2009: 590). The young people in this sample felt like they had to fight to be on an even keel with the teachers, let alone to impress them. This supports Pomeroy's (1999) findings about hierarchy where she discussed the fact the young people feel teachers prefer other children above them. This has serious implications for pupils' self worth and sense of belonging in the classroom. If the pupils feel unwanted or that they are not viewed in the same way as other pupils it can have a direct impact on the amount they participate, the effort they put in and, consequently, their achievement (Goodenow 1993). Riley and Docking (2004) also discuss this feeling of being at the "bottom of the heap" and how it brings into question pupils' own self esteem as they perceive themselves to be rejected by the teachers (Riley & Docking 2004:168).

4.1.3 Scapegoats and Unfair Systems

This perceived barrier of reputation and lack of expectation from the teacher goes hand in hand with two other aspects revealed by the young people, which they perceive to inhibit their full integration and participation in lessons. A number of young people referred to being made to feel like victims or scapegoats. They felt they were the ones who would take the blame for things without thorough investigation from the teaching staff. This is articulated by Jack in Year 9 as he explains:

'If something happens in class it is normally me who gets the blame even though they don't know it's me. Say somebody throws a pen...they'll put me straight in detention without even looking'

Kieran in Year 9 says:

'they don't give you an equal chance to find out all of the facts and find out what's gone wrong and what's gone right'

This supports Hamill and Boyd's findings as discussed in Chapter 2 where they noted that the young people who have been excluded from school felt themselves to be "victims who were picked upon" (Hamill & Boyd 2002a:114). Pupils, in the present study, asserted that they often felt unfairly treated by members of staff who failed to take the time to investigate matters thoroughly or who are quick to condemn these young people:

'She's really mean and like if you do something and you didn't really do it and you just got the blame she'd like believe the other person.' Freya, Year 7

The young people feel a strong sense of injustice about this as they expect to be treated fairly by those in authority. When they are not treated fairly it is perceived to be a large obstacle and barrier to their achievement, enjoyment and participation at school.

'If I do something wrong then she exaggerates and keeps me in isolation for a long time...so I don't learn do I?' Jason, Year 8

The fact that Jason refers to being put in isolation suggests a concrete barrier to his learning in the sense that he is not able to access the lessons and learning as a result of his punishment. When this punishment is believed to be unjust by the young person it appears they have little or no understanding of why they are missing lessons and learning and being

kept apart from their peers and academic progress; clear barriers to attendance, active participation, and achievement and future engagement.

Freya, Year 7, talks about a time when she felt she had been unjustly punished:

'there was a time when I like swore at this boy...well Jonny and Danny did it as well and I got suspended for it when they didn't.'

By being excluded, she missed out on lessons and learning at school. The injustice for her was that she was treated differently to the others. Freya was quick to admit that she had been in the wrong for swearing at this boy. She talked later in the interview about the need for teachers to punish people and maintain boundaries. The injustice for her was that she was treated differently to the others. Her punishment was diminished in some of its meaning by the fact two other people had done the same thing and got away with it. Munn et al. (2000) noted this same problem of pupils feeling "particularly aggrieved when they thought that they had been 'picked on', singled out for serious punishment that was not meted out to others" (Munn et al. 2000:3).

This sense that teachers are unjust or can behave unjustly towards the pupils transcends age and gender. Carla in Year 10 talks about teachers not following the rules laid out in dealing with challenging pupils in the classroom setting:

'They just send you out and that's it but it says on the thing that you get a warning, then a note in your planner, then sent out, then a behaviour call, but they don't do it like that'.

The idea that the teachers do not do what they are supposed to, or what is laid out explicitly in school regulations and/or policy is perceived to be a great injustice.

Anthony, Year 9, confirms this feeling by saying:

'He kicks me out nearly every lesson for hardly doing anything'

Through this, pupils are revealing significant barriers to attendance, participation and achievement whilst showing difficulties they find in relating to the teaching staff and authority. By having a bad reputation and thinking that the teachers expect them to misbehave, the young people think they also have the potential to be used as scapegoats for the class and then treated unjustly. Brophy (1983) argues that teachers' expectations play a direct role in pupils' achievement and behaviour and argues that where teachers have low expectations of pupils a self fulfilling prophecy is apparent and pupils achieve less. In other words, if a pupil is expected to achieve little and misbehave, then they will fulfil that prophecy. Brophy also explains that teachers tended to "maximise achievement in high expectation students, but limit the progress of low expectation students" (Brophy 1983: 644). Pupils at risk of exclusion who perceive themselves as having a bad reputation and low expectations from teachers also have the complexity of self-fulfilling prophecy as a barrier to learning.

The potential for pupils to be used as scapegoats creates a complex three way relationship between pupil, peers and teacher.

'I haven't done something wrong but I get blamed for it 'cos somebody grasses me in and it wasn't even me' Robbie, Year 11

Some pupils at risk of exclusion can think that the teacher prefers to listen to other pupils above them, implying further rejection and links to the aforementioned hierarchy discussed by Pomeroy (1999) as outlined in Chapter 2.

4.1.4 Respect and Attitudes

Having looked at how the pupils feel they are treated, or thought of by the teachers, it is important to look in closer detail at barriers the young people feel there are between the

teacher and pupil. One prominent aspect is the way in which the teacher interacts with the young people. Certain young people talked about a perceived lack of respect shown to them by teaching staff. Jacob in Year 7 expressed how he felt this:

'When you've been naughty in class and they want to tell you off then they don't respect you'

Carla in Year 10 discusses this further. When asked, 'Do the teachers show you respect?' she answered:

'No, because they're supposed to say 'be quiet' and then they go 'shut up'...and then he starts proper shouting for no reason and it gets us all stressed and then he's got a reason to moan about because we start being bad'

She identifies being spoken to disrespectfully as a trigger to the class messing around and then in turn, treating the member of staff disrespectfully. This, prompting a breakdown in the classroom environment, demonstrates a clear barrier to participation and learning.

Lumby and Morrison (2009) state the importance of a respectful equal relationship between pupil and teacher where the "large power distance" is not perceived. They argue how young people flourish in personal responsibility and engagement to learning when treated more as an equal (Lumby & Morrison 2009).

A further point a number of pupils mentioned is the teachers' attitudes themselves:

'If they're in like an angry mood then it's hard to learn because they're always shouting...I don't see the point in that then' Robbie, Year 11

This creates a barrier to learning, as the young people are clearly sensitive to the attitude and mood of the teacher:

'It's just the way like that they might have had a bad last lesson and then take it out on us and it's just the attitude like that which sort of spoils the lesson a bit especially when it's a good lesson that we're doing' Jack, Year 8

The notion that the attitude or mood of teaching staff itself can influence young people's schooling experiences was widely reported by pupils at risk of exclusion as a significant barrier to their involvement and enjoyment in class. Thus, the teacher's mood, according to the young people, can seemingly affect the very participation of the young people in itself. Munn et al. (2000) highlight the need young people have for teachers to be consistent and discuss how teachers moods can affect what happens after an infringement of rules from choosing to ignore it to reporting it directly to the headteacher (Munn et al. 2000:5).

4.1.5 Listening

The final section discussed by the young people under the theme of pupil-teacher relationship whilst looking at barriers that prevent them from learning in terms of attendance, active participation and achievement is the idea of the teacher not listening, not having enough time for them and being too busy:

'Because if you need help then he tells us to just come another day so he wouldn't really be there if you actually need him' Hayley, Year 11

Carla in Year 10 finds this to be a significant barrier and she comments numerous times on this:

'I used to try and ask for help but then she kept ignoring me so then I started being bad in it because they weren't listening' Carla, Year 10

This becomes such an important factor for her that it makes her question coming to school at all:

'When you get up on a morning and you think 'Oh God I don't want to go because you know that they won't listen to you when you try and tell them summat' Carla, Year 10.

This is a clear barrier to enjoyment as well as engagement/achievement for the young people concerned. It was noted in Chapter 2 that being listened to is paramount in students feeling like they have a voice or identity (Hamill & Boyd 2002a, Flutter & Rudduck 2004, McIntyre et al. 2005). Kieran in Year 9 who was on the school council said what would make him feel proud/that he belonged to the school was:

'Like if they actually listened to our ideas and stuff. I'm part of the school council and when me and other members put forward our ideas that aren't much money they don't really do much about it'

Clearly the idea of being listened to is closely linked with the idea of democracy, the idea of belonging and feeling a part of the school community. As Flutter and Rudduck note, "schools should reflect the democratic society at large" (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004:135). For pupils to feel, therefore, that they are not listened to is a serious problem:

'When you put your hand up to ask her 'owt she just says put your hand down'

Nicole, Year 7

'She's the one that never listens at all' Carla, Year 10

Many pupils highlighted teachers being too busy as a reason for them not listening. When considering what puts pupils more at risk of exclusion than others, such as poor literacy skills, family problems (Kyriacou 2003: 58), it could be argued that pupils at risk of exclusion may, in fact, need more of a teacher's time than those who do not. Yet, students in this sample felt they did not receive this:

'If you ask them for help then they say wait a minute because we've got other pupils to look out for' Carla Year 10

'If you go to them after the lesson then they'll speak to you. They're always too busy during the lesson with too many kids in there' Jonny, Year 9

Interestingly both of these young people, mentioned immediately above, have other social and emotional needs. Carla has a very difficult family environment and Jonny and Hayley (quoted at the beginning of this section) receive free school meals, which suggests they come from a lower socio-economic background than some of their peers. There is already a proven link between performance at school, exclusion and those receiving free school meals (Parsons 1999; Macrae et al. 2003: 92-3) and perhaps some of these findings suggest one of the reasons why. It could suggest that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with difficult family problems may need extra support and time from teachers and thus feel the reality of teachers being too busy all the more readily. It may also highlight the importance of teachers knowing about the needs of the pupils in the first place and 'knowing' the pupils (Pomeroy 1999). This will be discussed further over the next few sections.

Robbie in Year 11 (who also receives free school meals) discusses the same idea of teachers being too busy but suggests a potential enabler that would reduce his risk of exclusion:

'They need a supply in every lesson...so they can actually help you with your work...when you need help there's only one teacher to help you do your work so...'

He shows an understanding that the teacher cannot be everywhere at once. Nicole in Year 7 expresses the same sentiment when talking about what she would change to help her achieve more in her lessons:

'Umm like more teachers...cos some of the lessons have helper teachers well all of the lessons should have like one of them so they can help you when you need it'

Extra support in lessons could be one useful strategy for some young people. At this point, then, it would be helpful to look at what potential influences and enablers the young people suggested in terms of the pupil-teacher relationship. If, as argued at the beginning of this chapter that “the importance of the interplay between pupils and school staff cannot be underestimated, particularly for pupils on the margins” (Riley et al. 2006: 28) then the potential for school staff to be a significant enabler for pupils at risk of exclusion is vast. The main areas that pupils discussed as enablers were teachers’ attitudes and engaging teaching but by far, the most overwhelming response was the need for teachers to care for young people in a pastoral way.

4.1.6 Teachers’ Attitudes

Pupil response to teachers’ attitudes was interesting. Whilst the young people had discussed the problems of a negative attitude they were quick to assert that a positive attitude could have a big effect.

'Some teachers...they all look like they've got a face like a smacked backside so just look really sad whereas there are some teachers that look really happy and enjoyable. If they all looked like that, then I think everyone would be alright with them and there wouldn't be any trouble.' Lewis, Year 11

'It would be like...teachers...like...smiling' Freya, Year 7

Teachers, in the pupils’ ideal world, would not only have a good attitude and be positive and smiley but they would also be able to relate to and have a productive relationship with pupils. Riley asserts the need to create “opportunities for pupils and staff to develop meaningful relationships” as being critical in changing pupils from disaffection and

exclusion (Riley et al. 2006:28). Riley's work focused on three aspects including outward bound activities, residential trips as well as self awareness work. These gave staff and pupils the fora to interact differently with each other and build meaningful relationships with each other.

Harley, in Year 7 explained his hopes from staff. They would be:

'Funny. If I said something about them they wouldn't mind. They'd be cool and just have a laugh with you'

This hope, that he could say anything about the teachers and they would not mind is clearly unrealistic, yet the desire for a shared humour is significant. Pupils interviewed by Lumby and Morrison showed being able to 'share humour and enjoyment with each other and with their tutors as liberating and supportive of learning' (Lumby & Morrison 2009: 588).

Thus the notion of a relational and supportive teacher was paramount to the young people in helping them to actively participate, enjoy and engage with lessons.

4.1.7 Pastoral Support

Many young people in the sample, especially those with evident problems at home, expressed the need for pastoral support and saw it not only as important but as a key feature of feeling like they belong or are accepted in school:

For many children with difficulties in the family or community, school can be a safe and supportive refuge. Relationships with teachers can model warm and appropriate adult concern and support (Munn et al. 2000: 95).

