Parental Involvement with Schooling and Parental Engagement with their Children's Learning in Disadvantaged Areas in Wales.

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Sciences

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DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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Abstract

Introduction

Parents' involvement and engagement with their child's school and learning are key to children's educational outcomes and life successes. Parental involvement and engagement are both socioeconomically distributed, and often limited amongst lower socioeconomic status (SES) families. Deficit approaches towards parents are often adopted and limited research considers the impact of poverty and stigmatisation on parents' lives and their potential to participate and engage in their child's school or learning. This research uses socioecological frameworks to support understandings of parental involvement and engagement within schools and learning in deprived areas in Wales.

Methods

Four schools participating in the 'Food and Fun: School Holiday Enrichment Programme' (SHEP) were recruited. The data were collected at two points; the 2019 summer holidays and between May and June 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Primarily qualitative interviews were used to explore child (n=13), parent (n=15) and school staff (n=8) perspectives on how poverty and stigmatisation impact home-school relationships, parental involvement and engagement. Secondary data analysis of Free School Meal (FSM) data and Key Stage 2 (KS2) educational outcomes provided contextual demographics of participating schools.

Results

While parents from lower SES backgrounds were involved and engaged in their children's schooling and learning, school-level middle-class ideologies and deficit discourses were prevalent. Poverty and stigmatisation affected all aspects of family's lives, negatively affecting home-school relationships, parental involvement and engagement. School events for families were commonplace, however, the structural and practical barriers which limit some families' attendance and potentially exacerbate existing inequalities were not considered. The need for increased opportunities for parents to contribute towards school decision making processes, including the practicalities of events and their children's education were evident. Support staff in schools were also recognised as valuable assets in the development of home-school relationships.

Conclusion

This research provides understanding to how families and all levels of the socioecological framework interact to support or hinder parental involvement and engagement in education and

learning. These findings are important for policymakers and practitioners in understanding the impact of poverty on families and their involvement and engagement in the education system.

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Acronyms

After Housing Costs (AHC)

Cardiff University Research Opportunities Placement (CUROP)

Free School Meal (FSM)

Healthy Promoting School (HPS)

Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)

Parent Teachers Association (PTA)

School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP)

The Health Improvement Network (THIN)

United Kingdom (UK)

World Health Organization (WHO)

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1. Introduction

1.1   <u>Background Aims</u>

Exploring the role of education, and the school as a setting, is fundamental in understanding inequalities in society (García-Moya et al., 2015). Education can be understood as a "driver of opportunity but also a reproducer of inequality" (Zajacova and Lawrence, 2018; 273). Children and young people spend a great deal of time at school, and the school setting has been recognised as a setting in which inequalities in young people's health and wellbeing can also be influenced (Busch et al., 2015; Kidger et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2017). A healthy school environment can not only support educational development but improve overall child health and emotional wellbeing which can contribute to the development of positive health behaviours in adulthood (Langford et al, 2014).

Education and health are influenced by the family and the school, with both being inextricably embedded within complex broader social contexts. For example, the family and school are both microsystems which themselves are influenced and interact with wider societal forces including the community, housing, welfare provision and economic policy (Zajacova and Lawrence, 2018). The importance of parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning has been well documented (Epstein, 2009; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Langford et al., 2014), with school, family and community partnerships being considered crucial to the success of young people (Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017).

Research shows that parental involvement and parental engagement are socioeconomically differentiated, with family engagement with education and interventions often limited amongst lower socioeconomic status (SES) families (Langford et al., 2015). Difficulties engaging some parents in their children's education often emerge from the congruence and conflict between norms within home and school environments (Barbarin et al., 2010; Jose et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017; Moore and Littlecott, 2015). Therefore, further research focusing on the mechanisms which engage families in schools and interventions, as well as the impact of this engagement on wellbeing and educational outcomes is necessary.

This thesis is primarily interested in understanding how poverty, vulnerability and stigmatisation are perceived to impact parents' involvement in schooling and parents' engagement in learning, and children's educational and health outcomes. This research will view parental involvement in schooling as parent's token involvement in activities or events held on the school grounds

whereas parental engagement with learning is related to activities which support the acquisition of knowledge or skills typically within the home (Goodall, 2018a) [See Chapter 3 for further details]. The motivation for this research initially stemmed from the researcher's involvement in a Cardiff University Research Opportunities Placement (CUROP) working on the evaluation of the Welsh Government 'Food and Fun: School Holiday Enrichment Programme' which has been used as a case study in this research. Through this prior work on the evaluation of the programme in 2016, particular interest in the family involvement aspects of the programme, and parents' involvement in schools and engagement in learning more generally was taken. The programme is run in areas of deprivation in Wales and therefore the families participating in the programme were often from lower SES backgrounds. The idea for the PhD research was developed from involvement with the holiday programme and interest in understanding further the impacts of poverty on families.

The concept of poverty is central to and used throughout this research and commonly used in society although the way in which poverty is understood and measured is variable (Carney, 1992; Wickham et al., 2016) and therefore it is key to define for the purpose of this research. "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary.. in the societies in which they belong" (Townsend, 1979; 31). For example, families experiencing poverty may face challenges purchasing food, having the finances to partake in enrichment or education activities or have the cultural capital to navigate the education system.

Poverty can often be understood as either relative or absolute, with the United Kingdom (UK) government measuring relative poverty in relation to median household income (<60%) and measuring absolute poverty via inflation adjusted median household income (McGuinness, 2018a; Wickham et al., 2016). In 2022, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022) estimated that 1 in 5 people living in the UK were experiencing poverty. However, when child poverty across the UK nations was compared, Wales (34%) had the highest rates of child poverty in comparison with England (27%), Scotland (21%) and Northern Ireland (24%) (End Child Poverty, 2021). Whilst the UK government uses income related measures to estimate the prevalence of those experiencing poverty, it is argued that government statistics do not capture all individuals or families living in poverty (Banovcinova et al., 2014; Wickham et al., 2016).

Throughout the thesis the term 'working class' is used to define a sub-group of people within the population. The class system is a complex and subjective topic, with class being understood,

defined and measured in alternative ways. In this research class will be recognised as the combination of economic capital, cultural capital (values, tastes and language) and social capital (social connections and contacts) (Attridge, 2021). Whilst poverty is a fundamental concept in this thesis, it is also key to consider how working-class values, cultures and relationships effect family's involvement and engagement with schools and learning. Therefore, the term working class will not be solely related to money or income but rather will be understood in terms of the combination of capital noted above.

Moreover, there is recognition that children's health and educational outcomes are strongly correlated with adult health, hence researching the whole family in relation to health and educational inequalities is key (Marmot, 2017). Poverty has been shown to affect the functioning of family systems, with poor family functioning associated with depression and poor academic achievement (Banovcinova et al., 2014; Johnson, 2010). The family is the first environment where children learn and the first environment which shapes a child's physical, emotional and personal patterns (Dahraei and Adlparvar, 2016). Therefore, understanding the family's role in a child's education, and the relationship between the school and home is fundamental. The conditions in which children are born, and where early child development takes place substantially affects educational, employment and social relationship opportunities and outcomes (Marmot, 2017).

The overall aims of this research are to examine socio-economic differences in parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning and the subsequent impacts this has on children's educational and health outcomes. Throughout this research the broad term of 'parent' is used however this encompasses all adult (s) with caring responsibility for a child and living within the child's immediate household unit. The family unit can take many different forms and therefore the term 'parent' within this thesis could include biological parents, grandparents, other family members, careers or foster parents (Spear et al., 2021). This research has used a Welsh Government funded holiday programme (The School Holiday Enrichment Programme) as a case study to access schools, school staff, and families. However, there is broader applicability of the findings beyond the programme, with a greater focus placed on the examination of poverty, vulnerability and stigmatisation on parental involvement, parental engagement and home-school relationships.

Much political and media rhetoric places blame on parents' individual characteristics for limited involvement or engagement in their children's schooling or learning (Jensen, 2018; Lightfoot, 2009). However, this research will not accept deficit approaches to parental involvement and

engagement but rather adopt more of an asset-based or strength-based approach (Doyle and Keane, 2019; Ishimaru et al., 2016). This approach will therefore focus on identifying the "strengths, or assets, as well as the needs and difficulties of children, young people and families" (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2018;1). Consideration of socioecological approaches and the impact of macro-level structures, systematic issues, neo-liberalist ideals and the growing 'responsibilitsation' of parents (Vincent and Maxwell, 2016; Wyness, 2014) on families' every-day lives and parents' relationships with their child's schooling and learning will be central to this thesis.

1.2 <u>Research Design</u>

Within this research a convergent mixed-methods research design was used. Through a case study framework, the research has used primarily qualitative methods to explore how home-school relationships, parental involvement, and parental engagement impact children's educational and health outcomes. Furthermore, the research aims to understand how poverty, vulnerability and stigmatisation can impact parents' involvement, engagement and parental self-efficacy in relation to supporting their child's development.

Embedded within the case study framework whereby the Welsh Government funded Food and Fun: School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) acted as a case study; four schools were recruited to participate in this research. The research data were collected at two-time points; during the summer holidays of 2019 and between May and June of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primarily qualitative research design supported the in-depth exploration of families from lower SES backgrounds experiences of the education system with quantitative secondary data analysis providing contextual understanding of the demographics of the schools participating in the research.

The qualitative methods employed in this research were observations, semi-structured interviews with parents and school staff and creative interviews with children. The first round of data collection involved observations being conducted on the days the holiday programme ran at the schools, and interviews were conducted with children, parents, and school staff. Due to challenges of accessing parents and children for follow-up interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, the second round of semi-structured interviews was limited to school staff.

1.3 <u>Overview of Chapters</u>

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide a synthesised overview of literature within the fields of interest. Chapter 2 begins by outlining the inequalities in the UK today, providing an overview of how

inequalities are measured and understood. The chapter will discuss educational inequalities and whether schools act as either an equalizer or reproducer educational inequalities. This will lead on to considerations of the relationship between education and health before discussing how theories such as socioecological frameworks can help shape understandings of the complexities of children's outcomes. The chapter will also consider the World Health Organisations (WHO) Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework and the importance of family engagement in school-based health interventions which further supports understandings of the importance of parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning which are outlined and discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

Parental involvement and parental engagement are key concepts within this thesis and Chapter 3 provides a range of theoretical frameworks to support understandings of these concepts which typically have divergent definitions. Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) model for the progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with learning, the primary model used to understand the concepts is discussed here. Central to the chapter is also the examination of socio-economic differences in parental involvement and parental engagement. These discussions focus on how systematic problems affect parent's personal and socioeconomic circumstances and considers the subsequent effects this can have on parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning.

Chapter 4 details the impacts of school closures on children's educational and mental health and wellbeing outcomes. The chapter considers both summer holiday and COVID-19 school closures and highlights similarities and differences between periods of school closures. In line with the focus of the research, the chapter has primarily examined socioeconomic differences in experiences including inequalities in opportunities and access to resources both material and cultural. Whilst this chapter has focused on periods of school closures, the chapter further highlights the challenges faced by children and families from lower socio-economic status backgrounds within the education system and seeks to further examine parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning in times where there is arguably less school involvement or support.

Chapter 5 details the research design employed and outlines the methodological approach. This includes detailing how the SHEP was used as a case study, the advantages of using a mixed methods approach and the ontological and epistemological stance adopted.

Chapters 6-9 present the findings from this research. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 provide an overview of data collected in the first round of data collection in the summer holidays of 2019, whereas

chapter 9 provides analysis of data collected during the follow-up interviews in May-June 2020 immediately following the second round of school closures and the third national lockdown.

Chapters 6 and 7 are focused on understanding parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning. The chapters explore the importance of schools' open-door policies, the daily social exchanges between parents and school staff and the development of effective communication between schools and families. This includes the mapping of involvement/engagement events and activities onto a 'Parental Involvement and Engagement Formality Typology' [Figure 5: Chapter 6]. The chapter explores differences between the extent to which children and parents report levels of involvement and engagement in comparison with school level perceptions. The chapters also discuss how limited involvement and engagement are often attributed to parents' individual characteristics with parents often facing 'othering' if they do not conform to what is deemed as normative by the school and middle-class ideologies.

Chapter 8 helps to contextualise the collected data, by providing an overview of how SHEP was implemented, including how schools were recruited by the Welsh Local Government Authority (WLGA) and how families were recruited to participate in the programme by schools. The chapter presents quantitative findings outlining the socioeconomic composition of the schools recruited for the programme and qualitative findings provide further understanding of school-level recruitment processes. Chapter 8 also discusses the benefits of attending the programme and the differences in how the intended purposes of the programme are perceived by the WLGA and those on the ground running the programme. One of the main aims of the chapter is to examine the extent to which family's involvement in a summer holiday programme implemented within the informal school environment can impact parent's involvement in schooling, parents' engagement in their children's learning and children's outcomes more generally.

Chapter 9 presents findings from the follow-up interviews conducted with school staff during initial COVID-19 school closures in May-June 2020. The chapter discusses the maintenance of school-home relationship during the pandemic, the classifying of vulnerable students and families during the pandemic, and the ways in which schools attempted to mitigate some of the harms of the school closures on children and young people. These discussions are not limited to educational support but consider how schools provided social and emotional support to families during this period.

This thesis concludes in Chapter 10 with a discussion of the key findings and the implications of adopting a socioecological approach when understanding the impact of poverty and vulnerability

on parental involvement with schools, parental engagement with learning, family-school relationships and subsequently children's educational and health outcomes.

2 Schools as a Setting for the Reduction or Reproduction of Educational Inequalities

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss inequalities in the UK today, primarily focusing on educational inequalities but also considering health inequalities. Inequalities start in the utero, and widen throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Clarke and Thévenon, 2022; Hewitt et al., 2018). This chapter will provide greater understanding of how inequality is measured and the degree to which the UK is viewed as an unequal society. This will include outlining government responses to poverty and inequalities alongside considering societal perceptions of poverty.

Throughout this thesis educational outcomes will be understood as a consequence of the interrelationships and exchanges between the social and physical environments in which individuals learn, live, work and play (Gislason, 2013; Pearce et al, 2016). The chapter will also consider the complex reciprocity of health and education and aim to examine how health and education are overlapping and mutually reinforcing dimensions of inequality. In the UK, there is a recognition of the importance of the relationship between health and education in research, policy and practice (Hewitt et al., 2018), which is evident in the introduction of health and wellbeing as a key area of learning in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020e). As education is a devolved matter in the UK, when discussing educational policy throughout this thesis, this refers to Wales unless stated otherwise.

To conclude, the chapter will discuss how schools connect educators, children, families and community representatives and offer a setting where children's education and health outcomes can be improved. The school environment is primarily seen as an environment where children learn and develop, however the school environment can be considered a setting for health improvement and promotion as recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO). School staff and students spend a considerable amount of time within the education system and within schools, meaning children and school staff are both often viewed as a 'captive audience' in terms of intervention implementation (Langford et al., 2014).

2.2 Understanding Inequalities in the UK

Inequalities in the UK are amongst the worst in the development world, with statistics indicating an estimated 18-22% of people in the UK were experiencing relative poverty in 2018-19 whilst absolute (AHC) poverty was measured at approximately 20% (Bourquin et al., 2020). Inequality is an umbrella term which covers "income and wealth but also race and ethnicity, disability,

sexual orientation, gender identity" (Mcrae and Westwater, 2022;1) as well as other factors and characteristics. Inequality is primarily measured and understood in terms of economics, in relation to income, wealth and consumption, and the differences between the 'rich' and the 'poor' (Joyce and Xu, 2019). Analysis of UK wealth shows that wealth is extremely unequally distributed with the richest 10% of households holding 44% of all wealth (Partington, 2018; The Equality Trust, 2019). In terms of productivity and earnings, in 2020, Wales was measured to have the lowest productivity and earnings of the UK countries, approximately 15% below the UK average and approximately 40% below London (Agrawal and Phillips, 2020).

Whilst the £20 universal credit[1] uplift during the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to a temporary reduction in economic inequality (End Child Poverty, 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted many households already struggling whilst simultaneously pulling others into poverty. In recent years the benefits system has seen benefits freeze with the average benefit entitlement among workless households become 10% lower than in 2011 although the cost of living has substantially increased (Bourquin et al., 2020). Furthermore, the government's decision in April 2022 to uplift benefits by 3.1% although inflation is forecast to hit 7% is anticipated to negatively impact around 9 million families in the UK, with families estimated to be £500 worse off per month (Hetherington, 2022).

The impact of poverty and inequality does not solely affect a family's access to resources but their power and status within society which combine to place strain on families' everyday lives and shapes how children grow and learn (Joyce and Xiaowei, 2019). Relative income inequality is central to explaining a range of social issues as outlined in *The Spirit Level* (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Higher levels of income inequality predict poorer maths and literacy levels, higher levels of obesity, mental illness and limited social mobility (Coalter, 2013). Central to this thesis is understanding the impact of poverty and inequality on families' everyday lives, and their involvement and engagement with their children's schooling and learning.

2.3 Policy, Poverty and Stigmatisation

Governments are tasked with implementing policies which respond to the country's financial situation, but which align with their political standpoint. The neo-liberal era saw the deindustrialisation of the manufacturing industry, promotion of the privatisation of goods and services and the deregulation of banking and finance (Collins et al., 2016). This movement has

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[1] Universal Credit is a welfare benefit which can be claimed by those that fit the eligibility criteria. This includes those on a low income or unemployed that are aged 18 or over, but also some people aged 16 or 17 who are not in full time education or training.

contributed towards the weakening of working-class organisations and the redistribution of income and wealth to a minority striking a resemblance to whom were previously called the capitalist class (Collins et al, 2016). The neo-liberalist Thatcher government of 1979 reduced welfare support and implemented policies which contributed towards mass unemployment, increasing poverty and income inequality (Collins et al, 2016). These neo-liberalist ideals have arguably become accepted overtime and embraced by subsequent UK governments which is evident in recent welfare reforms and changes in the benefit system (Collins et al., 2016; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019).

Neo-liberalism rejects ideas of solidarity in favour of promoting ideals of self-interest and individualism (Collins et al, 2016; Taylor-Gooby et al, 2019). One of the defining characteristics of neoliberalism is competition and the idea that individuals are competitors within a universal market (Metcalf, 2017). Research on the Thatcherism era indicated the large-scale dismantling of the UK's social democratic institutions and the pursuit of austerity plausibly increased inequalities (Smith et al., 2016). This movement signalled a shift towards individuals becoming independent of the state and in charge of their own destinies which can be complementary to those who achieve their own successes. However, this can act as a means of justifying not providing support to those that may be in times of need. For example, neo-liberalism sees that individuals are responsible for their own life outcomes and therefore a child's outcomes can be viewed solely as a consequence of the ways in which a child and family lives their life.

This rise of individualism, self-interest and competition have contributed towards socio-structural violence against the poor (Jones and McCormack, 2016). Socio-structural violence is a term coined by Galtung (1969) to describe the social structures that inhibit individuals, groups and societies from reaching their full potential (Farmer et al., 2006). The term violence is not understood in relation to physical violence against a human but rather is understood as an avoidable impairment to a human which effects their ability to meet their needs that otherwise would be possible (Farmer et al., 2006; Galtung, 1969). For example, these social structures are "embedded in the political and economic organisation of our social world" (Farmer et al, 2006: 1686) and can include educational institutions and health care services.

Furthermore, in line with neo-liberalist thought, political rhetoric used by the government has tended to turn the victims of poverty into being responsible agents of their own injury and position in society (Jones and McCormack, 2016). Welfare and austerity cuts have not only been targeted at those most vulnerable, but they have also been accompanied by a propaganda which demonises those that are entitled to them (Jones and McCormack, 2016; Treanor, 2020).

Language used in the media and political discourse towards those who suffer the most is often dispassionate and, in some cases, violent (Jones and McCormack, 2016). For example, there can be stigmatisation placed on families that live in council estates and social housing with terms such as 'benefit streets' being used to define 'undesirable' and 'problematic' areas (Jones and McCormack, 2016). People living in poverty may also internalise this rhetoric and apply stigma towards one another even when they are in similar or identical circumstances (Treanor, 2020). Although many people living in poverty reject the idea that they are to be blamed for their own situation, they often blame other livings in similar situations for their personal situations (Treanor. 2020).