Anna, a looked after child, explains what she needs and expects from her teachers:

Int: *'What would make you feel like you belong?'*

Anna: *'Teachers who say, 'How are you doing? What are you doing Anna, what have you done today?' Like the ones who ask me questions'*

This suggests a movement beyond the simple teacher and student relationship. It is not enough for the teacher to simply impart knowledge. The young people require a much deeper and complex relationship. It is as Pomeroy discovered about 'knowing' the pupil (Pomeroy, 1999)

When asked about favourite teachers the majority of reasons why they chose a particular teacher was because they had taken a pastoral interest, or had a stronger relationship with the young person concerned:

'She helps you a lot and she listens' David, Year 10

'When I got into trouble last year he helped me get around it all and get on with something' Nick, Year 10

'I always thought he was a strict man who runs around telling off people but he's human!' Jack, Year 9

'He even helps you with out of school stuff' Jonny, Year 9

'Just because like...he helps me out if I need it and then...like today...one of the teachers I asked for help and he goes...I can't do nothing about it...the computers are all down in the whole school so he's a like...Mr F but when I asked Mr A he goes...quickly go and log on to a computer...get it up and I'll help you with it and we only had 5 minutes left of the lesson' Max, Year 9.

'She's proper kind' Nicole, Year 7

The important thing for these pupils is the need for a wider and more complex relationship with the adult, rather than just one of teaching.

There is a strong parallel here with the recent research done on social pedagogy (Kyriacou et al. 2009, Petrie 2005, Cameron 2007). Principles comprised in social pedagogy are crucial for those at risk of exclusion, yet was not something that was identified in Chapter 2 in previous research into exclusion. Social pedagogy itself is defined as being “actions on the parts of adults to promote the personal development, social education and general well-being of the child alongside or in place of parents in a range of educational and social care settings” (Kyriacou, Ellingsen, Stephens & Sundaram 2009:75). It works with the “whole child and supports their all-round development” (Cameron 2007). It is a term which has held much significance in Europe but has been underestimated in the United Kingdom until recently. Petrie (2005) notes that social pedagogy can “help promote the framing of questions about what the school community desires for its members, beyond raising standards, and beyond schoolification with its subjection of children and staff to a narrow, curriculum-led agenda” (Petrie 2005: 180). Thus, social pedagogy enables professionals to work with pupils in a more holistic way. Smith and Whyte (2007) note how this aligns itself with the 2004 Every Child Matters Agenda and the 2005 Getting it Right for the Every Child (Smith & Whyte 2007: 25).

Kyriacou discusses how although the principles of social pedagogy (those being care and welfare, inclusion, socialisation, academic support and social education) apply to all pupils, ‘the main impetus of social pedagogy concerns how best to offer support to those pupils who because of their circumstances...face problems in meeting their needs at a minimally acceptable level’ (Kyriacou 2009:101). Petrie supports this idea and explains that social pedagogy commonly ‘denotes work with more vulnerable groups in society (Petrie 2005:177). Those at risk of exclusion would certainly fit into this category.

Kyriacou et al. (2009) examine the significance of social pedagogy by comparing approaches across Europe. Norway is highlighted as being particularly interesting as, in

contrast to England where teaching and pastoral care have separate roles, “the two functions are officially regarded as incorporated” (Kyriacou et al. 2009:76). This supports what the young people in this study highlight in wanting teachers who not only teach them but have a much deeper pastoral relationship with them as well.

The young people in this sample suggested various concrete enablers for pastoral support to help them engage better at school and reduce exclusion:

‘Give them a routine thing...like on a morning...don’t go to form but like have a chat with them and see what...how it’s going at home and stuff’ Nick, Year 10

‘I’d be more positive rather than negative all of the time’ Jonny, Year 9

‘I would just get them a learning mentor or something...someone that pushes you forward a bit and get them to have like a one-on-one confession thing where you say what you’ve done wrong and what you’ve done good and help you go forward’

Kieran, Year 9

Ideas of support and a desire for pastoral care are almost ubiquitous but seem to resonate most with those who have had a high number of exclusions and seem to be on the periphery of the school community. Those who either need help due to family difficulties, those from a lower socio-economic background and those already with a high number of exclusions appreciate the support of the teaching staff; they need this holistic care.

It would therefore appear that social pedagogy and the idea of teachers both teaching and having an intentional pastoral role is crucial for pupils at risk of exclusion. Pupils themselves are aware of their need for this pastoral, social pedagogical care and express how much importance they place on it by the amount they discuss it throughout the interviews.

Thus, young people need a caring environment but it is still not that straightforward. They want to be known and treated individually and understood, yet at the same time they also want to be treated as an adult and not as children:

'She just sits you down and talks to you like a proper adult conversation' David, Year 9

The focus on not being shouted at here is also important. They do not want to be treated as children, but as young people and with respect. Freya in Year 7 has much to say about this matter:

'Teachers can't get mad at the children...they can only like talk to them normally and not shout at them' Freya, Year 7

'She's always got like a soft voice and she's always there' Freya, Year 7

'Like do what Mrs Booth does. She doesn't shout...like if you get into trouble she doesn't shout at you as much. She's always like finding a way to go around it like she'll always be like nice to you...she'll always be like supportive to you...she's always like saying stuff about the school and saying what it means.' Freya, Year 7

This supports what Lumby and Morrison found about how young people respond positively to being treated as an adult. As seen in Chapter 2, they argue that it directly impacts learning and increases engagement and participation in class (Lumby & Morrison 2009).

4.1.8 Common interests

Teachers also need to have a separate quality as well as just teaching. They should be:

'alright to have a chat with and um get along with people and they're not angry ever' Nick, Year 10

Having common interests with the young person is also important, as well as someone they get along with:

'not strict...umm...don't know...quite laid back. I need to get on with them though cos otherwise that's it' Evie, Year 11

'like they like their job and they like other things as well except their job...like rugby or something.' Kirsty, Year 10

A common interest, a knowledge that they can get on with the staff and the fact the staff will look out for them and care for them appear to be the most important criteria for the young people. This supports the need for the teachers to have a “striking alignments with the mental and social worlds that they [the pupils] inhabit, both inside and outside the classroom” (McIntyre et al. 2005:154). Allowing time to build these meaningful relationships such as suggested at the beginning of this section through residential trips and outward bound activities could be one useful way of encouraging pupils and teachers to interact in a different way and could be used as a successful enabler to increase pupils' engagement at school.

4.2 Discipline

The other major theme I will discuss in this chapter is discipline and pupil opinions and attitudes towards it in terms of general context, barriers to learning, and what potential enablers they might have to reduce or minimise exclusion.

4.2.1 Teacher's role and behaviour

One important issue to the young people, which has been touched on lightly already in the pupil-teacher relationship, is that of classroom management and in particular, the way in which pupils feel the teachers speak to them when they are enforcing discipline.

'they're idiots...just in the way they speak to you' Luke, Year 11

'They always proper shout and they always start shouting so...I don't see the point in that' Robbie, Year 11

Whilst the young people appreciate that the teacher may need to assert control:

'when people are messing around in lessons and the teachers need to be a bit more stricter on that' Kirsty, Year 10

They maintain that they could do it in a gentler and calmer way:

'Like don't shout but if someone's messing about then tell them but not like...not shouting' David, Year 10

Nearly all interviewed understood the need for authority and the need for the teacher to maintain control:

'let you get away with some things but not a lot of things' Robbie, Year 11

'Like they weren't too strict but then they weren't too nice either cos then they're like a pushover' Jonny, Year 9

'Be a bit more laid back...not like obviously so the class goes mental' Sarah, Year 10

There seems to be a general consensus for a more relaxed style where pupils can have a laugh with the teacher but still maintain appropriate boundaries. One girl suggests a

potential enabler in being able to have a more relaxed environment to help her concentrate:

'so you can have your iPod in one ear as you're doing your work then it makes you concentrate more. If it's turned on and no one else can hear it then some teachers let you do that' Sarah, Year 10

This idea has some real significance as Hallam and Price note the 'calming' influence background music can have on improving behaviour and increasing focus on tasks set for pupils with BES needs (Hallam & Price 1998:90).

Another pupil talks about removing distractions in a different way whereby the teacher sends people out straight away in a zero tolerance scheme:

'I don't know...like the people who don't want to learn and who mess about all the time...like Ms Booth always says just...when she comes into our lessons...just send them out...instead of keeping them in and fighting with them' Kirsty, Year 10

The relationship between peers is an interesting topic of discussion when looking at discipline and classroom management. Pupils were divided in their opinions about who was responsible for their behaviour; some took full responsibility for their own actions and were quick to admit when they were at fault:

'Me a bit – because I'm lazy and I just don't concentrate' Anthony, Year 9

'Yeah my behaviour – I always backchat to the teacher' David, Year 9

Others were more of a mixture where they recognised they were at fault but felt it was not just their responsibility:

'Mainly me – but then there's other people like talking and stuff and I can't concentrate' George, Year 10

'If I'm with certain friends I kind of get roped in and start messing around' Anthony,
Year 9

'Being with my friends cos I get disrupted easily' Luke, Year 11

Whereas others diminish their own responsibility and find excuses or others to blame. They make it seem like they have no control over it at all:

'It's when people wind me up my anger comes out, and I can't stop that so...'
Hayley, Year 11

'Well sometimes...cos sometimes like people are always coming to me and like and say 'be bad...be bad...make everyone laugh' and that' Freya, Year 7

4.2.2 Exclusion

No matter what their feelings about who is to blame there is a split opinion about exclusion, punishments and truancy.

On the whole, exclusion is seen as something negative whether that be from the stigma of being excluded or from it being 'boring' being away from friends for the period of exclusion. Those who have been excluded repeatedly are particularly vocal about its demerits as the following two quotes illustrate:

'Exclusion is basically pointless because all you're doing is getting a day off so you're not exactly learning anything by it...it's basically like getting a free day off from school' Lewis, Year 11

'It's just like a day off really. You just go home or you go somewhere else and it's just like a day off from school' Jonny, Year 9

Additionally, when the young person feels like the exclusion was not their fault then there is a sense of it being an unjust punishment and this makes the exclusion worthless and it doesn't make sense:

Int: *Did this put you off doing it again?*

Sarah: *'Not really cos I just got excluded for stupid stuff'* Sarah, Year 10

It would appear that if the young person accepts responsibility for the wrongdoing then the exclusion can be productive but if they feel it is an injustice then it has no effect as they feel they do not deserve it. Xin Ma noted that "if students perceived school disciplinary rules as unfair, they developed a negative sense of belonging even though their school disciplinary climate may not have necessarily been negative" (Xin Ma, 2003: 348). Thus, if exclusion is perceived to be unjust by the pupil, it is not only a negative and meaningless time away from school but it can create a negative relationship with school upon their return. If a negative sense of belonging develops then it can have a direct negative impact on the pupil's level of engagement, motivation and achievement (Osterman 2000).

There are those for whom exclusion does seem to have an effect. This tends to be for those who are in younger years, or for those who have not been excluded either before or not many times:

'I don't want to get excluded again...it's bad isn't it?' Ed, Year 8

'My mum will have a go at me' Jason, Year 8

'It was proper boring' Nicole, Year 7

Thus, age and the number of times the young people had been excluded plays a significant role in their attitude to exclusion.

David in Year 10 talked about how exclusion is pointless because it doesn't make him think any differently. Consequently it did not have the desired effect. For him to have been disciplined effectively he would need to go away and have time to work it out for himself before being punished:

'Give them space sort of like not...I don't know..like whenever they do something wrong...so you could have a room where you could go and work it out yourself and just think' David, Year 10

The idea of needing somewhere to go is a popular one amongst the older boys. They talked of having somewhere like a time-out room that they could access to prevent them from getting into trouble in the first place.

'Umm I don't know...cos like when I get angry, the teachers all like let me walk out of lessons to calm down. So that's like probably what I'd do...to let you go out of lessons, calm down' Robbie, Year 11

'I'd have a room for people that have anger problems so then they can go there and just smash a load of things up' Lewis, Year 11

Opting out is a theme suggested by some as a strategy for helping them in the first place. Two in particular talk of being able to work in a room by themselves without any peers to distract them.

'Where you sit down and there's nobody else in the room and you sit down and just do work because it'd be less distractions and you could just get on with it' George, Year 10

'They support me a lot...now they send me over here on my own for maths so I can concentrate better' Carla, Year 10

For these two young people who would choose to opt out of the classroom environment altogether, it is perhaps the very confines of a classroom that is a barrier to learning. George is the young person who said he would feel like he belonged more at school if he was 'normal' and finds it hard to fit in. Carla, on the other hand, discusses significant family problems and talks of needing 'peace' and 'quiet' and 'calm'. In these cases the issues of family background and ability to interact socially clearly inhibit the young people's capacity to participate in school. As they struggle to cope in a classroom environment, the educational value and atmosphere at school is visibly impacted and their place in the school community appears to be the thing that is a problem in the first place. Bond (2006) notes that pupils who experience such difficulties are not likely to wish to articulate their emotions to anyone and were even less likely to be capable of expressing them. She highlights the fact that pupils facing such emotional and behavioural difficulties also feel under constant pressure to conform and please authority, yet are likely to resist this even more (Bond 2006:56). This appears to be true for pupils in this study.

Informal exclusions were mentioned by quite a few young people. Numerous talked of 'being kicked out' of class and some of being put in isolation as a form of punishment. This generally involved being put in the corridor with work outside of a teacher's office. For some this was a fairly short term event but for others this is a longer term arrangement:

Evie: *'Maths...cos I can't do maths and I just get kicked out...well I've been banned'*

Int: *'So what do you do instead of maths then, when it's on your timetable to be in maths?'*

Evie: *'Umm I either sit outside Mr Mead's office, or Ms Booth's'*

Int: *'Right ok and do you have maths work to do then?'*

Evie: *'Yeah...just work from a text book'*

Int: *'Do you find that better than being in the lessons?'*

Evie: *'Well there's no distractions but I'm not really getting the work done...so...'*

There is a sense of understanding of the implications of these internal exclusions by Harley in Year 7:

'It was like I was excluded but in school. I was excluded from my lessons'

It highlights a clear barrier to learning and achievement by young people being physically removed from their lessons. They cannot access learning because they are physically not able to participate, which results in increased isolation, lack of belonging and thus reduced motivation and achievement (Osterman 2000). Munn et al. discuss the concern of a prolonged internal exclusion where there is a "loss of educational opportunity" and point out the "difficulties of reintegration" when they pupils has missed out on work and lost confidence in the social setting in the classroom (Munn et al. 2000:73).

Truancy and choosing to skip lessons is also a complex issue. For some it appears to be way of finding some peace and quiet:

'You know you're free and you won't get shouted at' Lewis, Year 11

'At least you know you've had an hour's peace' Carla, Year 10

This appears to be for those who either have difficulties at home who need some space, or for those who have disengaged with school to such a level that fear of punishment has no effect. Those who have fallen into the spiral of repeat exclusions or behaviour incidents at school are particularly keen to avoid further confrontation.

For others it is a chosen withdrawal avoiding the almost certain rejection from staff:

'She always sends me out anyway so I don't see the point in going' Kirsty, Year 10

This reflects what Riley (2004), Cullingford & Morrison (1996) and Pomeroy (1999) suggest as argued in Chapter 2. Lumby and Morrison discovered a similar situation experienced by a young man in their sample:

'[he] recounted a disrespectful act by one teacher which he believed marked the end of his effort to learn' (Lumby & Morrison 2009: 588)

They argue that a negative experience with teaching staff encourages some young people to withdraw completely from education. Kirsty, in this sample, supports this as she has chosen to avoid a lesson and a teacher because of what she perceived to be a negative experience.

On the other hand it appears that at times pupils truant for the thrill of the chase and in order to bring about confrontation:

'Because...I don't know...it's something else to do and you just feel like...you basically feel buzzing because you might get caught and then you've got a little rush of like I might get caught or I might not get caught. And I like getting into trouble because then you get that rush and it feels really weird.' Lewis, Year 11

This supports the ideas argued by Willis (1977), as outlined in Chapter 2. The chance to oppose and make a stand against authority is the very base of counter-school culture (Willis 1977: 11). Lewis typifies the 'lad' whom Willis describes as gaining excitement from going against authority but also the importance of regaining his own time whereby he can resume his 'immediate identity and self-direction' (Willis 1997: 29).

For some, this release from school and regaining of time is something with which the threat of punishment does not compete:

'Three hours peace for one hour detention' Luke, Year 11

Most of the reasons for pupils truanting are bound up in complex social relations, which will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

4.2.3 Useful discipline strategies

Riverton High School employs a positive discipline system and encourages praise and rewards for good behaviour and attendance. Pupils earn praise slips from teachers for good work and behaviour which are then read out in assembly. Pupils with 100% attendance are entered into a draw for prizes such as iPod shuffles. One strategy used to promote good behaviour is to use a report card. This is something identified pupils take to every lesson to get it signed by the teacher to see if they are reaching their agreed target such as good behaviour, being polite and respectful or working hard. This report card is then seen by the head of year each morning. At the end of the week, depending on the outcome, the pupil can be removed from the report.

For some, being on report where they have to get each lesson signed by the teacher and then show this to the form tutor, key stage manager and parent, is a really useful strategy:

'Um I'm on report now and that usually helps because you're under pressure to get a good report' Toby, Year 11

'Yeah it's helped my behaviour because every time you come off exclusion you get put on report cards and even teachers were saying I was improving when I came back off exclusion' Tim, Year 9

For others it is a worthless system:

'Umm I'd make 'em like not stricter but better rules cos they're stupid...cos they give us report cards when we're naughty but it's only paper...no one's bothered cos they're just giving us paper' Carla, Year 10

Being given a new chance to prove yourself and get things comes out as being an important fact for the young people involved.

'I just want them to think 'he can behave...he can do this' Max, Year 9

Pupils at risk of exclusion seem to face a lot of barriers to learning due to discipline. Through exclusion, truancy and unofficial exclusions they miss out on opportunities to access learning and to engage with the learning environment and thus cannot actively participate or achieve. Students suggest a few strategies of how they feel this could be reduced through timeouts, smaller groups and less distractions, but the biggest barrier to them seems to be classroom management whereby they feel they could be treated more like adults, not being shouted at, with a developed pastoral relationship with a teacher who knows them and can relate to them. This really is the heart of what they seem to respond to.

CHAPTER 5: Curriculum, Physical Surroundings and Organisational Structure of the School Day

The focus of this chapter will be on potential barriers to pupil engagement with and enjoyment of school. The specific factors that will be discussed are accessible curriculum, physical surroundings and the organisation of the school day. It is important to understand how young people perceive these integral aspects of schooling and why they may view them as restrictions to their engagement with school. Firstly, this chapter will focus on accessibility of curriculum as it was of high importance to the majority of young people interviewed.

5.1 Curriculum

5.1.1 Curriculum Delivery

Curriculum can be a powerful motivation for young people. Brandt (1995) reporting on a conversation with Kohn outlines that an engaging curriculum and a caring atmosphere is all that is needed for children to act on a natural desire for knowledge and inquisition (Brandt 1995: 14). In the present study, for example, when asked what makes the young people want to come to school, a high proportion of them referred to a subject or a lesson that they enjoyed.

'Games...my favourite subject' Jamie, Year 8

'umm drama...and seeing my friends' Freya, Year 7

'I like doing experiments in Science' Jacob, Year 7

Thus, curriculum is important to young people in this study and can be, for some, a positive aspect of school. As was argued in Chapter 2, “a relevant curriculum is both a preventative and interventive measure in relation to disruptive behaviour” (Hamill & Boyd, 2002a: 114). It is argued here that the curriculum has the potential to be productive of disruptive behaviour as well. Thus, although many of the young people stated that the curriculum could be a powerful motivator, they also talked of it being a significant barrier to their engagement. In fact, the notion of curriculum as a barrier to education was more widespread among this sample of young people than the idea that it was a positive aspect of school.

A large number of pupils felt teachers lacked imagination in the way they delivered the curriculum. When asked if lessons made him want to contribute, Robbie in Year 11 said:

‘Sometimes but when we’re like reading and stuff and doing like book work all the time it’s boring’

He goes on to say:

‘If it’s something like that’s fun that’s getting taught then I don’t mind but it’s when you’re doing boring work...like coursework and that...I just can’t be bothered’

Robbie, Year 11

He reiterates this when he says he would enjoy lessons more if

‘... they weren’t as boring as they were because you just feel like falling asleep every lesson’ Robbie, Year 11

Other pupils shared similar views:

'Yeah some of them are but then some of them you sit down and do work...write all lesson which is boring...so some of them can be but most of the time it's just plain boring work' George, Year 10

Clearly 'boring' lessons where you sit and write or do 'book work' do not capture the imagination of the young people. Riley and Docking (2004) note that "many pupils find too many lessons arid and demotivating, forcing them into a passive learning role" (Riley & Docking (2004: 178). Interestingly, it was boys who were most vocal about the way lessons were delivered, which supports Riley and Docking's findings that girls are more likely to be happier in school and "believe that school work was worth doing" (Riley & Docking 2004: 174). Conversely, boys struggled to find as much point in doing work. Looking more closely at the interview data reveals why the boys in particular find curriculum, in the way it is delivered, such a barrier to learning. Jack identifies the predictable nature of the work:

'Well it's basically like the teacher telling you something and then telling you to open your pages and do some work and it's like really predictable. I mean before you go into the lesson you can tell what they're going to say...open the page to whatever and do questions 6-8...basically just copying out of a book and I don't think people learn as well as they could do' Jack, Year 9

The predictable nature of the work and 'boring' book work is a particular problem for the boys. Willis (1977) suggests the need for 'the lads' to find excitement and that the view "school as a blank between opportunities for excitement" (Willis 1977: 38). Thus, if boys experience a lot of passive learning, it is clear that they are likely to view this as one of the 'blanks' and be demotivated by it.

Lewis in Year 11 discusses different learning styles and why passive learning in lessons is specifically a barrier for him to engage in lessons. He says he learns best by:

'Doing things with my hands...not just sitting there having to copy off the board...or stuff where I have to use my own brain to work things out instead of a teacher telling you what the answer is.'

Jovanovich and Steinbach King (1998) note that in a science lesson boys were more likely to "have their hands on the equipment" than girls and are much more "active participants" (Jovanovich & Steinbach King 1998:487). This suggests that boys may experience a greater barrier to learning than girls if lessons are merely teacher-led requiring passive engagement from the pupils. Max supports this theory by illustrating his need for kinaesthetic learning:

'Doing stuff and not just sitting down and reading a book and then copying out of a book. I don't learn like that...it's like I didn't know how to play football at first but when I got up and started doing it...physically doing it...then I knew...but in history they teach me stuff and the next day they ask me about it and I won't just know it and that's it' Max, Year 9

Thus, curriculum, in terms of how it is taught, is perceived to be a barrier to the pupil's learning and boys' learning in particular. They are, however, quick to discuss things that would improve the situation. In fact, a clue to finding out what a good lesson is for the young people is to reflect on their favourite lessons:

'PE because I like...I don't like writing...I'd rather do something...instead of writing...like do it if you know what I mean?' Matty, Year 8

'Umm probably Games like I said because it's very physical and gets you involved and you have a good time...have a good laugh' Kieran, Year 9

'Games and Drama 'cos you get to do outdoor stuff instead of staying inside and drama is just fun' Tom, Year 7

The idea of being active and 'doing' rather than 'sitting' was a popular one. In fact, nearly all of the pupils interviewed decided that for a lesson to be interesting it needed to be fun and interactive. When pressed on this they came up with various ideas for enablers to help make lessons more engaging. For some, it was important for the lesson to be practical:

'If we're doing practical work and stuff like that' Luke, Year 11

'Like more active...like more practical work...not just sitting down writing' Sam,
Year 8

Others suggested working with others being a potential enabler to help them engage better with the lessons:

'Working with partners' Tom, Year 7

'Like getting into groups and talking about it and just maybe doing a role-play or something...like a presentation...sort of that stuff' Anthony, Year 9

'It would just be a normal lesson but more relaxed. It would be talking about the work more so you can discuss stuff and learn through that' Toby, Year 11

Whitehead and Clough (2004) found this to be true in their study whereby practical work and discussion work with friends was given high priority by young people of ways they enjoyed participating in lessons.

Others preferred more creative/interactive technology lessons:

'Probably funner lessons... 'cos like...something fun to do with like the subjects like create a poster and that and projects like that' Robbie, Year 11

'Like 'cos there's like websites with all like little mini games and stuff...stuff like that' Tim, Year 9

The young people see more interaction and active learning as the solution to making the curriculum more accessible.

Sarah in Year 10 comments rather interestingly:

Sarah: *'I think just make them more fun because like when they say they'll make it more fun like [when] Ofsted [come in] or something then they do it for two weeks and then it's boring again*

Int: *Do you notice a difference when Ofsted come in?*

Sarah: *Yeah*

Int: *What sort of things do they do differently?*

Sarah: *Just do more fun and make us be good and yeah they're just nicer all of the time'*

It is clear, therefore, that the pupils in this sample appear to agree with and support the idea that an interesting curriculum is significant in increasing and decreasing their risk of exclusion.

5.1.2 Relevant Curriculum

Having looked at curriculum from the point of view of how it is delivered as barriers and enablers to learning, it is now important to look at the content of the curriculum itself.

McIntyre et al. (2005) showed the need for the curriculum to be relevant to the young people in their study and stated that it needed to have a "striking alignment with the mental and social worlds that they [pupils] inhabit, both inside and outside the classroom" (McIntyre et al. 2005: 154).

Toby in Year 11 explained why his favourite subject was his vocational lessons:

Toby: *'Vocational*

Int: *What do you do in it?*

Toby: *Mechanics – it's 'cos I'm more interested in that than anything in school apart from...well I'm more interested in that than anything really*

Int: *Is it more practical?*

Toby: *Yes...well it does writing as well but it's more about stuff you know'*

The idea of it being about 'stuff you know' makes it familiar and relevant – something he can engage with because it makes sense to him. In fact, this is linked strongly to the gender discussion in the last section about boys engaging with more active and kinaesthetic learning. Vulliamy and Webb (2000) suggest work-related learning at Key Stage 4 as being a useful enabler to reduce exclusions from school. This could be seen as a really effective way of addressing the need that the boys in this sample have for kinaesthetic learning and practical work. Vocational courses at college provide this outlet where some of the sample, do courses like mechanics, bricklaying, building. Willis (1977) discusses the attraction of this sort of work for "the lads" whereby it carries "an aura of the real adult world" (Willis 1997: 103). For boys who struggle to see the worth in school, Riley et al. (2006) suggest learning outside of school could be a useful answer.