Terms such as 'dependency', 'unwillingness' and 'workshy' are commonly used labels for those who are entitled to welfare benefits . Garthwaite argues (2013 cited in Bambra et al, 2016) that there is an increasing stigma attached to claiming benefits, which can deter people for claiming what they are entitled to and therefore amplifies the risk of financial hardship. Recent reforms have seen benefits and tax credits become less generous and more conditional (Garthwaite, 2011). These changes alongside a political rhetoric of 'strivers vs skivers' has resulted in the demonisation of those that are unable to work (Garthwaite, 2011 cited in Bambra et al, 2016). The media and politicians often label low SES communities negatively, with terms such as 'lazy scroungers' and 'dependency culture' being used within media messages. The use of these terms arguably contributes towards the public absorbing and internalising these messages (Jones and McCormack, 2016), which supports the pathologizing of families, devolves government of the responsibility to make required changes to macro-economic structures and justifies no increases or even decreases in state support (Lansley and Mack, 2015, cited in Treanor, 2020).

Moreover, although family structures are varied across the UK, there is still a perception of the 'ideal family' and a view that 'good families' are relatively self-sufficient and require limited state involvement (Treanor, 2020). Nonconformity to this 'ideal family' often sees parents or families being labelled as lacking and culpable (Welch, 2018), and family life under the conditions of disadvantage tend to be pathologized with parents who are experiencing poverty referred to as 'poor parents' and low-income families categorised as 'troublesome' (Treanor, 2020). The pathologising of poor families and the negative language associated with those who may be experiencing poverty or hardship have become common in the media and even within our everyday language. The entry of the word 'chav' into the Oxford English dictionary in 2004 is an example of this, with the word being a representation that serves to suggest that inequalities experienced in society are explained by the deficiencies of the poor themselves (Reay, 2006).

Political responses to societal inequalities see an emphasis on individual behaviour and personal responsibility rather than a focus on the root causes of inequality which further effect the public's views of poverty and inequalities (Jones and McCormack, 2016). National surveys such as the British Attitudes Survey highlight how there is social stigma and negative public attitudes towards poverty and welfare, with individualistic explanations of poverty becoming more prevalent over time (Inglis, 2016). A greater understanding of the structural causes of poverty and inequalities which advocate the voices of those experiencing harsh realities can help the public to understand and further inform policy makers that the inequalities that exist are often a consequence of macro-level factors such as, welfare cuts and austerity rather than a result of individual factors (Jones and McCormack, 2016).

Furthermore, concerns have been raised around the impact of the change from tax credits to universal credit[2] for lower-income families and other protected groups (Hudson- Sharp et al., 2018; McGuinnes et al., 2018b). Changes to welfare support were presented by the Conservative/ Liberal Democrats coalition governments which were arguably intended to make the system fairer and more affordable whilst encouraging individuals to enter or remain in paid employment (Brown, 2018b). However, the notion that the changes to welfare support are based on fairness is arguably flawed as rather than creating a fairer tax system which sees those wealthier taxed more heavily, the government implemented changes which negatively impact those that may need assistance from the welfare system. Whilst the initial objective of the changes to universal credit were to simplify the system and improve work incentives arguably the focus of the reform shifted towards a stronger focus on cost cutting in line with the government's austerity agenda (Hudson- Sharp et al., 2018). Changes in terms of eligibility in universal credit and the replacement of six benefits into universal credit consequently saw a situation whereby claimants were required to meet certain conditions or risk losing their benefits (Hudson- Sharp et al., 2018).

Research into the impact of universal credit changes has indicated that universal credit entitlement thresholds and the removal of the family element in universal credit from 2016 has caused financial hardship and distress for many families (Hudson- Sharp et al., 2018; McGuinness, 2018b). These changes have been seen to have had a significant negative impact on

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[2] In 2014, the UK government moved towards progressively ending working tax credit with all those eligible being asked to apply for Universal Credit before the end of 2024. Universal credit has been introduced as an all-encompassing welfare benefit and has replaced income-based job seekers allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, income support, working tax credit, chid tax credit and housing benefit. The change aimed to ensure individuals would be better in work, and working more hours, with the benefit gradually decreasing with more money being earnt (HM Government, 2013).

family life with families living on the breadline often having to relying on voluntary organisations such as the Trussel Trust (Human Rights Watch, 2019; McGuinness, 2018a). A Welsh Government review of the impacts of the restructuring of the welfare system on families indicated that changes to the welfare benefit system and in particular the freeze in working-age benefit rates and changes to universal credit eligibility would have negative impacts on households in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019a). The review indicated that nearly half of households in Wales were expected to lose out from the reforms with the largest impacts being felt by those on the lowest incomes (Welsh Government, 2019a). Households with children and several protected groups such as disabled people, certain ethnic groups and women were highlighted as those that would be disproportionality negatively impacted by the changes (Welsh Government, 2019a). The impact of the changes on those experiencing poverty and the protected groups in Wales show how challenging the nature of tackling social issues such as poverty can be through the multi-level governance system in the UK (Bache and Flinders, 2004). As the Westminster government hold the primary governance level and make the major economic decisions, devolved nations have limited fiscal powers to implement policy which can tackle deep-rooted structural challenges (Bache and Flinders, 2004).

2.4 Educational Inequalities in the UK

Economic inequalities across the UK effect all aspects of individuals' lives and their functioning, and economic inequality is an influential factor in the rise of educational inequalities. Educational inequality can be understood as the difference in pupil attainment dependent upon social characteristics (Blanden et al., 2003). These social characteristics include socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability, gender and whether a child has been in the care system (Hobbs and Mutebi, 2021). Moreover, when social characteristics are combined, the combination of characteristics can lead to worse outcomes for certain sub-groups of the population (WHO, 2018). Nonetheless, decades of research have highlighted that SES has one of the most influential impacts on student achievements (Eriksson et al., 2021) and therefore government policy has tended to focus on reducing socioeconomic educational inequality. On average an estimated £17 billion a year is spent on tackling socioeconomic inequalities in education as statistics show that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are around 18 months behind their more affluent peers across all subjects when they take their GCSE's (Teach First, 2022).

Inequalities begin when a child is in the womb and continue to develop through childhood and adolescence, affecting a child's entry into higher education, their employment chances and their earnings (Hobbs and Mutebi, 2021). Typically, socioeconomic inequalities in education can be

attributed in large part to circumstances external to the school. Children start school with varying resources and unequal access to opportunities, and there is evidence that children at the beginning of their educational journey display strong patterning by family origin in their attainment which continues throughout their education (Gorard, 2010). Schools can be seen to reflect the populations they serve and therefore schools can be debated to be ineffective in addressing the stratification of attainment (Gorard, 2010). Nonetheless, the next section of this chapter will consider whether schools can act as an equaliser or reproducer of educational inequality.

2.5 Schools as an Equaliser or Reproducer of Inequality

There are typically two contrasting arguments to the role schools play in educational inequality, with one argument viewing schools as having the potential to acts as an equaliser of inequality and the other argument seeing schools as institutions of social reproduction (Dumont and Ready, 2019). Gorard's (2010) work titled *Education Can Compensate for Society- A Bit,* argues that whilst the compulsory schooling system is limited in their endeavours to overcome disparities in resources and attainment of school intakes, the school system can begin to equalise broader understandings of educational outcomes including learning to trust, attitudes to education and willingness to help others.

Inequalities in education emerge before a child formally enters the education system and persist overtime. Whilst the comprehensive education system aims for equality of outcome or opportunity in education (Glaesser and Cooper, 2012), educational reforms such as the 1988 Education Reform Act have seen greater marketisation of the education system, particularly in England. Wales (the focus of this case study) has largely resisted recent market reforms seen in England which is partly attributed to devolution of education policy in the UK. However, Wales still face vulnerability to external market forces such as the tendency of 'good' schools in 'good' areas creating competition within local housing markets. Research suggests postcodes matter in terms of education, and as the UK becomes increasingly divided in terms of wealth and poverty, this wealth and poverty impacts upon educational opportunities for young people (Thompson and Ivinson, 2020).

The Institute for Fiscal studies notes that "where you go to school matters" (Breen et al., 2022;1) due to government funding, class sizes, school and community resources and teachers' choices on how to teach and engage with their students. As discussed later in section 2.7, health promoting areas can often be purchased via material advantage (Pearce et al, 2016) and this is also evident for education promotion as school choices can arguably be realised through the

housing market. This attraction of more affluent families to areas and schools mutually reinforces cycles where 'better' schools are in areas where poorer families cannot afford to live, and children in these schools academically achieve higher than their peers living in more disadvantaged areas. Therefore, children arguably start on an unequal playing field as many parents do not have the means to choose a 'desirable' location for them and their families to live in (Thompson and Ivinson, 2020).

Nevertheless, some educationalists argue that the education system is based on meritocracy; "a system that appoints status on the basis of an individual's merit"(Young 1958, cited in Erivwo et al., 2021; Wiederkehr et al., 2015). Therefore, success is viewed as an indicator of personal deservingness and the education system rewards students for their ability and efforts (Wiederkehr et al., 2015). Much like neo-liberalist ideals, the ideal of meritocracy is favourable to those that achieve within the system but those that do not meet the standards of expectations set by the system or conform to the ideals are viewed to have failed or acted in a deviant way (Wiederkehr et al., 2015). Common proverbs such as 'If at first we don't succeed, try, try, again' reinforce the belief that hard work leads to success (Wiederkehr et al., 2015) without consideration of external factors which influence children's potential to succeed. The belief of meritocracy can also be damaging to a student's self-esteem as they may believe their failure is a reflection of a lack of hard work or limited intelligence (Erivwo et al., 2021).