For younger pupils, relevant curriculum is also a significant part of school. Harley in Year 7 talks of what would make him want to come to school when he says:

'If Leeds United were going to come and take me to their training ground!'

This is perhaps a throwaway remark, but it holds an element of truth within it. For him, school would be better if it was to do with something he was interested in and motivated by. Toby, Year 11, sums this up by saying he would like:

'More stuff related to us...like stuff we do...more relevant stuff to me'

Having this striking alignment with the mental and social world is obviously important to the young people at risk of exclusion. Willis (1977) highlights the impact it can have when the social and mental worlds do not meet. He discusses a “working class counter-school culture” where boys who are used to a “shop floor culture” are so far removed from the middle class institution of school that their natural behaviour on the ‘shop floor’ of inappropriate jokes and competing for status means they naturally challenge authority (Willis 1977: 2). Although written in 1977, the notion of a counter-school culture holds some truth to this discussion of curriculum and pupils at risk of exclusion whereby a middle class institution of school is not appropriate for everyone. As seen in Chapter 2, Hatcher (1998) looks at the links between pupil disengagement, class, curriculum content (and related school cultures). He argues that education is viewed by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds as merely a way to “preserve class position” and “guard against any decisive downward mobility”, as opposed to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds who “risk social demotion” if they do not go onto higher education (Hatcher 1998: 11).

This, perhaps, sheds some light on why some pupils fail to navigate the school curriculum as successfully as others. It is also noted in Chapter 2 that pupils from a lower socio-economic background tend to be more at risk of exclusion than others (Parsons 1999, Macrae et al. 2003). Engaging with a curriculum which seems pointless or irrelevant, is clearly more of a challenge for a working class pupil as it not only appears pointless but seems to be something unnecessary for them to engage with on a longer term basis. In this

study, those with lower socio-economic backgrounds support this theory as they struggle to understand or engage with a curriculum which has little relevance to their everyday lives.

5.1.3 Meaningful Curriculum

Not only do pupils want the work to be relevant to them but they also need the work to be meaningful:

'We didn't know where to go but I didn't really like the stand down day because I didn't know why we were doing it' Nicole, Year 7

'They say that we're learning about something and then do something which is totally pointless...but some of them are alright' Nicole, Year 7

'R.E. is just pointless because I don't see why I have to learn it' Harley, Year 7

Finding the work to be meaningful is important for the young people so that they do not disengage or give up on a subject. This supports what Ennis found to be true about curriculum. Looking at pupils' engagement with PE, she notes that if students were interested in an activity they would happily participate in it, yet "if they did not find it meaningful, they did not dress, become involved or expand effort" (Ennis 1995: 453). Teachers, in this instance, labelled the pupils as disengaged and blamed them for not participating. Ennis argues, however, that by "deflecting the responsibility for student noncompliance away from their teaching styles and curriculum, teachers denied their opportunity to change the curriculum content to make it more meaningful" (Ennis 1995: 453). This suggests that a possible enabler for reducing exclusion, increasing participation and enjoyment in class is for teachers to ensure the curriculum is meaningful for pupils and suggests teachers may need to take more responsibility in ensuring it is something the pupils can engage in.

5.1.4 Academic accessibility

Equally the importance of the curriculum being accessible in terms of academic ability is significant. Typically, pupils at risk of exclusion are lower in academic ability and struggle with literacy and basic skills (Kyriacou, 2003:58). Many in the sample discussed that not being able to access the work academically was a barrier for them. They felt excluded from knowledge that was being produced in the classroom setting. When asked about least favourite subjects they were quick to highlight this problem:

'Maths because it's always boring and it's always really hard stuff that I don't know' George, Year 10

'Geography...I find it the hardest lesson' Freya, Year 7

Others discussed this more generally as something that prevented them from learning:

'Yeah like making it hard...lessons. If you're like in a set that's too high and the lesson is too hard' Matty, Year 8

'Well I could say like teachers when they're using like big words all the time' Luke, Year 11

'If I understood what they were going on about most of the time then that would probably help' Nicole, Year 7

Whitehead and Clough (2004) note pupils talk of teachers expecting too much or not enough and not getting the balance right. (Whitehead & Clough 2004: 6)

For some pupils this is linked to problems with confidence and self esteem:

Robbie: *'No that's the thing I don't like doing in English...speaking and listening. I don't mind listening but I don't like speaking...'*

Int: *Why's that?*

Robbie: *I don't know. I'm just not confident and that'* Robbie, Year 11

When curriculum appears to be inaccessible to pupils they feel inferior which can lead to further disengagement for fear of ridicule or humiliation. (Willis 1977; Xin Ma 2003; Osterman 2000). This will be discussed further in the next chapter but it is pertinent to touch on it briefly here as it is influenced by inaccessible curriculum. The necessity for differentiation in levels and accessible curriculum for everyone is obvious and paramount in avoiding this withdrawal/disengagement from the lessons. In differentiating by ability, the teacher recognises that students vary in their background knowledge, readiness for learning, language, learning preferences and interests (Hall 2002: 2). In other words, they recognise that pupils are individuals with individual needs. Doing so, supports the Every Child Matters agenda as well as the Index for Inclusion by increasing pupils' participation and reducing their exclusion from curricula increases pupil inclusion (DFES 2003, Booth et al. 2002). Brophy (1983) citing Fisher (1980) notes that pupils who performed at a level of about 80% accuracy, learned more and felt better about themselves as well as the subject matter they were learning (Brophy 1983: 268). Thus, by teaching at differentiated levels, the teacher has the opportunity to help pupils feel better about themselves as well as the subject which not only prevents them from disengaging and withdrawing but actually helps engage them.

Pupils were quick to suggest potential enablers to overcome the barrier of an inaccessible curriculum:

'Umm teachers give you like help more if you know what I mean...like tell you more information about what to do' Jamie, Year 8

'Umm like explain things more...so instead of like with this poem saying where's the adjectives and where's like the onomatopoeia and that...where is it? They could actually explain what onomatopoeia is and everything and whereabouts...like what line it is on...but they don't...they just tell you to find it and look for it in the whole poem...so...' Robbie, Year 11

Pupils appreciated the need for extra information and explanations. Often they feel like the work is inaccessible because it is too hard which leads to a breakdown in the classroom:

'Art and product do because they like explain it better because it's harder obviously 'cos you've got to get everything right but in other lessons no because they don't tell you properly and 'cos like if you're talking when you go in they just say right get on with it 'cos I'm not talking over you' Carla, Year 10

Differentiation in lessons by having the work set at the right level for each student and explaining it properly is therefore vital in making the curriculum accessible for them. It is worth remembering the value two students placed on having 'helper teachers' (mentioned in the last chapter) or learning support in the classroom as well, which they identified as a useful tool in making the curriculum more accessible for them.

5.1.5 The power of curriculum

The importance of one good lesson a day is a final idea perceived by many as being a potential enabler to minimise exclusions and help them engage better in school in terms of curriculum. This chapter started by looking at the powerful motivation the young people find in their favourite lesson. Many of them went on to later discuss the significance of this:

'Knowing that...what motivated me to come to school at the moment is knowing that I've got P.E. so if I had P.E. every day that would make me want to go to school every day' Tim, Year 9

Accessible curriculum in a subject that they find they can access and enjoy would make them want to come to school every day:

'Umm doing more drama...cos I really like drama. Cos we only do it once a week and I think we should get more time to do it' Freya, Year 7

'Umm like enjoyable lessons...cos like on days when we have Science, English and Maths, and like V/C [vocational] and V/C I don't get that because we haven't got one good lesson all day. Like if I had a good lesson every day then that would help make it like I'd be more into going to school cos you've got at least one good lesson a day' Robbie, Year 11

'We've only got 4 P.E. lessons in two weeks and I think we should have more' Matty, Year 8

'Umm doing one lesson...your favourite lesson...your own timetable...it would be science every day.' Jacob, Year 7

Pupils suggest the importance of the school meeting their individual needs, understanding what engages them and altering the timetable accordingly. This certainly gives new insight into the pupil asking to be treated as an individual and the specific needs of the child being met as a potential enabler to minimise the risk of exclusion. Reid (2005) discusses the need to “make our practice and processes centred on the needs and timescales of children and young people, their families and schools in ‘Implications of Every Child Matters and the Children Act for Schools’” (Reid, 2005: 15). He goes on to say that to achieve the principles of the Every Child Matter agenda “there is likely to be a greater need to have more flexible opening hours, terms and daily school start and finish times” (Reid, 2005: 15). Florian and Rouse (2010) also assert the importance of meeting individual needs in an inclusive classroom and state the benefits of students from a variety of diverse needs and

backgrounds coming together instead of following individualised yet segregated pathways
(Florian & Rouse 2010: 401)

5.2 Physical surroundings

A surprising theme that emerged as a barrier to learning was the physical surroundings and environment of the school. Nearly everyone interviewed commented on the physical appearance of the school as something negative which they were not proud of. It most commonly came up when asking the pupils what they would change or improve about the school and held particular importance for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds:

'Umm...probably the buildings because they're so old. It makes the whole place feel horrible' Toby, Year 11

'If they changed like the buildings cos they're all old and horrible and they're all dirty and everything' Robbie, Year 11

'The buildings...they're tatty' Nick, Year 10

'For it to look a bit better because it's a bit messy now isn't it? The buildings need doing' Kirsty, Year 10

Steer (2005) comments notably on the relationship between physical environment and behaviour:

The surroundings in which we work and learn have a major impact on our behaviour... attractive and stimulating classrooms inform pupils that they are valued and respected. In such situations learning is enhanced and bad behaviour is reduced (p.75).

Whilst the majority of students voiced their displeasure with the surroundings, a few go on to explain why the surroundings bother them specifically:

'Yeah the classrooms and stuff because they're all scruffy and it makes you feel like you're in a dumping ground' Carla, Year 10

Carla associates the lack of care over the buildings with the fact her and her fellow pupils are not worth better facilities and that the staff do not care about improving them. Pupils in this sample comment widely on physical environment and words such as 'dumping ground', 'old' and 'tatty' are used. An uncared for and untended area gives rise to the broken window theory outlined in the NASUWT report 'One more broken window' whereby criminal activity or antisocial behaviour becomes "normalised" and people become "unmotivated and disengaged from society" (Broadhurst, Owen, Keats & Taylor, Perpetuity Research and Consultancy International Ltd. 2006:25).

In short, if the physical environment is not a place where pupils can feel proud of or taken care of then there is likely to be associations of low self esteem, "little appetite for educational attainment and have little cultural or social capital to draw on" (Broadhurst et al. 2006:25). As the physical environment degenerates, it encourages more antisocial behaviour as people take less and less pride in their surroundings and a culture of anti-social behaviour ensues. In a school environment, if pupils feel like their school is a 'dumping ground' they will not place value on the environment and may disengage from the school society, deciding that antisocial behaviour and vandalism is appropriate.

Thus, physical environment is very important to the young people at Riverton High School. Carla comments further on it:

'Well they started painting the doors red which is bad because outside Mr Mead's office and Mrs Cole's...you go there to have time out but now they're painting them red so now you'll feel more angry'

She is aware how her physical environment affects her emotions and moods and perceives this to be a barrier to her emotional wellbeing at school.

For pupils, like Carla, with family difficulties or turbulent home environments the need for a calm, welcoming and safe environment at school seems to be even more important.

'Umm a clean classroom where it's peaceful and they've got better teachers in that listen and like where all the classrooms don't all look the same because like in primary school you had to sit still in one classroom all day but even though we get to move around all the classrooms look the same' Carla, Year 10

The idea of different classrooms having the potential to stimulate pupils in different ways is very interesting. It is an astute potential enabler to minimise exclusion levels for young people by giving them a positive change in scenery and environment appropriate to the different lessons.

The main concern with the buildings seems to be that they are not aesthetically pleasing and old fashioned:

'Umm the buildings...to make them more modern' Elliot, Year 8

'Yes the tower blocks...they look like a block of flats' Pippa, Year 8

In the same way the pupils talked about the need to make the classrooms and resources in them more modern too:

'Umm all the classrooms are sort of like the same and I'd like the classrooms to look more modern and stuff' Jack, Year 9

David: *'Umm like modern...a lot more modern*

Int: *By modern what do you mean?*

David: *I don't know...like new...new stuff...new chairs, table etc and umm the buildings...to make them more modern and more...better science stuff and equipment'* David, Year 10

This supports the fact the young people want to be able to relate to a relevant and current environment and lifestyle. In the same way that they wanted relevant teachers and curriculum, they also want modern, relevant and up to date resources, equipment, classrooms and buildings. They want to be proud of their school so that it is not 'tacky' and 'tatty' or indeed a 'dumping ground' but somewhere they feel proud of.

5.3 Organisational Structure of the School Day

Organisation of the school day is the next major theme to emerge from the interview data. A high proportion talked of wanting some changes to the day be it school times, or activities throughout the day. They named different things that they found to be barriers to learning from the current set up.

One of the most significant things that seemed to be a barrier for some young people is the time of the school day itself. There was mixed opinion on what would be better. Some wanted the day to start and finish earlier:

'I'd rather like finish earlier but start earlier if you know what I mean' Kirsty, Year 10

Others thought that they would rather finish earlier and have shorter breaks to compensate:

'I'm not bothered about coming to school it just starts too early and like it finishes too late because I think our lunch is too long and like all the other schools finish at like 3 and stuff and ours is like half past and I don't think anyone would really mind our lunch being like half an hour because it's like too long' Sarah, Year 10

One of the more significant discussions about the timings of the school day is that 50% of the sample does not live in Riverton and has to travel from outside of the town to get to school. Some of them live up to 12-15 miles away from the school site. This seems to be a real problem for them as they have to get up early to get to school. Many of them perceive this to be a barrier to learning as they experience tiredness because of it:

'Sometimes I'm tired...so I just can't be bothered getting up and going to school'

Robbie, Year 11

'I'd say it's like too early for school. If they made it like 10o'clock while 4o'clock I wouldn't be that bothered' Robbie, Year 11

'I have to get up at like 6 o'clock so I can get out and get the bus and stuff' Robbie, Year 11

In this case, changing the timing of the school day could be beneficial as the ones who have to travel in wouldn't have to get up so early and therefore wouldn't be as tired for school.

Another suggestion that was to do with the organisation of the school day which links to the curriculum is having a greater number of lessons:

'Umm like...umm...more lessons during the day. Instead of 5 then you have shorter lessons' Matty, Year 8

This would be a positive potential enabler for those who struggle to concentrate or find it difficult to sit for a long time and do work. This links nicely to another suggestion by Nick in Year 10 who wanted an *'activity between odd lessons...to break it up a bit'*.

A higher frequency of lessons as well as activities to break the day up seems to be a popular suggestion particularly for those who find a classroom environment difficult to cope with. This links back to the opening section of this chapter where I argued the significance of active, hands on learning for boys, in particular. Boys are once again suggesting enablers to create moments of activity and interaction during the school day.

Many pupils identified break and lunch time as a difficult time as well. Having an hour for lunch was considered too long by some:

'Yeah and everyone is just sat there bored' Sarah, Year 10

Positive changes that could be made were plentiful:

'If it was more like facilities sort of thing...more things to do at break and lunch time...somewhere you can just go' Matty, Year 8

Robbie in Year 11 associated this potential enabler as a way of introducing positive behaviour and reducing negative behaviour:

'Like obviously letting kids lend a football and that so we could have...so we could like play football cos we all get bored at break and lunchtime so if we had like a football to play with ...we would all concentrate on doing other things in school rather than getting into fights and everything' Robbie, Year 11

Others support this idea:

'More fields to play footy on and footy to get to use and a basketball to get to use...just stuff like that...the usual' Luke, Year 11

The young people require something positive and concrete to do with their undirected time in order to prevent them from getting bored or worse from getting into fights or trouble which could potentially lead to exclusion. The assumption that people might make about young people wanting to finish school earlier and have longer lunch breaks appears not to be true. It is, in fact, interesting to note that, according to pupils in this sample, there is too much unstructured time.

The idea of physical environment and organisation/structure of the school day being so important to the young people interviewed is revealing as it has often been underestimated in terms of its influence on young people's sense of belonging, attachment and engagement with school. It reveals that pupils at risk of exclusion care about the environment in which they inhabit. The structure of the day highlights some tangible barriers for young people, which if listened to, could impact the behaviour of the young people significantly.

Above all, the curriculum being accessible is paramount for the young people to be able to engage in the lessons. The pupils highlight obvious barriers to learning in inaccessible curriculum through academic levels, how it is delivered and what is delivered. Finally they underline the significance of accessible curriculum through the powerful motivation it can be when teachers get it right.

CHAPTER 6: Social Relationships and Interaction

This chapter discusses the final overarching theme to emerge from the interview data. I will explore how social interaction impacts the attitudes of pupils at risk of exclusion in relation to school; how social relationships are perceived as barriers to young people's achievement, active participation and attendance; and finally what potential enablers there are within the theme of social relationships to reduce young people's risk of exclusion.

Firstly, I will discuss the sub-theme of belonging before moving on to look at social cohesion, bullying and fear of ridicule/humiliation. All of these sub-themes are interrelated and impact each other as, for example, rejection and humiliation are linked to bullying which is linked to a lack of, or lower sense of belonging. It is important to note that it is not possible to separate completely each sub-theme from one another which suggests the complexity of social relationships themselves.

6.1 Belonging

Seeing friends was given as the main motivation for coming to school and was considered more of an incentive than any other reason.

Int: *Do you like school?*

Luke: *'Yes and no because I don't like working really but I like chilling with my friends'* Luke, Year 11

When asked specifically what motivated them to want to come to school there was a strong theme:

'Sociality' Ed, Year 8

'Umm...I don't know...my mates. I've got good friends here' David, Year 10

'Umm probably the people that's here because I have got quite a lot of friends and I just have a laugh when I'm around them and that's what makes me go...and some of the teachers as well' Kieran, Year 9

There is a strong sense of loyalty and allegiance to those friends in some cases:

'Now that I've met new friends and I don't know...friends really...I wouldn't like to leave now' Kirsty, Year 10

In this case, the friendship group not only motivates Kirsty to come to school but it actually creates a loyalty to the school itself as the school provides the forum for her social group to meet. Wilson (2004) explains that "social networks also influence connectedness. The larger a student's network of friends, the stronger his/her connection will be to school" (Wilson 2004: 298). In fact, this idea of belonging and being accepted is paramount to successfully engaging at school. Osterman (2000) notes, "being accepted, included or welcomed leads to positive emotions such as happiness, elation, contentment and calm, while being rejected, excluded or ignored leads to often intense negative feelings of anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy and loneliness" (Osterman 2000:37) and can thus negatively influence feelings towards school. In Kirsty's case she feels accepted and thus is able to engage positively in the school community. This means she has a higher chance of engaging and succeeding at an academic level, as Osterman goes on to report:

"Students who experienced a greater sense of acceptance by peers and teachers were more likely to be interested in and enjoy school and their classes" which is also "reflected in their commitment to work, higher expectations of success and lower levels of anxiety" (Osterman 2000: 331).

Conversely, a lack of sense of belonging appears to be a clear barrier to learning and participation at school. In fact, the theme of belonging is an important one in this discussion regarding young people at risk of exclusion from school. Willms (2003) notes that pupils with poor literacy skills, those from lower socio-economic status families, and those from another country with a different mother tongue, are more likely to feel less of a sense of belonging than those with better literacy skills, those from an average socio-economic status family and those living in their country of birth (Willms 2003). Pupils at risk of exclusion have already been identified as likely to have poor literacy skills and being from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Kyriacou 2003, Munn et al. 2000). For this reason, I will concentrate on the theme of belonging in more detail.

When asked about friendship groups there were some who felt they didn't really have strong social networks:

'Uh no I don't have any...well I do have friends but I don't really like get involved in like all these big groups. I'd rather stay with my one or two good mates' Evie, Year 11

'Not many because I don't like talk to some people but there are people I just don't like in my year' George, Year 10

In these cases it appears to be a personal choice that they keep themselves to themselves yet another story of not fitting in and feeling different emerges from both of these young people throughout the interview:

'Because I don't know...I just feel like I don't really fit in anywhere' Evie, Year 11

Carla: *'No I just don't know...I just don't fit in*

Int: *Is that with other pupils?*

Carla: *Everything*

Int: *Can you explain how?*

Carla: *No I'm just different*

Int: *You don't know in what way?*

Carla: *No I don't know.'* Carla, Year 10

This lack of belonging and ability to fit in socially seems to demonstrate itself in different ways. In some cases pupils link it to being a barrier for attendance, participation and attendance. The fact that they do not fit in becomes a trigger for challenging and disruptive behaviour:

'[laughs] I just don't know to be honest...I don't know...I suppose it's because I don't fit in anywhere so I do my best to get kicked out of my lessons because I don't want to be there' Evie, Year 11

Osterman (2000) explains the link between not fitting in and disruptive behaviour:

"Rejection or the sense of exclusion or estrangement from the group is consistently associated with behavioural problems in the classroom (either aggression or withdrawal), lower interest in school, lower achievement and dropout" (Osterman 2000: 343).

In this case, the fact Evie does not want to be there becomes a tangible barrier to her learning. Instead of feeling like an outsider or different, she chooses to remove herself from the situation through aggressive behaviour which will result in withdrawal as she knows it will get her removed from the room. Evie goes on to discuss that feeling more 'comfortable' in her lessons would be a positive enabler that could minimise her risk of exclusion:

'Uh I suppose feeling more comfortable in my lessons like...cos I don't know...I always think people are like...well I know people say stuff. And I know it's like stuff that I can ignore but it just winds me up and uh I suppose if people just like weren't bothered and if I fit in with other people...' Evie, Year 11

For Evie, fitting in and being more comfortable around her peers could make a dramatic difference as “when young people receive empathy, praise and attention in a clear and consistent fashion, they experience social support. The experience of social support generates a sense of belonging which, in turn, leads to increased engagement and academic motivation” (McNealy & Falci, 2004: 284). Thus, a sense of belonging and feeling accepted is important in order to increase active participation, achievement and attendance.

Additionally, a sense of belonging and feeling accepted within a community is important as it is shown to have a positive influence on people's perception of the environment they inhabit and the social relations within the community (Chavis & Wandersman 1990: 67). A way of understanding community involvement and feeling accepted in community is through social capital. Morrow (2001), citing Putnam (1993), explains that social capital consists of “social and community networks; civic engagement or participation, community identity, involving people's 'sense of belonging' to the community, and norms of cooperation, reciprocity and trust of others within the community” (Morrow 2001: 38).

In other words, social capital is not only seen in terms of people's social networks but also in the amount they contribute to the community and the ability to trust others and work with them. Evie, in the case above, displays little social capital as she has little sense of belonging to the community, as well as low norms of cooperation, reciprocity and trust of others. This lack of social capital is significant as it means she lacks the social support necessary and is more likely to underachieve and lack motivation to engage academically. It

also means she is at greater risk of dropping out of school altogether (Teachman, Paasch & Carver 1996: 773).

Lack of social capital seems to be a common feature for pupils at risk of exclusion. It compounds feelings of being seen as different or abnormal by their peers. George in Year 10, when asked if he felt he belonged to the school, says:

'Probably not...because the school...I just don't like school and I misbehave all the time'

George, in his answer here, typifies what Osterman refers to as “normlessness”; that is “dislike of school and non conformity to accepted school norms”, which is, by its very nature “converse to sense of acceptance or membership” (Osterman 2000: 338). By not fitting in, or feeling a sense of belonging or membership George is at much greater risk of disengagement and drop out (Osterman 2000). When asked if there was anything that would help him feel like he belonged more he said:

George: *'Yeah if I was normal*

Int: *What do you mean by that?*

George: *If I did work like everyone else did and didn't just sit at the back of the room doing nothing'*

For him, he is aware that his behaviour, which is significantly different to that of his peers, makes him stand out and not fit in. By not conforming to school rules and expectations he is in his own words, not 'normal'. This “normlessness” and opting out of group membership is a significant barrier to achievement and active participation as it reduces a sense of attachment, identification and belonging to school. In other words, George is displaying

very little social capital or sense of community which means he is less likely to achieve or feel accepted or the positive feelings associated with such acceptance.

6.1.1 Social cohesion

Having identified belonging as an important factor not only in coping at school on a social level but also having a direct impact on academic achievement and motivation, it is worth examining the social cohesion of the school itself, and barriers pupils experienced regarding belonging. Tensions between age and racial groups, as well as issues of esteem also seem to be reasons for why pupils feel that they do not belong. Having identified how important social capital and participation in community is in order to engage, achieve and participate in school, it is necessary to explore the ways in which the pupils felt isolated or detached from community.

Robbie in Year 11 observes a lack of social cohesion in terms of race:

Int: *Is there anything about the atmosphere of your school that you would change if you could?*

Robbie: *'Not really...well there is really cos it's like the black kids and the white kids and they always stay away from each other but I don't get it...like they're always over there...like they always hang around over there...like they always hang around together. But everyone else...they always go around everywhere else so like...I don't get it'*

This perceived lack of racial integration is detrimental to all students at the school. Wilson notes that “students who report having friends of different races exhibit stronger connectedness” (Wilson 2004: 298). Pupils who lack this racial integration experience less connectedness to the school community, thus once again putting them at risk of lower achievement, motivation and chance of drop out. As seen in Chapter 2, culture is significant

in the discussion of ethnicity. In the same way that pupils may struggle to connect with the curriculum on a cultural level (Osler & Hill 1999), their cultural engagement to school and the school community may be affected. The danger of this is that it may create “a cycle of miscommunication and confrontation” (Skiba et al. 2002:336). Walton and Cohen (2007) note that ethnic minorities may experience “belonging uncertainty” which can directly affect their engagement and achievement (Walton & Cohen 2007). Altschul, Oyserman and Bybee’s study (2006) supports this by saying that pupils who have a strong racial-ethnic identity tended to achieve higher due to increased connectedness, awareness of racism in terms of being aware of other people’s prejudices, and embedded achievement whereby being a member of a group encourages higher achievement (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee 2006). This suggests that connectedness and a cohesive community is important in the overall achievement and well-being of all pupils.