Whilst meritocracy is flawed as it fails to consider external influences to a student's success, it also does not recognise how schools are often underprepared or unwilling to modify school culture, pedagogy and curricula to support children from more disadvantaged backgrounds or non-traditional families (Erivwo et al, 2021). As discussed further in Chapter 3, often the 'one-size fits all' approach to family engagement in schools fails to recognise the diversity of families within a school and therefore the school-level middle-class ideology and culture are not suitable or relatable for many families a school might serve (Crozier, 1999; Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock, 2020). Schools often fail to consider the evolving demographics of their student population and do not alter school systems of ethos to accommodate all students due to wanting to meet the needs of the dominant population, which can contribute towards disadvantaged students facing further disadvantage (Erivwo et al. 2021). Dominant middle-class culture and ideology can be damaging to students who may not be part of the numerically dominant culture and community (Moore et al., 2017). Whilst meritocratic and middle-class ideology can arguably not only act as a system-justifying tool, the mental health and wellbeing of a child from a poorer background can be negatively impacted from attending a more affluent school (Moore et al., 2017). Research has found that in more affluent school's there is a school-level perception of less

need for pastoral support to mitigate the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage and although a child from a less affluent background may face potential marginalisation by the dominant middle-class culture (Moore et al, 2017).

A focus on the delivery of academic results as a consequence of external market level influences can also limit opportunities for teachers to respond to social problems within their schools, as the pressure of meeting performative measures can supersede the need to support social and pastoral problems (Norris, 2016). Typically, school effectiveness is measured via educational achievement or achievement gains over one school year (Steinmann and Vegar Olsen, 2022). A school which may be experiencing challenges and underperforming may face additional pressures to meet specific targets and drive-up standards which consequently can have further negative implications for vulnerable students that may be struggling within the system (Norris, 2016). The marketisation and driving up of standards could be seen to be beneficial for all students within a school, however in reality an increased school-level focus on academic promotion can hinder the social and wellbeing support some children require and can further alienate students who may find the schooling culture and ethos unfamiliar. More socioeconomically advantaged schools drive forwards an agenda of academic standards and achievement placing less of a focus on non-academic problems such as health and wellbeing, therefore further illustrating how it can be damaging for a child from a more deprived background to attend an affluent school (Moore et al, 2017). Research has highlighted that student-staff relationships are a key mechanism underpinning these effects and positive student-staff relationships and the provision of pastoral support could support children from poorer backgrounds attending more affluent schools and reduce the effects of socioeconomic deprivation (Moore et al, 2017).

Interestingly, greater inequalities have been found in more socio-economically advantaged schools (Moore et al., 2017; Shackleton et al., 2018). Research shows that school-level social composition can exacerbate inequalities, and simply attending a school with a higher SES intake can have a detrimental effect on children living in poverty (Flouri and Midouhas, 2016; Moore et al., 2017; Shackleton et al., 2018). Despite exposure to the same materials at school, children from poorer families do not gain the same benefits as children from more affluent families when attending an affluent school (Moore et al, 2017) as it is likely the school is meeting the needs of the numerically dominant community. General beliefs that the education system is meritocratic support justifications of people's position within society (Wiederkehr et al., 2015) and does not consider the negative social experiences or comparisons children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face within more affluent schools. Moreover, a study of economic vulnerability in childhood found that children can often attempt to conceal their poverty from other children

and school staff due to associated stigmatisation, meaning it can be difficult for schools to recognise signs of poverty and vulnerability (Embry, 2013) and therefore provide essential support.

In addition, Bourdieu's (1989; Doyle and Keane, 2019; Durand and Secakusuma, 2019) concepts of symbolic power and social space can be used to help understand the tensions around transcending the cultural boundaries that often exist between the home and school. Bourdieu (1989; Durand and Secakusuma, 2019) argues that the social world is a highly structured reality with all interactions occurring within certain structures. Within society, individuals have a place within the social space and are located within a number of hierarchical fields or institutional arenas (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Field is particularly important to understand in relation to this research and Bourdieu (1989) outlines a field as the social structures of groups and in particular, the social structures of social groups. For example, schools can be understood as fields whereby teachers hold a form of symbolic capital and often hold a prestigious position within the field (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Symbolic power is understood in relation to capital, with teachers holding the appropriate social, economic and cultural capital within the field of education (Bourdieu, 1989). Whereas families inhabit different fields which vary dependent upon their positions within the highly structured reality (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Therefore, limited understanding of the field and the symbolic power teachers hold within the hierarchised field can act as a barrier to communication. Arguably, for families to feel more comfortable within the field, teachers could attempt to relinquish their symbolic power and gain an understanding of the perspectives of families, particularly from low SES backgrounds, who exist outside of their own habitus (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019).

Research also suggests that disadvantaged students are more likely to become alienated, detached or estranged due to cultural differences between the school and the home environment (Shackleton et al., 2018). Informed by Bernstein (1975), the theory of cultural transmission proposes that when student's realisation of the capacities for practical reasoning and affiliation are met, this establishes an autonomous student and creates the conditions whereby it is possible for a human to function well (Markham and Aveyard, 2003). The realisation for the capacities for practical functioning is established via students' commitment to the school's instrumental and regulatory order, as each order is associated with the development of practical reasoning or affiliation (Shackleton et al., 2018). Schools can facilitate the realisation of these essential capacities and pupil development through the school's organisation, curriculum development and pedagogic practices (Markham and Aveyard, 2003). However, these instructional and regulatory orders are shaped by the dominant culture are therefore these orders are driven by a

set of beliefs and values guided by the dominating class within the education system (Markham and Averyard, 2003).

Disadvantaged students can often struggle to realise their capacities for practical reasoning and affiliation which can negatively impact their capacity to function well (Markham and Aveyard, 2003; Shackleton et al, 2018). If students are not committed to the either or both of the school's instrumental or regulatory orders then students can experience alienation or detachment from the system (Markham and Aveyard, 2003; Shackleton et al, 2018). In line with arguments against the education system being meritocratic, Bernstein (1975) further seeks to explain how schools and the education system are shaped to support students who conform to the dominant culture and ideology. As Gorard (2010) notes whilst the education system cannot compensate for society and cannot single handidly tackle the deep-rooted societal inequalities, schools can attempt to equalise broader understandings of educational outcomes and support children's mental health and wellbeing which will be discussed in further detail below.

2.6 Education and Health: A Complex Relationship

Decades of research has identified that educational success is a major predictor of health outcomes (Zimmerman et al., 2015), and although the relationship is complex, positive associations have been found between pupil wellbeing and achievement (Clarke, 2020; Hobbs and Mutebi, 2021). The complex relationship between health and education has been acknowledged by researchers and policymakers, with research often requiring the collaboration of multiple fields and agencies (Hewitt et al., 2018). Whilst schools often see their primary aim as educational promotion, schools are a setting where inequalities in young people's health and wellbeing can be addressed partly due to the considerable amount of time young people spend at school (Busch et al., 2015; Kidger et al., 2009; Langford et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017). Therefore, consideration of education in conjunction with health was seen as key to this research.

Education can be seen to support the development of a range of skills which are argued to positively impact individuals' economic and social resources, which in turn are associated with positive health outcomes (Zimmerman et al., 2015). Academic success has an impact on a child's life satisfaction and overall wellbeing impacts children's engagement in schooling, illustrating the complex two-directional relationship (Brooks, 2014). Supporting the development of the 'whole child', their social, emotional and academic growth is arguably part of the broader "societal, social and economic responsibilities of education" (Clarke, 2020;267). Educationalists note that there is a need to move beyond the transmission of knowledge to children to the implementation

of a more holistic curricula which promotes children to flourish in all aspects of their lives (Clarke, 2020; White, 2016). UK governments have advocated that positive wellbeing can effectively raise achievement and introductions of 'mental health' and 'wellbeing' into curricula across the UK illustrates macro-level acknowledgement of the relationship between health and education (Brooks, 2014; Department for Education, 2019). For example, the aim of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience in the forthcoming Welsh Curriculum is to promote confident, healthy individuals and is primarily concerned with assisting learners to develop a capacity to navigate life's opportunities and challenges through a holistic whole school approach (Welsh Government, 2021b).

A whole school approach is advocated in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework which encourages a settings approach to health promotion, with the aim of strengthening individual and collective empowerment (John-Akinola and Nic Gabhainn, 2015). Whilst there is no universally accepted definition of a HPS, the WHO (1996;2) defines a HPS as a "place where all members of the school and community work together to provide students with integrated and positive experiences and structures which promote and protect their health". The HPS framework advocates the promotion of health through a holistic whole school approach and focuses on the introduction of health education and promotion through three core areas; the formal curriculum, the school environment and engagement with families and the community (Langford et al., 2014). The HPS framework has roots within the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986) which posits that the fundamental conditions and resources of health are embedded with the environments in which we live, work and play. Peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice and equity are all viewed as the prerequisites for health (WHO, 2022).

The importance of a whole school approach to health and wellbeing has also been recognised in the Welsh Government's (2021b) whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing and globally through the WHO's HPS's framework (Langford et al, 2014). The school environment described as "the character and quality of life within a school and refers not only to the physical environment but also the whole school experience" (Lester and Cross, 2015:2) can have a profound impact on a young person's schooling experience (Cohen et al., 2009; Lester and Cross, 2015). Though each young person contributes towards the operations of the school and the creation of a shared vision, the school climate is considered much larger than one singular experience (Cohen et al., 2009). The school climate refers to the spheres of school life (safety, relationships, learning and the school's environment), the organisational structures and patterns and the school's values and beliefs (Cohen et al., 2009). Although there is no consensual list of

factors which characterise school life, researchers agree there are four major areas; safety, relationships, teaching and learning and the physical school environment (Cohen et al., 2009; Lester and Cross, 2015).

Studies which focus on school climate or school culture, terms often used interchangeably, often use these four areas of school climate to form measurement tools (Moore et al., 2017; Shackleton et al., 2018). A study examining the associations between socio-economic status and student perceptions of school environment and health in English secondary schools measured school environments via Likert scale questions focused on supportive teacher relationships, sense of belonging, commitment to academic values and opportunities to participate in school environment (Shackleton et al, 2018). Factors such as a sense of belonging and supportive relationships with teachers have been shown to affect a range of health outcomes for young people (Moore et al, 2017; Shackleton, 2018). Findings suggested that children from less affluent families reported a lower sense of belonging and a lower commitment to academic values similar to previous findings (Shackleton et al, 2018; Moore et al, 2017). Furthermore, research has indicated that school connectedness acts as a protective factor for student health and wellbeing suggesting that a lower sense of belonging amongst less affluent children could be negatively affect their health and wellbeing (Lester and Cross, 2015).