Equally the tensions between year groups seem to cause some anxiety for one young person interviewed:

‘Umm probably just the tension between years because on Facebook there’s been a club called everyone hates the Year 9s and Year 7s, Year 8s, 10s and 11s have all joined it and the fights etc...it’s just the tension between year groups’ Kieran, Year 9

In this example, pupils in Year 9 are made to feel less of a sense of belonging to the school community than the rest of the school. This demonstrates another example of lack of social cohesion which diminishes social capital for those involved as they are excluded from a wider community identity and involvement. In fact, tension or disquiet between year groups underlines a lack of belonging to the wider school community and a lack of social capital as a whole.

By identifying these two areas of lack of belonging, it identifies some of the social barriers experienced by the young people, which prevent them from learning and participating fully. They both raise questions of esteem and social cohesion in the school community. It is clear how important social capital, connectedness and a sense of belonging are at school. There is a direct relationship, as identified by pupils, and supported by existing literature, between them and motivation and academic achievement.

6.1.2 Bullying

Lacking belonging and being seen as abnormal and different means some of the pupils at risk of exclusion are also vulnerable to being picked on or bullied, thus, further decreasing social capital and making them more ostracised. The loss of social networks within school leads pupils to feeling less connected to the school generally, as well as to the people within it, making them more at risk of being seen as different and thus being picked on.

Pupils that mentioned specific acts of bullying or being picked on were all in Year 7; two of which were boys and one was a girl. The incidents seem to be of such significance for the young people concerned that they mentioned them when answering questions about things that made them not want to come to school or participate in lessons.

Harley: *'Umm sometimes I get a bit bullied*

Int: *What do you get bullied about?*

Harley: *My size' Harley, Year 7*

Nicole: *'Annoying Year 11s*

Int: *Why is that?*

Nicole: *They call me dogface and stuff...well there was someone I get the bus with called Neil and he started it and now they all call me it'*
Nicole, Year 7

Int: *When you're in a lesson and you have your classmates around you...do their attitudes make you want to learn?*

Jacob: *Mmm some people*

Int: *Some people? What sort of thing do the others do that stop you from learning?*

Jacob: *Darren*

Int: *Darren?*

Jacob: *In a poetry lesson he said go back to your bin to me'*

Jacob had earlier identified English and specifically poetry (where the incident had occurred) as being his least favourite subject. This strongly suggests that the incident has created a barrier for him to learn and achieve in that lesson.

Being bullied or picked on amplifies a sense of lack of belonging and reduces self esteem (Kyriacou 2003:21). This is a difficult barrier to overcome and can directly affect the young people's attitude to participation in school.

6.1.3 Fear of rejection

A lack of belonging can also lead to another barrier which was identified by certain young people. Fear of rejection and humiliation from the peer group seems to be an inhibiting factor for some, and especially those who do not feel very confident or have low self

esteem. This is also a cyclical relationship as bullying and being seen as different can lead to low self esteem which then leads to further disengagement and more barriers to learning.

Lewis talked about something in direct response to what he perceives makes it difficult for him to participate in lessons.

'The fact that sometimes I don't like doing my drama lessons because you know that if you screw it up in front of your class then they're all gonna laugh at you. But I don't exactly get on with everyone in my drama class because they're all like a group...different group of people so I don't like them anyway and the fact that I think they're gonna laugh at me just makes me think I didn't fit in. So that's why I don't always like going to my drama class unless I'm really confident about doing it'

Lewis, Year 11

It is such a barrier for him that he often chooses to truant from the lesson instead of having to experience such fear of humiliation. This gives a very different insight to truancy than one of a disaffected pupil not bothering to engage with school. Truancy in Lewis' case appears to be fuelled by low self esteem and fear of being made to look foolish in front of his peers:

'I don't skive by myself because it's boring. Unless I really don't want to go to a lesson...

...if someone said come and skive with me in an art lesson I'd tell them and say no.

Or if they said come and skive with me and I had a drama performance then I'd probably say yeah' Lewis, Year 11

Lewis is a talented artist and art is his favourite lesson. His self esteem and engagement with art, as a result, are clearly higher. Xin Ma (2003) notes that "students who had a greater feeling of worthiness appeared to feel more comfortable in their schools than did

those students who felt less worth” (Xin Ma, 2003: 347). This appears to be the case for Lewis in art as he shows by being less inclined to truant from art where he feels a greater sense of worth. It highlights how significant barriers of fear of humiliation and rejection from his peers are for attendance, active participation and, thus, achievement in subjects such as drama.

This is true for other young people:

‘Yeah like drama because it’s embarrassing to get up and like in music...but I don’t do it now...but in music when you had to sing in front of people no one would ever do it’ Kirsty, Year 10

The idea of looking foolish in front of classmates can obviously create a barrier to learning as they fear rejection and humiliation. Ryan et al. (1994) look at this important relationship between pupils, teachers and their peers linked to self esteem and note the positive influence relationships can have in terms of pupils feeling good about themselves. For various reasons such as socio-economic backgrounds, language, culture, self-esteem, academic ability, and medical reasons, fitting in socially appears to be a difficult barrier for the majority of pupils at risk of exclusion in this sample. Consequently this appears to create fear being humiliated or ridiculed in front of their peers.

Fear of humiliation seemingly goes hand in hand with worry about low academic ability.

Those who feel they are weak or of lower academic ability seem to be particularly frightened of being made to look stupid in front of others.

‘That’s one of the main reasons I don’t like my English lessons because I’m in a higher set and feel like I’m the dumbest one in there even though sir said to me that I’m not. It’s because of the way that I talk and everything; the way I use slang and they all talk posh and stuff like that really so they all know these smart words and

I'm saying the same smart words but it just sounds stupid when I'm saying it and I don't like doing it in front of the class because I don't want to get noticed by it'

Lewis, Year 11

Lewis appears to suggest that he feels like he is from a different social group to the others in his class. He feels less intelligent and less articulate than the others and as a result is fearful they will laugh at him and reject him. In this instance he is aware of the teacher's confidence in him yet it is not enough to overcome his feelings of inadequacy. This suggests how much Lewis' low self esteem inhibits his full participation at school. He is not truanting because he is 'naughty' or 'unintelligent'. In fact, his English teacher clearly sees that he is not. His low self esteem and fear of being ridiculed suggests he chooses to opt out of stressful situations as a means to preserve his dignity.

This has potential repercussions as it is widely reported that low self esteem leads to young people taking part in at-risk behaviours such as alcohol, tobacco, drug use, depression, suicide, violence including using weapons, early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy and poor peer relationships (McNeely & Falci 2004: 290; King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan 2002: 294). A pupil struggling with low self-esteem who then participates in at-risk behaviour and is excluded is then at risk of offending (as noted in Chapter 2). This creates an image of disaffected young people as uninterested in education who are socially disruptive. Yet, truancy and disaffection are clearly linked to variety of complex factors such as low self esteem, bullying and school connectedness or social capital and is not just something disruptive pupils do to avoid school.

Some pupils made comments about similar feelings of inadequacy and inferiority but with what they perceived to be teacher-led humiliation:

'Umm yeah just the way that like the teachers just push you but you don't know and sort of like embarrasses you in front of the whole class and everyone is having a little giggle to themselves or to their peers like that's what I really think' Kieran,
Year 9

If pupils who feel less able than their classmates are 'picked on' by the teacher they seem to feel even more stupid and humiliated which can result in them withdrawing emotionally from the lesson. This supports what Riley discussed about children feeling 'at the bottom of the heap, labelled by teachers as 'thick', 'stupid' and not wanted in school'(Riley & Docking 2004:168).

Being made to feel humiliated in front of peers is not just related to academic ability. Max in Year 9 felt an injustice had been done to him when a teacher allegedly called him a name in front of the class:

'But the whole class were there and they saw him swear at me and they were all going...they were all laughing...they all started laughing at me when he swore at me'

Consequently, Games which had been one of his favourite lessons had become one of his least favourite.

Lumby (2009) discovered that "relations between staff and learners in upper secondary schools are assessed by many of the young people interviewed as undermining and, in some cases, halting learning and excluding them" (Lumby and Morrison 2009: 591). The relationship between teacher and pupil can be one of hierarchy and power whereby the pupils feels humiliated and undermined (Lumby & Morrison, 2009; Pomeroy, 1999; Riley, 2004). Max's perception certainly supports this feeling. Lumby ascertains that a

relationship where the pupils feel they are treated like an adult or an equal is an important enabler for young people to engage with learning (Lumby & Morrison 2009: 586-7).

The fear of being ridiculed or humiliated is so great for some that they suggest they would much rather work in smaller groups to avoid the classroom situation:

'Ohh...umm...smaller classes. Like just a few people... I suppose when I'm in my classes at the moment I feel quite...I don't like to give my opinion because like...the people I'm with in the classes...well cos I don't get on with them so much, I always feel like maybe they're gonna judge me...' Evie, Year 11

'Where you sit down and there's nobody else in the room and you sit down and just do work because it'd be less distractions and you could just get on with it' George, Year 10

'Like if they made the classes smaller' Pippa, Year 8

These young people suggest smaller groups as a potential enabler to remove some of the social barriers, including fear of humiliation, low self-esteem and embarrassment that they experience at school.

A lack of belonging or feelings of being an outsider seems to be a particular issue for those with medical problems or home and family difficulties. Every pupil interviewed, who discussed a difficulty at home or had a known difficulty or medical problem, also talked of difficulty in relating to peers. For some, the difficulties meant they found it a challenge to focus in school:

'Yeah because I can't concentrate anyway because of things at home' Carla, Year 10

'Well they [friends] try...cos they try and encourage me but I just can't concentrate so there's no point.' Carla, Year 10

Difficulties at home are clearly a barrier to the pupils' learning and achievement as they are preoccupied by other things and are not able to give school their full attention. As outlined in Chapter 2, Hamill and Boyd (2002b) list characteristics that pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs face. They are more likely to experience low self esteem, lack motivation, lack concentration, experience difficulties with learning, have poor interpersonal skills and experience more feelings of hopelessness (Hamill & Boyd 2002b: 92).

Medical problems can be a difficult barrier as well. Anna in Year 7 has a particular problem with wetting herself due to abuse she suffered when younger.

'Yeah...just once...cos I felt...cos I wet myself so Miss gave me a skirt and I don't like skirts cos I always wear trousers so I just walked out of school'

The reality of her situation was humiliating but being given a skirt instead of trousers meant she felt she had to leave school and went home in the middle of the day without permission.

Carla in Year 10 who has difficulties at home finds this to be a barrier to her school work. When asked what would help her achieve more in school she replied:

'Well I can't really because I go to counselling and they said that I'm suffering from depression so I can't really do anything at the moment till my head's sorted out'

Her medical condition seems to be a significant barrier for her alongside the difficulties at home and family situation that she has to deal with.

Evie in Year 11 talked about recently having been put on medication to help her manage her anger.

'It's like...it's to calm me down...Propenol or something like that. It's to calm me down because when I lose my temper I really lose it.'

In fact she considered medication and recent CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) involvement to be a positive step for her as she felt it was helping her cope better at school:

'I think I have sort of avoided a lot of situations that could have got a lot worse...umm...it has helped...obviously I'm not perfect now but I also go to CAMHS in Harrogate...ummm...so all these things...that it has...especially since being on this [medication]...it's like I notice it myself. Like when Ms White put me back on the report card. I really didn't want to be on it and I kicked off but nowhere near as bad as I would have done before.' Evie, Year11

Her emotional and psychological state was a difficult barrier for her attendance but there are some potential enablers in place that she recognises as being a positive thing for her. Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre (2004) discuss the need for “emotional dimensions to learning” (Hart et al. 2004: 132). If teachers recognise and attend to the pupils’ emotional dimensions, they argue that it helps “learners overcome psychological barriers that might otherwise limit their ability and willingness to engage” (Hart et al. 2004: 144). The key theory surrounding this is transformability which enables the teachers to engage learners in a “genuine meeting of minds” (Hart et al. 2004: 182-3) giving them feelings of “security, competence and control” (Hart et al. 2004: 195). This type of approach could be a powerful enabler for pupils at risk of exclusion to be able to engage with learning and overcoming some of the psychological barriers they are presented with.

6.2 Distraction

Having looked at barriers in terms of belonging and having seen how many facets of feeling like an outsider there are and the effect this can have on pupils at risk of exclusion, it is now time to examine another major barrier to learning in the overarching theme of social relationships. In stark contrast to isolation and lack of belonging, pupils identified that being in lessons with friends was a major distraction and barrier to learning.