Yet there are challenges in the promotion of health and wellbeing within schools. Often schools perceive that health improvement strategies are competing with educational attainment strategies, in turn diverting attention away from the 'core business' of schools (Bonell et al., 2014; Littlecott et al., 2018b). Literature has stated that this concept, known as the "zero-sum game" (Littlecott et al., 2018:636), appears to affect the success of health and wellbeing intervention implementation and fidelity (Langford et al., 2015). Schools can often be resistant to engage in health improvement practices or policies as schools are driven by the perceptions of the "zero-sum game", and the belief that schools should narrowly focus their attention on their core mission of increasing academic attainment (Bonell et al., 2014; Littlecott et al., 2018b). The marketisation of education has arguably negatively impacted the health and wellbeing of students and teachers, as often schools prioritise academic success with greater focus being placed on improving school performance and meeting key indicators to success (Moore et al, 2017).

Recent studies have examined the effect of school-based health promotion practice and policies on educational outcomes in an attempt to accept or reject the perception of the "zero-sum game" (Bonell et al., 2014). Interventions adopting the HPS framework were seen to not cause a detrimental effect to a school's overall educational attainment (Littlecott et al, 2018a), but rather

evidence suggests HPS based interventions have the potential to increase academic achievement as well as reduce classroom misbehaviour (Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, a systematic review of interventions adopting the HPS framework highlighted that school staff listed a range of practical issues in relation to the implementation of school-health based interventions (Langford et al, 2015). For example, high staff turnover, high staff-to-student ratios and a lack of community volunteers are factors which can challenge successful implementation (Langford et al, 2015).

A narrative synthesis of studies adopting the HPS framework found that a lower value was placed on health outcomes versus academic achievement, which inevitably challenges the implementation of health-based interventions (Langford et al, 2015). Schools and teachers face increasing educational pressures and obligations, and interventions which are embedded within the curricula were regarded as more effective than those in isolation (Nielsen et al., 2015). Findings have suggested that schools are more likely to be engaged in school-based health interventions if they fit with the school's institutional priorities, are supported by a school champion and support enhancement of educational attainment (Langford et al., 2015; McIsaac et al., 2016).

Whilst schools are viewed as a setting for health promotion, previous research has acknowledged that schools are particularly complex environments nested within highly complex social and political contexts (Joyce et al., 2016; McIsaac et al., 2016). Schools are considered complex adaptive social systems as their functionality is shaped by interactions between active agents within the school and the external educational supra-system, both who can be considered as systems within their own right (Keshavarz et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2018). All systems within schools are independent but related to one another as each system is part of a bigger system or a supra-system for a small system (Keshavarz et al., 2010). For the school setting to be utilised effectively for the promotion of health the context of the school and the interrelated systems within the school need to be considered when focusing on health promotion.

2.7 Theory and Frameworks for Understanding Educational and Health Inequalities

The complex relationship between health and education can be sought to be understood via socioecological frameworks which seek to explain how individual behaviours are embedded within a system of nested institutional contexts (Zimmerman et al., 2015). Ecological perspectives are long-standing in the social and health sciences and have influenced public health and education (Kokko et al., 2014). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory and framework conceptualises children and families as nested within a wider set of influences which all

interconnect to influence health and educational outcomes. Within Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework there are five layers to the environment which all interact to affect children's development; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem (Paquette and Ryan, 2001).

Children's outcomes are shaped at all levels of the ecological system and through factors such as school connectedness (mesosystem), their family's accessibility to community-based resources (exosystem) and the cultural and political climate (macrosystem) (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). At the microsystem level, schools and the family unit are considered two of the most influential systems, as both are heavily interconnected and influential upon child development (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). The different levels of the model offer opportunities as well as constraints, with these opportunities and constraints interacting at the same and different levels of the model (Zimmerman et al., 2015). Bronfenbrenner (1994) explains how a child's birth weight, their parents' educational level and their family's circumstances can interact to impact upon child development, health and education. The interaction between systems can provide further understanding to how health and educational inequalities are developed and often experienced in conjunction with one another, as disadvantage is accumulated at multiple layers of the socioecological system. For example, periods of austerity and welfare reforms (chronosystem), limited access to health care resources within the wider community (exosystem) and a parent redundancy (mesosystem) could all interact to impact a family's day-to-day lives negatively and effect longer-term child development, health and educational outcomes. Arguably, if learning was to solely take place in the classroom and children were isolated units, educational inequalities would not exist (Goodall, 2018c).

As a consequence of macro-systemic issues, many young people are being raised within family micro-systems where parents may both be struggling financially which could negatively be impacting their mental health (Mind, 2022). Whilst these challenges may not impair some parents' parental responsibilities, for others this may impact on their parental responsibilities, their parent self-efficacy and subsequently their child's development, wellbeing and engagement in education. Macro-systemic issues such as poverty and austerity have been shown to directly impact the mental health and wellbeing of the population (Slee et al., 2021). Analysis of The Health Improvement Network (THIN) data on changes in generalised anxiety disorders between 1998-2018 for adults aged 18 and over, observed an upward trajectory in generalised anxiety from the time of the 2008 economic downturn and during periods of austerity illustrating the inter-related relationship between employment, finances and anxiety (Slee et al., 2021). Recently,

further concerns have been raised around the impact of the economic crisis and people's mental health and wellbeing as the cost of living and inflation continue to rise (Shah, 2022).

In addition, an ecological theory which can contribute to understandings of health inequalities between countries, within countries and even with neighbourhoods is the ecological public health model (Pearce et al., 2016). As discussed above countries which are more unequal are seen to have worse health and social problems including lower social mobility, lower overall educational scores, higher levels of obesity and higher prevalence of mental illness amongst the population (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). From a socio-spatial perspective "where you live, work and play, as well as who you are" matters to your health (Pearce et al., 2016:194). The concept of ecological public health is not new but is noted in the Ottawa Charter which identifies that health is created in everyday life and highlights the complex links between people and their environment (Bentley, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory and framework for human development supports these ideas and can help to explain how different systems within society exist and interact with one another to affect health (McLaren and Hawe, 2005). It is fundamental to understand health in relation to the broader context rather than as a static attribute of individuals McLaren and Hawe, 2005; Pearce et al., 2016).

Ecosystems draw attention to the interrelationships and exchanges between the social and the physical by considering the complex relationship between humans and the natural environment (Gislason, 2013). By looking at the environments where health is produced, we can further understand the social and material conditions as well as the ideologies and discourses that shape human health and health inequalities (Gislason, 2013). The consideration of these four clusters of factors outlined in the Ecological Public Health Model; the material, the biological, the cultural and the social (Lang and Rayner, 2012; Pearce et al, 2016), their interaction with one another and with the broader eco-systems outlined by Bronfrenner (1977) offers a way to understand health and health inequalities in a modern world (Butler et al., 2015). For example, when analysing communities experiencing poverty the model encourages analysis of families' personal circumstances, the economic climate, the cultural norms in the local area, national policies related to families and welfare, their social relations and the interaction of all of these factors with one another.

In line with research which suggests postcodes are important in terms of education, research indicates that environments can be regarded as either health promoting or health damaging. Environments which are viewed as health promoting often have characteristics such as social cohesion, little segregation, access to green spaces and good access to health services (Pearce et

al., 2016). These characteristics alongside social connections, the home environment, the work environment and the economic and political climate all interact to effect health outcomes in a positive way (McClaren and Hawe, 2005). Health promoting areas which can also be typically viewed as areas with 'good' schools can often be purchased via material advantage as property within desirable areas can be purchased, and therefore health-related harm can be minimised, health-related benefits maximised (Pearce et al, 2016) and educational opportunities optimised. Individuals can therefore use their material advantage to make informed decisions in relation to purchasing property within desirable areas which can arguably increase social segregation (Rowe and Lubienski, 2017). In addition, areas of greater deprivation are more likely to be exposed to health-related harms and can experience what is referred to as 'triple jeopardy' thus meaning there are higher chances of individuals suffering from multiple aspects of deprivation, poor environment quality and high mortality and morbidity (Pearce et al, 2016).

Some public health interventions tend to focus on changing individual behaviours causing adverse effects and increasing the health inequalities that they have aimed to reduce in a phenomenon known as the 'inequality paradox' (Buck and Frosini, 2012; Pearce et al., 2016). Educating families that live in poverty that they should feed children in a healthier manner ignores the conditions which prevents them from doing so and can be seen as stigmatising and even insulting. As Morris argues (cited in Bentley, 2013:530) when it comes to health and wellbeing "everything matters" and individuals and their health outcomes cannot be understood in isolation, as all aspects of one's life are regarded as contributing factors in one's health. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory alongside the Ecological Public Health model contribute towards understandings of the importance of considering how the environments in which we live effect our opportunities and outcomes.

2.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has defined what is understood by the term inequality and discussed the inequalities that exist in the UK which a particular focus on educational inequalities. Wealth in the UK is extremely unequally distributed with economic inequalities anticipated to become wider due to inflation and the rising cost of living (Hetherington, 2022). Economic inequalities contribute towards educational inequality, with socioeconomic status being the largest indicator of academic achievement. The chapter has examined the role of schools in equalising and reproducing educational inequality and has argued that education cannot compensate for society and level of the playing field for children from poorer backgrounds.

The chapter has also explored the complex relationship between education and health through a socioecological approach. Central to this thesis is understanding the role that parents and families play in supporting their children's learning and education, however this chapter has provided understanding to how policy, societal expectations and norms and school's influence children's education and educational inequalities more generally. The chapter has included an overview of Bronfenbrenner's socioecological framework, which is key to this research, as the framework illustrates the importance of all levels of influence of a child's outcomes.

The chapter has concluded with discussions around the importance of considering health alongside education and highlighting how schools can be used as a place for health promotion alongside educational promotion. A positive schooling experience can be positive for children's general health and wellbeing (García-Moya et al., 2015) and school-level shared visions of health promotion can support relationship development and contribute towards more positive educational outcomes (Brown, 2018a). This chapter has sought to provide a socioecological explanation to the existence of economic and educational inequalities in the UK. Individual or family level explanations of inequalities will not be reinforced in this research but rather consideration of the impact of interactions at all levels of socioecological system on parent lives and their potential to be involved and engage with their children's school and learning will be considered.

3. Family-Level Influences on Education Outcomes and Educational Inequalities

3.1 Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter focused on school-level influences on education inequalities this chapter will explore family-level influences on children's educational outcomes and broader educational inequalities. Decades of research and policy have highlighted that parental involvement with schools, parental engagement with learning and positive parent-school relationships are key levers for improving child educational outcomes (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Whether this involvement is home-based or school-based, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning have been linked with school success, lower school drop-out rates and higher rates of participation in further education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2013; Jeynes, 2018). In the UK, the vast differences in the achievements of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds are largely attributed to factors outside of the school, including broader structural forces, but also factors such as parental involvement and engagement in schooling and learning (Goodall, 2018b).

Formal learning accounts for only a small proportion of a child's overall learning, as learning and cognitive development start at home, and learning within the home and community continue throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Goodall, 2018a). Engaging parents in their child's learning and schooling from an early age has been shown to improve children's academic, behavioural and wellbeing outcomes (Goodall, 2018a; Waters et al., 2018). However, the concepts of parental involvement and engagement in learning and education can be interpreted in many ways and assumptions of what these concepts mean are often taken for granted (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). To improve overall engagement levels, research suggests that parents need to be informed of what being involved and engaged means, how to achieve involvement/ engagement as well as the benefits of involvement/engagement to the family as a whole (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019).

Parental engagement with education and learning can profoundly affect the extent to which children from low SES backgrounds combat the conflicts and challenges they often face in school (Auerbach, 2007). Similar to students, parents experiencing poverty may attend school with unequal access to resources, inhibiting the extent to which they can meaningfully support their child in their pursuit for educational success (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). For example,

an inability to afford material resources, a lack of transportation and unsociable working hours were all highlighted as barriers to parents from low SES backgrounds presence at school and their engagement in their children's learning (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). In addition, parents possess complex identities, historical relationships with schools, and cultural scripts which influence and shape their interactions with the school as an institution (Auerbach, 2007). Arguably, the 'one size fits all' approach often adopted to engage parents in school affects the extent to which parents from low SES backgrounds engage in schooling due to divergent cultures between the family/ community and the school (Crozier, 1999; Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock, 2020). Moreover, research shows the 'one size fits' all approach fails to recognise varied life contexts and families' circumstances and therefore is not suitable/ appropriate for all families a school serves (Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock, 2020).

This chapter will define the terms parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning, as well as discuss the impact of deficit discourses on definitions and policies related to family engagement in schooling and learning. This chapter will also examine the three levels in which parental involvement and engagement can be hindered; the school-level, the child-level and the parent-level (Lavenda, 2011). Whilst the literature tends to use the term 'parent' throughout, this does not necessarily mean the child's biological parent but any adult whom holds the caring responsibility for a child (Goodall, 2018b). The chapter will explore barriers to parental involvement and engagement with children's schooling and learning and discuss family influences on educational inequalities over time.

3.2 Conceptualising 'Parental Involvement' and 'Parental Engagement'

Within parental engagement and parental involvement literature, divergent definitions and measurements of engagement and involvement have resulted in mixed findings within the field and difficulties when drawing comparisons or analysing impact (Spencer et al., 2018). Whilst the terms have some theoretical overlap, this research will separate the terms, using parental involvement with school and parental engagement with learning as distinct concepts in line with previous literature which suggests that parental involvement with schools is a precursor to parental engagement with learning (Goodall, 2018a; Goodall, 2018b; Jeynes, 2018). Parental involvement is viewed as parent's involvement in activities which support their child's learning as well as a positive attitude and commitment towards education and learning (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Spear et al., 2021; Watt, 2016). For example, parental involvement with school could be seen as attending a parents' evening whereas parental engagement with learning is related to activities which support the acquisition of knowledge or skills (Goodall, 2018a). This

established distinction between parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning has been supported by academics and policymakers (Campbell, 2011), and clearer distinctions between the concepts has allowed for the development of policies and interventions which target and support both reactive and proactive forms of involvement and engagement (Campbell, 2011).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) present a model for the progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with learning. The continuum indicates that the progression from involvement to engagement is not simple. Schools may organise activities which are accepted or rejected by different cohorts of parents and therefore the school may find themselves at several points along the continuum at one singular point in time (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Therefore, a whole school approach to supporting engagement in learning is fundamental as each new year brings new cohorts of parents and typically changes in children's classroom teacher (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argue that progression along the continuum is related to changes in the relational agency between schools and parents. Parental engagement with learning sees the greatest exercise of parental agency and creates a feeling of ownership, as parents are given information by the school and inform the school about their ideas, deciding upon the best course of action themselves (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). At the latter phase of the continuum, agency belongs to the parents with learning responsibilities being seen as a joint task (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). At this point, the parent-school relationship is no longer regarded as school-led as agents support one another in supporting the learning of the child (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

In addition to the parental involvement and parental engagement continuum, Simovska (2007) developed a continuum of participation in relation to school children's participation in education. Simovska (2006; Torres and Simovska, 2017) argues the continuum of participation ranges from token to genuine, with genuine participation being understood as a participant's active involvement in decision making and influence over the matter at hand. The concept of genuine participation has also been used in educational literature to understand parental participation in children's education (Torres and Simovska, 2017). Research has highlighted parents and/or families are often invited to participate in schooling activities or in school-health based interventions, however this participation is often token or indirect (Torres and Simovska, 2017). Parents are not likely to be directly involved in decision making processes but simply fed information via the distribution of messages through school newsletters, the school's website or parents' evenings (Hingle et al., 2010; Inchley et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2015). According to Epstein's (2002; Campbell, 2011; Auerbach, 2007) theory of overlapping Spheres, there are three

contexts in which children learn; the school, the family and the community. The theory which has dominated research, policy and practice postulates that children are the main actors in their learning and are influenced by the spheres separately and in conjunction with one another (Auerbach, 2007; Campbell, 2011) supporting ecological systems theory and the HPS framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). Furthermore, Esptein's (2002; Campbell, 2011) framework of parental involvement for school programmes and partnerships outlines six types of parental involvement and engagement in learning and education; parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. The framework was developed to support educators to develop school-level programmes and family partnerships by highlighting the ways in which this could be achieved (Epstein, 2002). The six types of parental involvement are explained further in Table 1 below. There is no prioritisation of any of the forms of involvement over one another, but rather the framework offers insight into how schools can attempt to involve parents in different ways.

Type 1: Parenting	Type 2: Communicating	Type 3: Volunteering	Type 4: Learning at Home	Type 5: Decision Making	Type 6: Collaborating with the Community
Support families to establish home environments to support children as students.	Design effective forms of school-home and home-school communication.	Recruit and organise parents help and support.	Provide information and ideas to families about how help home learning and curriculum-related activities.	Include parents in school decisions, developing parents to be leaders and representatives.	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community.

Table 1: Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement for School Programmes and Partnerships.

Critics argue the framework places the school at the centre of the engagement process meaning that families and children cannot initiate or lead efforts to work towards a more parental context-specific approach (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Moreover, whilst Esptein's theory is

valuable, critics argue learning at home is the most important aspect of the framework, and that the influence of learning at home outweighs the other five aspects of the model (Jeynes, 2018; Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Nevertheless, this framework has supported the development of data collection and analysis and will inform the development of the interview guides in this research (Campbell, 2011).

Schools typically understand parental involvement/engagement as interactions between the school and parents and with the agency remaining with school staff (Goodall, 2018b). However, the most effective parental engagement is argued to be rooted within the home environment (Goodall and Montgomery, 2018). The home learning environment is understood as "a reflection of the home environment and interactions in and around the home with family members" (Smees and Sammons, 2018:1). Meaningful learning activities can include; reading, singing songs and nursery rhymes, drawing, going out on visits and playing with numbers or letters (NCB, 2018; Smees and Sammons, 2018). These positive early learning experiences can have long-term social and educational benefits for children, whereas negative experiences can have detrimental effects on social and educational outcomes (Smees and Sammons, 2018).

Studies on parents' motivation for involvement in their child's education posit that parents' initial motivation for involvement is dependent upon the perceptions that parents have about their role as a parent (role construction), their self-efficacy within the school domain and the invitations and opportunities for engagement they receive from the school (Goldkind and Farmer, 2013; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This model of the parental involvement process, known as the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model has 5 levels; parents' basic involvement decision, parents' involvement forms, mechanisms of parental involvement, mediating variables and students' outcomes (Lavenda, 2011). The first level of the model focuses around motivation and parent perceptions of involvement in education is considered the most significant level, as it is at this level that decisions to become involved or not involved are established (Lavenda, 2011).

Parental role construction is defined as "parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the patterns of parental behaviour that follow those beliefs" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005:107). Role construction and parents' sense of responsibility towards their child's education is typically shaped by expectations of the individual and groups within which they exist (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). The other motivational factor which effects the involvement process, is parents' efficacy to contribute towards their child's academic success (Lavenda, 2011). Parents' self-efficacy is related to how confident parents feel about their capabilities to support their child's learning and high efficacy is linked to positive

decisions and active engagement in learning and education (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). In the model, the final factor which influences parents' basic involvement decision is invitations for involvement in schooling which is seen as a key motivator for involvement in schooling as parents feel their participation is valued and welcomed (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). The interaction between these factors will ultimately effect parents' involvement decisions and research has shown that parents with passive role construction and weak self-efficacy will benefit significantly from encouraging invitations for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

3.3 The Deficit Model and Regulation of Parental Involvement

The issue of parental participation in schools and schools' control and regulation of parental input is often raised (Torres and Simovska, 2017). As stated above, distinctions between different types of involvement and engagement and participation have been established, and it is evident from literature that schools predominately engage parents indirectly through the use of token participation (Torres and Simovska, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). For example, school parental involvement strategies tend to involve inviting parents to participate in events such as assemblies, parents' evenings and school fetes. These involvement activities generally involve indirect engagement, as parents are not regarded as active participants but receive information provided by the school and the activities require little to no parental input or response (Hingle et al., 2010; Simovska, 2006). In comparison to indirect engagement, direct engagement is understood as parents' presence, attendance and participation in intervention workshops or sessions. However, there is limited evidence of parents' direct engagement in intervention workshops or research sessions (Hingle et al, 2010).