'They start laughing and having a laugh and then it starts putting me off' Nick, Year 10

'You're tempted to mess around and chat' Toby, Year 11

For some, the peer group has the potential to influence them for good as well as bad:

'No...I don't know because if you're in a class where they're all good and that then you just think oh yeah I'll be good too and work but if you're in a class where they're all talking then you just get involved and then you're sat talking and you think you can't be bothered writing' Sarah, Year 10

'Well if I'm with someone who is always giddy and messing around then I'll be giddy and mess around but if I'm with people who are wanting to learn then I'll probably be wanting to learn as well' Jack, Year 9

Ideas for how friends could help the young people do better in school nearly all focused on the need for friends to stop messing around. This was a particularly important issue for boys in Year 10 and 11. Gender identities in the classroom are an important consideration to barriers to learning and engagement. Jackson (2002) highlights the need for boys to protect their self worth in the classroom, and that procrastination, withdrawal of effort, avoidance of working and disruptive behaviour are tools they use to protect their self

worth and avoid failure or the implication of failure (Jackson 2002: 42). The need to protect their masculinity and not be seen to be feminine in their approach to work is also vital (Jackson 2003: 584). Willis (1977) highlights the importance for boys of 'having a laff' and 'being one of the lads' (Willis 1977: 29). It is vital, as a boy, to be able to make the other boys laugh even at the cost of learning. Willis notes it is used "to defeat boredom and fear, overcome hardship and problems – as a way out of almost anything" (Willis 1977: 29). It is, of course, an important bonding tool for 'the lads' as well and in order to avoid isolation or experience the lack of social belonging discussed previously, it is imperative to join in. The boys in this sample explain how an enabler for them to increase their participation in class and reduce exclusion is to lessen these distractions:

Int: *How could your friends help you achieve more in school?*

'They couldn't really...I don't know...like if they left me alone in lessons and let me get on with my work instead of speaking to me then that would probably be one of them' Robbie, Year 11

'Not throw stuff at me during lessons' Lewis, Year 11

'Not mucking about in lessons...that'd help...well it would help everyone...stop putting people off' Nick, Year 10

Some seem to think this is an unlikely reality and nothing can be done to achieve this and remove this distracting barrier:

'No [laughs] because most of them are rude and obnoxious and shout out all of the time' George, Year 10

'No cos they don't want to learn...they just mess about all of the time' Kirsty, Year

10

For some, however, it is a difficult decision as to whether they actually want the barrier removed:

'Well when they are being proper naughty in class and you want to like do your work and that then that does your head in but it's better when you're in a class with your mates though cos when you're bored you've actually got someone to talk to'

Robbie, Year 11

Pupils identified friends as being a barrier to learning because they distract them from working. Gender clearly plays a significant role in this and boys are shown to need to assert their masculinity, be one of the lads and avoid failure through distraction techniques. It is clear that taking part in classroom antics, and gender norms within this, is a barrier to achievement and participation at school. Equally, it was argued at the beginning of the chapter that a lack of belonging and not joining in or having group membership creates barriers to engagement at school. These two barriers appear to be juxtaposed against each other and illustrate how complex social relationships are in school in terms of acting as barriers to active participation, achievement and attendance.

6.3 Status

The desire to fit in and belong to the social set up of school life means another area which emerged from the interview data needs addressing. For some young people their behaviour not only draws attention to them and gives them a role in the class but their peers actively encourage them to get into trouble:

'Well sometimes...cos sometimes like people are always coming to me and like and say "Be bad...be bad...make everyone laugh" and that' Freya, Year 7

It seems there is some status to be had for pupils if they disrupt the lesson.

'Well I suppose some people encourage me just to...well they probably get a laugh out of it...I don't know...I suppose it's funny seeing someone else kick off and shouting and swearing at the teachers...just refusing' Evie, Year 11

Being seen as rebellious or the class clown appears to hold positive connotations. Harley in Year 7 confirms this idea. When asked what makes a good atmosphere in a school, he answers:

'Someone like me because I'm the class clown so I make everyone laugh'

For the girls it seems to be more complex:

'Umm well sometimes I get like encouraged like if I'm kicking off...people encourage me to carry on and then sometimes people will be like shouting stuff at me which will wind me up so I'll kick off even more anyway. So if people just sort of left it so...you know I'm not bothered if people sit and talk about me...it's just when people do it deliberately so I can hear it and it just winds me up. If they just kept quiet...' Evie, Year 11

'They could be more supportive and stop saying "Be bad"' Freya, Year 7

Gender identity plays a significant role in behaviour and how it is dealt with for girls. There is a greater degree of shock or horror when girls display aggressive behaviour than for boys (Osler, Street, Lall & Vincent 2002: 55). The element of shock contributes to their classmates encouraging them to 'kick off' or 'be bad' as it creates a more entertaining result for their peers. The problem for girls is that they are often treated much harsher than boys are for similar behaviour as it is seen as out of character and away from their

expected gender identity of being “good girls”. Osler et al. (2002) explain that girls do not have the ability to be “loveable rogues” (Osler et al. 2002: 55).

Freya and Evie identify this encouragement as a negative thing and despite the status it may give them, recognise that in the long run it would help them not get in trouble if their peers were not encouraging it. Peers are therefore identified as being a barrier to the young people’s learning in both a distraction in class and as an encouragement for them to ‘be bad’ in lessons. In particular this is significant for girls who create a more shocking and entertaining result.

6.4 Socio-economic groups

The final theme that became apparent from the interviews was a complex social issue for some of the pupils based on the make-up of the school itself. Approximately 50% of the cohort lives in the town of Riverton, whilst 50% is transported in by bus from the north of nearby city Tinsbury. Riverton is a small, affluent market town, whilst North Tinsbury has a much lower socio-economic standing. This created a social barrier for some pupils:

‘Well it’s like people in Riverton think they’re better than people from Tinsbury so...’

Robbie, Year 11

Int: *Do you feel like you belong here?*

Luke: *Nah not really*

Int: *Why is that?*

Luke: *No reason really...I don’t know...I just don’t think I am*

Int: *Do you feel like an outsider?*

Luke: *Yeah cos everyone's different up here aren't they? Compared to where I come from.*

Int: *Different in Riverton to Tinsbury?*

Luke: *Yeah*

Int: *Do you know how?*

Luke: *No*

For these young people, they feel like they do not belong to the school at a cultural level. It is difficult for them to articulate how or why this is but Jonny in Year 9 tries to elaborate:

Jonny: *'I come from right on the other side of Tinsbury from here...it's just different...they treat...I don't know...'*

Int: *Can you explain at all?*

Jonny: *'Like the pupils...well some of them are a bit stuck up at times'*

The barrier of culture, geography and socio-economic backgrounds is a difficult one to overcome. Robbie in Year 11, when talking about belonging, comes up with a hypothetical potential enabler to solve this problem:

'Nowt really. How do you feel like you do you feel like you belong to a school in any case? Like I say...like with Riverton and Tinsbury. If they moved the school in the middle of Riverton...to like the middle of Tinsbury and Riverton then no one can say owt then'

Alexander (2008) explains that disadvantaged young people "suffer stigmatisation because of who they are, what they do and how they look" (Alexander 2008: 175). She discusses the stigmatisation young people feel when they move from their own territory into someone

else's area. Local knowledge and territory is where young people feel safe. Going into another locality is an unknown and potentially threatening environment for a young person, which results in them feeling insecure and lacking belonging or citizenship (Alexander 2008).

The difficulty the young people feel from Tinsbury is obvious. From the sample chosen for the study, 15 travel from another locality to Riverton for school. Alexander's study suggests that these young people are already at a disadvantage as they are more likely to feel insecure and a lack of belonging which has been shown contributes to less engagement and participation at school.

It is clear, therefore, how important the social side of school is to young people and how much it affects them for good and bad. Friends are undoubtedly a strong motivation for young people to come to school, but for those who do not find it easy to fit in, lots of barriers arise. The issue of belonging seems to be paramount in this chapter and I have focused on this accordingly. Being seen as different and potential humiliation and rejection is often a trigger for truancy or poor or challenging behaviour or indeed a result of it. It is this chapter alone where young people find it the hardest to think of potential enablers to minimise their risk of exclusion and this highlights the complex nature of the social set-up of a school.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the attitudes of pupils at risk of exclusion in relation to school.

The aim was to consider the overall attitudes in terms of atmosphere and culture of the school as well as educational value; what barriers the pupils perceived to hinder their attendance, active participation and achievement; and finally what they thought to be potential enablers to reduce their risk of exclusion.

The main findings can be broken down into six themes: pupil-teacher relationship, discipline, curriculum, physical surroundings, organisation of the school day and social relationships.

Gender identities played a significant role in pupils at risk of exclusion. Boys found the curriculum to be too passive and inactive in its delivery. A significant barrier to their engagement, active participation and achievement was that the lessons were not interactive enough. A further barrier they found as the distraction of peers in the classroom. Fear of femininity associated with working hard and academic prowess, and the need to assert their masculinity meant many of them found the classroom environment itself as a barrier to engagement. Additionally, girls at risk of exclusion found other pupils encouraging them to misbehave a significant barrier as well.

Further barriers to engagement at school were expressed by pupils with SEN. Social difficulties were particularly difficult for those with SEBN. Feelings of inferiority, fear of humiliation and lack of belonging can be seen to directly affect engagement at school leading to truancy and exclusion. Difficulties of relating to others and articulating their needs to teachers typified barriers for these young people.

Physical surroundings were a surprising theme to emerge from the interview data as a barrier to engagement. For pupils from a lower socio-economic background, the significance of physical surroundings seemed higher. The feeling that the school was a dumping ground and that they were not worth better facilities were common. Pupils with difficulties at home and emotional needs also asserted the need for a calm, peaceful environment. To be faced with an 'old' and 'tatty' building suggested to them that it was uncared for. The link between the buildings being cared for and the pupils being cared for was significant.

Finally, the practical running of the school day created problems for certain pupils in terms of their ability to engage. Issues such as starting too early, having too much undirected time at lunch time and timetable design were all identified as barriers which decreased pupil engagement.

This study has found that young people at risk of exclusion from school face many barriers in terms of their attendance, active participation and achievement at school. They also have clear views on positive enablers which could potentially improve their experiences at school. These will be discussed further in 7.3 when I will be focusing on positive enablers and making recommendations for practice.

7.2 Limitations

Before I make any recommendations and suggest implications for the future regarding exclusion from school, the limitations of the findings from this study needs to be considered. The most significant weakness of the study is that it was unable to explore the attitudes of pupils at risk of exclusion on a greater scale. Thus, the information provided in the study could only be said to scratch the surface of the situation for pupils at risk of

exclusion. As the study was only a small scale research project and based in one location with a relatively small sample, it means that the ability to transfer the findings to a wider setting is more difficult. It has been argued, however, that it is possible to state that the findings could be transferable and be applied to a school in a similar location with pupils at risk of exclusion with similar characteristics and backgrounds. Furthermore, having ensured that the data provided thick and detailed descriptions, it is possible to argue that the transferability of the data has greatly increased and can be applied to a wider setting (Bryman 2008). Thus, it could be argued that the findings of this study, could suggest important considerations for pupils at risk of exclusion on a wider scale.

Methodologically, the study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with each pupil. It could be argued that the research would have been enhanced if a different methodological tool, such as a questionnaire, had been used. It was possible that the young people could have felt intimidated by an adult researcher particularly as I was known to the respondents as a member of staff within the school. However, as was argued in Chapter 3, a questionnaire approach could not have gathered as much detailed information as the interview did and would not have allowed for further probing or conversation between the interviewer and respondents.

Additionally, the reliability of pupil accounts could be questioned. Being at risk of exclusion and disengaged from the school system or community could mean that pupils interviewed were disillusioned with school and it could be argued that they would hold purely negative or biased opinions about school. This, however, was not the case as many young people suggested positive enablers which would improve their experience which are not stereotypically associated with pupils at risk of exclusion. An example of this is those who asked for shorter lunchbreaks.

A final weakness that could be considered is the possibility of misrepresentation on the researchers' part. The interviews were conducted and interpreted by an individual researcher and it would have been beneficial to have multiple researchers so that there could have been increased objectivity and neutral analysis of the data. With one researcher it means that there was greater scope for subjectivity and misinterpretation. Given the nature of the research project, it was not possible to have more than one researcher and in order to ensure the respondents were not misrepresented great care was taken in collecting the data. It was recorded so that the researcher could return to the original conversation and was then transcribed and analysed carefully.

Taking the limitations and weaknesses of the project into account, it is believed that this study holds some significant implications in the area of exclusion from school especially due to the fact the findings are based on what young people currently experiencing exclusion perceive to be barriers and enablers to their engagement at school.

7.3 Recommendations

Having given the young people in this sample a voice and having asked them to highlight potential enablers which could decrease their risk of exclusion, it is only fair to use their comments as the basis for my recommendations for future practice which could help engage young people at risk of exclusion from school.

7.3.1 Hands-on Learning

In order to increase engagement in lessons, especially for boys, based on these findings, it is important to ensure opportunities for hands-on, kinaesthetic learning. More interactive lessons clearly increase the engagement of pupils at risk of exclusion. Work-related learning is an important facet of this and can be significant

as it not only offers practical activities, but also meaningful subjects which allow pupils to experience more adult responsibilities and learning (Vulliamy & Webb 2000, Riley & Docking 2004).

7.3.2 Classroom banter

An appreciation of gender identities in the classroom and an understanding that boys in particular need to assert their masculinity would be beneficial in the classroom environment. A key significance in increasing engagement with pupils at risk of exclusion is for the teaching staff to create an environment where they can join in some of the banter and use humour to build relationships with the young people (Lumby & Morrison 2009). The use of humour and an environment where the young people feel a sense of equality between them and the teacher could be a turning point for many pupils at risk of exclusion being able to engage, participate and achieve in the lesson.