Historically, compensatory education reforms suggest increased parental involvement in education can overcome overall educational under-performance (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The concepts of parental involvement with schools and engagement with learning are generally regarded as school-centric, as the school controls the levels and methods of involvement and engagement (Goodall, 2018a). Parental involvement in education and learning has shown to be socioeconomically differentiated, with parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds perceived to be less involved or interested in their children's education (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Certain research has tended to place blame for lack of involvement with schooling and engagement with learning on families living in poverty, suggesting families are experiencing a personal deficit which inhibits their interest or ability to engage in school or education (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Parental involvement and engagement literature highlights how parents are often viewed through a deficit lens, suggesting that parents are the sole contributing factor in educational

underachievement and the reproduction of educational inequalities (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Spencer et al., 2018).

The deficit model was developed alongside a growing 'responsibilisation' of parents that saw the government and schools place greater educational responsibility on families (Vincent and Maxwell, 2016). Successive governments have sought to improve children's educational and health outcomes by supporting parental practices and attacking the private sphere of the family (Goodall, 2019). For example, the 2018 Conservative Government published a policy document titled 'Improving the Home Learning Environment' which outlined evidence to support a behaviour change model to improve the home learning environment suggesting the implementation of behaviourist interventions to increase parents' engagement in their children's learning (HM Government, 2018). Nevertheless, much contemporary academic research has dismissed the deficit model, highlighting the crucial importance of larger societal factors on children's educational outcomes (Doyle and Keane, 2019; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Spencer et al., 2018). In turn, this research will reject the deficit model, adopting an asset-based approach, considering the power differentials between non-dominant families and schools (Ishimaru et al, 2016). By non-dominant families, this will refer to families which have lower incomes, are of immigrant or refugee status, or colour and who have been marginalised by dominant institutions, policies and practices in society (Ishimaru et al, 2016).

The daily experiences of students have changed overtime, as schools and classroom practices have taken strides towards students becoming active agents and greater focus has been placed on child-centred ways of learning (Goodall, 2018a). Although teachers provide a framework for learning, it is through students' own experience of learning via these frameworks that individual knowledge is created (Goodall, 2018a). Whilst a focus on child-centred learning has resulted in the production of students who can work independently and increases in children's voices being heard have become commonplace, there have been fewer drives towards increasing parental voice (Goodall, 2018a). This is evident in school involvement strategies which invite parents to attend token school events which do not necessarily provide meaningful opportunities to support parents' engagement in their children's learning (Goodall, 2018a). In relation to parental involvement, schools value the principle of authority over the principles of autonomy and agency, suggesting meaningful engagement opportunities are infrequent (Goodall, 2018a).

3.4 Family Influences on Educational Inequalities Over Time

The family is recognised as a site for the reproduction of inequalities, and poverty is argued to affect children's long-term educational and health outcomes before they even start school (Welsh

Government, 2014; Wheeler, 2018). At the age of 4, some children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a vocabulary which is at least a year behind children from more affluent backgrounds (Welsh Government, 2014); and by the end of primary school children from deprived backgrounds are three times more likely to not achieve the expected levels of vocabulary in comparison with more affluent peers (Welsh Government, 2014). However, national measurements of vocabulary are based on formal middle-class language and fail to consider accent, dialect and colloquialism which arguably does not present a true representation of a child's vocabulary. Moreover, a report on social mobility in Wales, highlighted that at the end of secondary school there is a significant attainment gap between those who are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and those who are not (Welsh Government, 2014). These inequalities which widen through adolescence continue to further widen into adulthood, with lower educational attainment at GCSE level shown to negatively affect yearly earnings and reduce life expectancy (Welsh Government, 2014).

Family background and factors such as parental income, parental educational background and the home environment all fundamentally influence educational attainment (Chevalier et al., 2013). Longstanding evidence links poverty to poor education outcomes and low SES predicts "a wide array of health, cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes in children" (Bradley and Corwyn, 2022;1). Furthermore, health and educational inequalities are seen to be intergenerational and intergenerational social mobility in the UK is limited (Friedman et al., 2017).

Limited social mobility is argued to be the intergenerational accumulation of disadvantage over time, which can in turn be seen to have affected family structures and family connectedness (Friedman et al., 2017; Kalmijn, 2006). Research examining social mobility in the UK found that working class families often have contact with their family in day-to-day life as families reported living in close proximity to extended family members (Kalmijn, 2006). Some working-class families saw social mobility as economically attractive, but they believed that intergenerational mobility could create distance between themselves and their children meaning family contact could potentially be reduced (Kalmijin, 2006). Nevertheless, research has indicated that this perception is not necessarily true as upward social mobility has been shown to not weaken family contact (Kalmijn, 2006; Wheeler, 2018). Therefore, this belief could act as a deterrent to upward mobility for working-class families who more often live highly localised lives (Kalmijn, 2006; Wheeler, 2018).

The family environment is the first environment to shape a child's physical, emotional and personal patterns (Dahraei and Adlparvar, 2016). The conditions in which children are born, and early child development dramatically affect educational, employment and social relationship opportunities and outcomes (Marmot, 2017). Poverty has been shown to affect the functioning of family systems, and poor family functioning has been associated with poorer academic achievement and depression (Banovcinova et al., 2014; Johnson, 2010). Laureau (2003; Wheeler, 2018) found that poverty effects three core areas of family life; the use of language, interactions with social institutions and the organisations of daily life. Subsequently, these three factors arguably affect the ways in which families interact with schools and engage with their children's schooling and learning.

Research shows that parental involvement in education is socio-economically differentiated, with parents from different SES backgrounds engaging in their children's schooling or learning to a greater or lesser extent (Doyle and Keane, 2018). Research typically shows that parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are perceived to be less involved or less interested than more middle-class parents in their children's learning and schooling (Doyle and Keane, 2019). However, structural barriers, limited access to resources and issues arising from the conflict between norms and values within the home and school environments can all be seen to affect the extent to which families from less affluent backgrounds engage in their child's schooling and learning (Auerbach, 2007; Macleod and Tett, 2019). For example, mismatches in home-school cultures due to differing values, belief systems, behavioural expectations, teaching strategies and adult-child interactions can impact parent's comfort levels with the school environment and their potential for involvement (Barbarin et al., 2010; Jose et al., 2017).

The provision of formal educational resources to children is highlighted as a challenge for families living in poverty (Jeynes, 2018; Smees and Sammons, 2018). The unequal distribution of economic, cultural and social capital constrains parents' involvement opportunities and their ability to provide formally recognised educational resources to their children (Auerbach, 2007). Children living in advantaged homes typically receive a more enriched home learning experience, due to their access to educational resources valued by the formal education system and growing up within an environment which encourages the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Smees and Sammons, 2018). Whilst for a young child many activities they participate in have elements of learning, middle class parents are seen to provide their children with access to the kinds of learning that the school system values, as these values are shaped by middle-class ideology. These activities outside of school can also help children build formal relationships with adults, develop social and practical skills and confidence (Hirsch, 2007; Vincent and Maxwell, 2016). Children

living in poverty often participate in fewer out-of-school activities meaning they are often denied these learning experiences and do not have the opportunity to build formal relationships with adults (Hirsch, 2007). Moreover, whilst these small advantages in the home environment are not necessarily impactful in isolation, the accumulation of differences in home learning experiences for children living in advantaged and disadvantaged homes can over time contribute towards the large disparities in outcomes (Smees and Sammons, 2018).

However, the extent to which parents involve themselves in their children's school and engage in their children's learning as well as the manner in which they do so have been socially constructed by the privileged in line with the norms and expectation of middle-class parents (Auerbach, 2007). These norms and expectations are signified by legitimate acts; for example, attending events at the school and assisting with homework. These legitimate acts are expected to be performed by parents, and if parents 'fail' to perform these legitimate acts, schools and middle-class parents often view these 'failing' parents as not caring about their child's schooling (Auerbach, 2007). Although it may not be possible for some parents to attend, or parents may be supporting their children behind the scenes in different or in a more indirect manner (Auerbach, 2007).

Some families living in poverty regularly lack some of the daily essentials which inevitably affect children's ability to learn or even attend school (CPAG, 2018). For example, children living in poverty may experience ill-fitting school clothes, may be living in cold damp conditions or may be suffering from hunger which can prevent school attendance and mean children may not learn as well, demonstrating the interconnectedness of health and education (CPAG, 2018). A study examining parental perspectives on children leaving school early found that the fight to survive everyday life constrained the extent to which they could engage in their child's education (Doyle and Keane, 2018). The impact of poverty and life stressors is significant on the family and getting by daily can be seen as a challenge meaning that families prioritise their "survival over education" (Doyle and Keane, 2018:83). Moreover, research into family functioning posits that a family's inability to invest in these materials affects their overall family functioning as parents as they are unable to "invest sufficient human capital into their children" (Banovcinova et al, 2014:149).

In addition to systematic barriers and fewer resources, research indicates there is often a mismatch of cultures between the school and the family (Auerbach, 2007; Macleod and Tett, 2019) particularly as schools tend to adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to parental engagement (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Markham and Aveyard, 2003). It is argued that the voices of families

from low SES backgrounds, ethnic minority backgrounds and those with limited English are often silenced by dominant middle-class ideologies which can create feelings of mistrust (Doyle and Keane, 2018; Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). For example, teachers reported difficulties communicating with non-traditional families or those from low SES backgrounds, stating that they are not trained or equipped to partner with families who may have diverse needs or those from marginalised populations (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Although teachers and schools have a duty to initiate contact with parents and maintain relationships between the school and families (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019), they often receive limited to no training in communication with families from diverse backgrounds.