7.3.3 Social Pedagogy

For pupils at risk of exclusion and those with SEN and SEBN in particular, a relationship with staff is paramount. Pupils gave ideas of mentoring, teachers taking an active interest in their lives and increased pastoral care as being significant in increasing their belonging at school and thus reducing their exclusion. A social pedagogical approach for pupils at risk of exclusion could therefore have important implications. Pupils at risk of exclusion require the teacher to take a greater interest in their holistic care and meet some of their social needs (Cameron 2007, Kyriacou et al. 2009). Creating opportunities for the relationship to be developed outside of the classroom is important. Residential trips, outward bound activities and activities outside of the classroom environment can be useful

methods of building these relationships and I would argue that this increased relationship has the potential to increase young people's engagement and achievement in the classroom (Riley et al. 2006).

7.3.4 Social suggestions

For young people at risk of exclusion, social interaction has proved to be a challenging aspect of school. Suggestions of smaller classes and even avoiding a classroom environment altogether were given as potential enablers to increase engagement at school. Exploring the use of smaller classes nurture groups with pupils at risk of exclusion, could therefore be beneficial to see if this would help overcome a difficult barrier and make the young people feel a greater sense of belonging and ability to achieve.

The use of music in the classroom, or allowing the use of iPods (as suggested by one young person) could be another way of helping those who struggle in a busy classroom environment and could help them ignore any distractions from peers allowing them to focus on the tasks set (Hallam & Price 1998).

7.3.5 Physical Surroundings

An obvious recommendation would be to invest in the physical environment of the school grounds (Steer 2005, Broadhurst et al. 2006). Small enablers, such as asking pupils to help decide what colour to paint doors, or getting them to help design the layout of certain classrooms could have enormous benefits for young people at risk of exclusion. Including the pupils not only in making decisions but also in implementing them would give them a sense of ownership and connectedness to

the school and allow them to know that their opinions are important and that both them and their surroundings are cared for.

7.3.6 Child-centred approach

Particular attention could be given to treating pupils as individuals and structuring their school day in a way that can meet their needs and help increase their engagement (Reid 2005). This child-centred approach could mean fairly small changes to timetables, lunchbreaks, and lessons which could change the pupils' ability to engage dramatically. It is clear that pupils at risk of exclusion struggle to negotiate their school days as successfully as others and so a few changes which respond to their needs could be extremely beneficial.

This study has shown that young people at risk of exclusion have much to say, both positively and negatively regarding their school experience. The study has attempted to portray barriers which cause young people difficulty to engage at school as well as potential enablers which could help increase their engagement, whilst looking at their overall attitudes to school, in terms of educational value and atmosphere and culture.

The one thing which stands out to me from the findings is that despite all of the challenges the pupils face they all wanted the teaching staff to think that they were good, that they tried and that they were clever. This displays an emotional engagement to school and the educational system despite their apparent disaffection or risk of exclusion and highlights to me that by implementing some simple changes, the risk of exclusion for these young people could be significantly reduced.

APPENDIX 1: Pupil Profiles

Year 7

Anna

Anna is a looked after child in Year 7. She has severe learning difficulties. Although Anna has not been excluded from school, she has shown repeated disruptive behaviour in lessons and refusal to follow instructions. She has also been involved in some more serious incidents concerning theft. Anna attends the school's onsite inclusion provision.

Freya

Freya is a girl in Year 7 who is originally from Zimbabwe. Her first language is Shona. She has been excluded four times for verbal abuse of staff, refusal to follow instructions, being disruptive and bullying in class. She also has been referred to the school's onsite inclusion provision.

Nicole

Nicole is in Year 7. She has moderate learning difficulties and attends extra literacy sessions in small groups. She has been excluded once but has numerous recordings of disruptive behaviour in class. Nicole has been referred to the onsite provision for inclusion.

Harley

Harley is a Year 7 boy who has Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. He attends extra literacy sessions during school as well as attending the onsite inclusion provision. Harley has not been excluded officially but he has 16 recorded behaviour incidents and has spent times isolated or unofficially excluded.

Jacob

Jacob is severely dyslexic and had a reading age of 6 when he started high school in September 2009. He attends extra literacy support as well as the onsite inclusion provision for behaviour management and improving appropriate social contact skills. He was permanently excluded from his primary school and struggles to fit in socially with his peers.

Tom

Tom has been excluded four times for aggressive and disruptive behaviour. He has various incidents of inappropriate behaviour recorded and he attends the onsite inclusion provision for anger management and behaviour techniques.

Year 8

Ed

Ed is in Year 8 and has been excluded once. He has 26 incidents of inappropriate behaviour recorded. He was referred to the onsite provision for inclusion in Year 7 but did not engage well with this.

Sam

Sam is in Year 8 and has not been formally excluded and has no behaviour incidents recorded on the school data system. He was referred by the pastoral staff for the study as he struggles to fit in socially and has behavioural problems as a result of this. He struggles to follow instructions and often challenges authority in class.

Matty

Matty is in Year 8. He receives free school meals. He is temporarily living with his father. He has no record of being excluded from school but has 29 recorded behaviour incidents for challenging authority and refusal to follow instructions.

Jamie

Jamie's first language is Punjabi and this is what is spoken at home. He lives in Tinsbury and travels to school from there. He has not been excluded but has displayed some challenging behaviour which has resulted in 5 recorded behaviour incidents.

Pippa

Pippa is in Year 8. She is keen on sports and PE but does not really like other classroom based learning. She has not been excluded but has a number of behaviour incidents which the pastoral staff confirmed put her at risk of exclusion. She often shouts out in class and can be rude to teaching staff.

Jason

Jason lives in Riverton. He has been excluded 3 times and attended the onsite inclusion provision in Year 7. He has a very high number of behaviour incidents and has been isolated during his break and lunch times for repeatedly leaving the school site.

Year 9

Anthony

Anthony has not been officially excluded from school. He has received 22 recorded behaviour incidents. He is in Year 9 and lives in a village outside of Riverton.

Jonny

Jonny was permanently excluded from a different high school in Tinsbury. He then moved to Riverton High. He has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties but is a keen cricket fan. He has been excluded once since being at Riverton and has had a significant number of behaviour incidents.

Jack

Jack is a boy in Year 9 who has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. He has an attachment disorder. Jack has not been excluded but does have a high number of behaviour incidents on his record.

Kieran

Kieran has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. He has been excluded 7 times and also has a significant number of behaviour incidents.

Max

Max has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. He has been excluded four times and has a high number of behaviour incidents. He has attended the onsite inclusion provision at the school as well as having support from the Behaviour for Learning Mentors. Max receives free school meals and lives in a village outside of Riverton.

Tim

Tim is in Year 9 and has been excluded twice. He has a significant number of behaviour incidents. He was referred by pastoral staff for this study as he is often rude to teaching staff and challenges their authority in class.

Year 10

Carla

Carla is in year 10. She has a moderate learning difficulty and is weak in literacy. She also has attendance problems according to her school record. Carla has a difficult family background and needed a lot of support from the family worker linked to the school. She has been excluded 6 times officially but has spent some unofficial exclusions in the onsite inclusion provision due to her home situation. She also goes there for her maths lessons due to conflict with her teacher.

David

David lives in Tinsbury. He has been excluded once for a 7 day period and has 12 recorded behaviour incidents on his school record.

George

George has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. He has been excluded once but has spent time in Year 9 with dual registration attending a Pupil Referral Unit for 1 or 2 terms.

Nick

Nick has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. He has been excluded 9 times and has had various timetable alterations to try and accommodate his needs better in school. He has a high number of behaviour incidents for inappropriate behaviour.

Kirsty

Kirsty has been excluded 5 times. She has a number of behaviour incidents for aggressive and rude behaviour to staff.

Sarah

Sarah has been excluded four times and she has 22 incidents of inappropriate behaviour logged on her record. She is in Year 10 and lives in Riverton.

Year 11

Robbie

Robbie has a moderate learning difficulty and requires extra literacy support. He has been excluded 3 times and receives free school meals.

Hayley

Hayley has been excluded twice. She has various incidents where her behaviour has been seen as inappropriate but these are largely unrecorded. Hayley receives free school meals and lives in Riverton.

Toby

Toby has been excluded twice. He has only a few incidents of behaviour which have been logged but more which have not been recorded. He lives in Riverton.

Luke

Luke has been excluded 5 times. He has attended the onsite inclusion provision for his behaviour whilst in Year 9 and 10. Luke spent the majority of Year 11 being on roll at an offsite provision. He therefore had dual registration but was eventually excluded from the offsite provision during the last term of Year 11 whereby Riverton High took him back to do his exams with them. He had his own timetable for this, much of which was spent at the onsite inclusion provision in school.

Lewis

Lewis has been excluded 7 times. During Year 11 he has been educated mostly at the onsite inclusion provision, going only into certain lessons with his peers.

Evie

Evie has involvement from CAMHS. She has been excluded 3 times officially but this figure is unrepresentative of her time in school as she has very poor attendance and has spent much time working in the behaviour support centre when she is in school. She struggles to stay in lessons and interact with her peers and as a result behaves accordingly to get sent out.

APPENDIX 2: Example Letter for Pupils

Dear _____,

I am doing a research project to find out about young people's experiences at school. I am interested in asking people who find school difficult to try and learn how it could be made better for you. I want to find out what you think about school and see what you think might help you.

I am going to interview 30 young people from your school and ask them questions about their experiences. I would like you to be one of the 30 people. If you do not wish to take part then just let me know. It is not something you have to do.

The interview will last about 30 minutes but it could be shorter or longer. I have asked your teachers and they are happy for you to do it. Your answers will be kept anonymous and no one will find out what you have said.

If you do take part and you would like a copy of the final project when it is finished, you are welcome to have one.

If you are happy to participate then we can begin the interview. All you need to do is be honest! If you want to stop at any point, just let me know.

Thank you very much,

Bethany Hawkins

APPENDIX 3: Interview Schedule

SECTION 1:

What attitudes do pupils at risk of exclusion have towards school in terms of (a) educational value and (b) atmosphere/culture of school community

- a. Do differences exist in terms of:*
 - i. Number of exclusions*
 - ii. Length of exclusions*
 - iii. Family background*
 - iv. Gender*
 - v. Reasons for exclusions*
-

1. Do you like your school?
2. What's the best thing about it?
3. What's the worst thing about it?
4. Do you think it is important to go to school? Why?
5. What is it about your school that makes you want to go?
6. Is there anything that makes you not want to go?
7. Is it a good place to learn?
8. What is your favourite subject? Why?
9. What is your least favourite subject? Why?
10. What are you good at in school?
11. What are you not so good at?
12. If you are struggling with a subject what do you do for help?
13. Do you find that the teachers are there to help you if you need it?

14. Do you think the lessons that the teachers teach are interesting?
15. Who is your favourite teacher? Why?
16. Who is your least favourite teacher? Why?
17. Do your teachers have high expectations of you in your lessons?
18. What would you like them to think of you?
19. Do the teachers treat you with respect?
20. Do they listen to what you have to say?
21. Do you think your school is fair? Does it give everyone the same chance?
22. Does the school support you if you have a personal problem?
23. Do you have a lot of friends in school?
24. Do you feel like you belong to the school community?
25. Do you know what the school ethos is?
26. Do you think it happens?
27. Do you do any extra-curricular activities in school? /Are you a member of any clubs?
28. Are you proud of being a pupil at Riverton High School?
29. Does it matter to you what people think of your school?
30. What do you think makes a good atmosphere in a school?
31. Do you think this happens in your school?
32. Do you think you have a say in your education?

SECTION 2:

What do pupils at risk of exclusion perceive to be barriers to their learning and participation in school, with particular reference to:

- a. attendance*
 - b. active participation in lessons*
 - c. achievement*
-

1. Are there things at your school that make it difficult for you to participate in learning?
2. Is there anything that makes you not want to come to school?
3. Have you ever missed lessons without permission? Why?
4. If you have missed lessons without permission, what have you been doing instead?
5. Why do you find this more enjoyable than school?
6. Did you get caught?
7. If you did get caught what was the consequence for missing lessons?
8. Has this put you off doing it again? Why?
9. Have you ever been excluded from school?
10. If yes, how many times?
11. What did you do during your exclusion?
12. Has this deterred you from getting excluded again?
13. Do you find your lessons enjoyable?
14. Do you feel like your lessons make you want to contribute/speak out in class?
15. Does the content of your lessons make you want to learn?
16. Do the attitudes of your teacher make you want to learn?

17. Do the attitudes of your peers make you want to learn?
18. Is there anything stopping you from achieving in your lessons at the moment?
19. Do you have any idea of what you want to do after school?
20. Is getting good exam results important to you?
21. Do you think you will get good GCSEs?
22. What would stop you from achieving good exam results?

SECTION 3:

What do the pupils perceive to be positive influences/enablers that could prevent/reduce their exclusions?

1. Is there anything about the atmosphere of your school that you would change if you could?
2. If you could change anything about your school to help you achieve more in lessons what would it be?
3. What would motivate you to want to come to school?
4. What would motivate you to participate more in your lessons?
5. If you could design your perfect lesson what would it look like?
6. If you could describe your perfect teacher what would they be like?
7. What would make you feel proud of your school?
8. What would make you feel like you belong?
9. If you could create a club at your school that you would want to be part of or take part in what would it be?

10. How could your teachers help you achieve more in school?
11. How could your friends help you achieve more in school?
12. How could you help yourself to achieve more in school?
13. What would help you enjoy school more?
14. If you were headteacher and could change anything about your school rules what would it be?
15. If you were the headteacher and you wanted to do something to help someone like you to do better at school, what would you do?

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