Working class families' lives are often highly localised, and families' aspirations for their child are often associated with the needs of the local community and the development of skills which are valued in their local environment (Wheeler, 2018). These values may not be in line with school values, and therefore home and school cultures may be at odds with one another creating misunderstandings and tensions between the family and the school (Auerbach, 2007). Arguably, some families living in poverty exist within the poverty trap, whereby families do not aspire to change their lives as they cannot imagine things being different (Wheeler, 2018). Moreover, research indicates that schools have found to be stepping in to support families experiencing poverty by providing a range of resources and implementing a number of anti-poverty strategies including running food and clothes banks and running low-cost food clubs (CPAG, 2018). If schools and parents living in poverty can build effective two-way relationships, there is the potential to increase educational outcomes for children and relieve some of the strain caused by welfare cuts and reduced budgets.

The term 'hard-to-reach' parents is often used in parental involvement and engagement literature. The term has been coined to describe parents who are perceived to rarely engage or participate in school activities such as meetings or school events (Campbell, 2011). Research examining the involvement of underserved parents often characterises these parents as being a mixture of unemployed, low income and English as an additional language parents (Campbell, 2011; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Whilst it can be beneficial to characterise individuals that do not engage in their children's learning and education, labelling parents in this way can have negative consequences (Rishell, 2008) and therefore the term underserved parents will be used in this thesis as the term has fewer negative connotations and does not reinforce deficit approaches. Labelling and biases can be stigmatising and affect the development of home-school relationships as parents may not feel comfortable attending their child's school and teachers may not offer meaningful support to those families they may label as 'dysfunctional' (Rishell, 2008).

This representation of 'dysfunctional' families is also exacerbated in the media as stereotyping of adverse families often sees families being pathologised; suggesting their morals, values and behaviours are not congruent with the norms of society (Doyle and Keane, 2018).

Research indicates that parents from low SES backgrounds often support their children to overcome disadvantage through knowledge and support which is gained via their broader social networks (Auerbach, 2007). Examination of working-class parents' role in supporting their children's college aspirations found that strong social mobility aspirations led them to utilising their social capital and finding support or knowledge which they could not necessarily provide to their child via their broader social network (Auerbach, 2007). Parents understood that 'making the right connections' was key and utilising these connections and wider information and resources meant parents could learn about the steps required to further their child's education and support their child's journey (Auerbach, 2007). Parents' roles in supporting their children's education varies with regard to sociocultural factors such as class and ethnicity, and therefore school awareness of this incongruity in expectations around engagement is fundamental (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). For parental involvement and engagement to be more effective, schools need to create open dialogue with parents, whereby school policies, codes and ways for parents to engage in their children's learning are not assumed as taken-for-granted knowledge (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019).

3.5 The Parent-Teacher Relationship

The development of a positive relationship and communication between school and the home at the beginning of a child's educational journey is viewed as key, with the establishment of a family/ school partnership in the early years leading to a better school experience for a child (Pirchio et al., 2013). However, decades of research have highlighted the complexity of parent-teacher relationships which play out within the school, are influenced by the much larger economic, sociocultural and socio-political contexts (Durand and Secukusuma, 2019). Studies examining the parent-teacher relationship have highlighted issues around the concepts of power, status and agency (Goodall, 2018a; Wheeler, 2018). Teachers often stand in the place of the expert and possess the power and status in the parent-teacher relationship, using their power to inform parents on how to support their child's learning rather than seeing the learning process as a shared task (Goodall, 2018a). The knowledge that parents have about their children is rarely utilised, as knowledge authority and status resides with the school (Goodall, 2018a). Moreover, a lack of trust between parents and the school can be attributed to the social distance between teachers and parents, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, as neither party fully

understands what the other party is trying to achieve (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Parents are generally not given the ability to act freely within the school, and parents report feeling controlled and contained within certain boundaries contributing towards parents feeling ignored or undervalued (Goodall, 2018a).

A negative parent-school relationship is shown to be a consequence of parents feeling unwelcome at their child's school or feeling inadequate or fearful of school due to personal school experiences (Campbell, 2011). Parents' prior educational histories hugely influence their view of school in general as well as the construction of their role as a parent and their self-efficacy to contribute towards their child's learning (Auerbach, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). Negative educational histories can act as a barrier to parent involvement in schooling and parental engagement with learning (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Parents reported previous negative schooling experiences created feelings of inadequacy, and a belief that their child's experience of schooling will be similar to theirs (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Subsequently, parents expressed that these negative experiences made them not value the importance of parental involvement in primary school (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). However, for some parents, a negative educational history can positively affect their parental role and practices; as parents state they do not want their child to miss the educational opportunities they once had (Auerbach, 2007).

As previously discussed, working-class parents highlight that poor parent-school relationships are characterised by a lack of trust and a degree of hostility (Wheeler, 2018). A study examining class-based parenting in Britain found that working class parents perceived an 'us' and 'them' relationship between themselves and their child's classroom teacher, which exacerbated hostility between parents and the school (Wheeler, 2018). The creation of this binary division creates a distinction between the two groups with one group being categorised as subordinate and the other as privileged (Goodall, 2019). In line with the deficit discourse, the subordinate group often termed as the 'other', has connotations of blame and fault (Goodall, 2019). In relation to parent-school relationships, parents often fall within the subordinate position and the effects of poverty and inequality in their lives are often viewed by others to be caused by their individual life choices rather than caused by the system (Goodall, 2019).

Innovative and increased use of technology arguably has the potential to break down the social distance between home and school, as there can be a direct interactive link between the two environments. For example, at the whole school-level, schools often email parents newsletters or post informative tweets, and at the individual-level, systems such as 'Show my Homework' allow

parents to see what homework their child has been set. Whilst there is a direct link from the school to the home, these strategies do not encourage interaction or active parental engagement, as there is often no two-way dialogue, and the partnership remains on the school's terms (Finn, 2019). Furthermore, there is the potential that families from low SES backgrounds may not possess the electronic devices required or the literature presented to parents may not be in an accessible language, creating issues of exclusion and feelings of inadequacy (Goldkind and Farmer, 2013). The benefits and challenges of using technology to facilitate learning will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.4.

In line with the deficit model, educators have also often been given the role of supporting and strengthening home-based learning suggesting there is a lack of support within the home (Jeynes, 2018). Research has indicated that parents are often willing to be actively involved in their child's schooling but face resistance from both their child and their child's teacher (Goldkind and Farmer, 2013; Jeynes, 2018). These findings are particularly relevant to adolescent children who feel a sense of independence and are often uncommunicative with their parents, meaning children themselves can act as a barrier to their parents' involvement with school and engagement with their learning (Jeynes, 2018; Auerbach, 2007). Children often act as cultural brokers and in some cases interpreters between the school and their parents, and therefore if children do not facilitate this engagement it reduces the probability of parents knowing of school involvement opportunities (Auerbach, 2007). In relation to power dynamics and agency, parents do not predominately possess the power nor agency in the parent-teacher relationship (Campbell, 2011). Teachers possess the power and status, often using this power to inform parents how their child is doing or on how to support their child's learning which can cause parents to feel powerless and instils the belief that teachers are the expert (Goodall, 2018a; Smaill, 2015). These power dynamics are also evident in parental involvement literature and practice where terms such as 'professional and parents' and 'practitioners and parents' are commonly used (Goodall, 2018a). The existence of power relations between parents and teachers can be broken down if effective strategies or methods are utilised. For example, teachers reported that using personal experiences about their own child's schooling as vignettes, helped to build teacher-parent relationships and break down the presence of symbolic power, as teachers were able to present themselves as a parent existing within a similar habitus to the parents they were engaging with (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019).

Communicating and dealing with parents is not only a delicate issue but can be seen as a problem for teachers due to its time-consuming nature and teachers' busy schedules (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999). Parents reported feeling like whilst the school encouraged parental

involvement via events and activities, teachers often did not want the hassle of engaging with parents or discussing any potential problems (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999). From this perspective, parents are viewed as holding a form of power, as teachers may avoid speaking with parents about problems as this could lead to confrontation (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999). The increase of parental power in society is evident in policy, as education has become a commodity of which parents are consumers (Jones and Allebone, 1998). For example, parents can examine school league tables, complete an Ofsted survey about their child's school and if they have the available resources they can shop around for desirable schools within their area. This notion of parents as consumers has led to parents relocating to certain areas to secure places for their children at highly ranked schools (Ferguson, 2015). Nevertheless, Jones and Allebone, (1998) note that in reality parental power is simply rhetoric and opportunities for families, particularly from low SES backgrounds to exercise their power or use their voice to affect their child's education is limited.

Literature also indicates that school size can affect parental involvement with schools and parent-school relationships, with small schools being shown to provide more effective participation opportunities (Goldkind and Farmer, 2013). Smaller schools arguably have a greater ability to focus on specific issues such as parental involvement and engagement and can emphasise the importance of the teacher-school relationship which in turn can positively impact academic achievement (Goldkind and Farmer, 2013). Classroom teachers are often predominately responsible for the development of communication between the school and home (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019), and smaller schools may mean classroom teachers have more time to effectively engage with a greater proportion of children and parents.

Research has indicated that interventions which focus on parental engagement with schooling can increase parental support in children's learning, can increase parental confidence, and can create a greater sense of feeling more capable in multiple areas of life (Macleod and Tett, 2019). As with intervention implementation, it is essential that parental interventions or strategies are suitable within the individual school context, and they take into consideration the needs of the families and the local communities. In relation to school-based interventions, interventions are more likely to be successful if they are supported by a school champion, typically a member of the senior leadership team as there is more of a likelihood of a whole school approach and changes in school policies (Goodall, 2018b). If parental engagement interventions or strategies are applied effectively, then they have the potential power to transform relationships and become embedded within the school culture (Goodall, 2018b).

Positive family-school relationships are key to the improvement of child outcomes as well as the creation of greater equity in schools and the education system (Ishimaru et al, 2016). A school which can create a climate that is respectful of family and community needs is critical in facilitating both student and parent involvement in schooling (Goldkind and Farmer, 2013). For parental engagement with learning to be effective, parents and teachers need to effectively work together to facilitate a child's learning, offering perspectives and skills from different contexts (Goodall, 2018a). When parents and schools work together, and a strength-based approach is applied, information can be shared and schools and families can understand one another more (Campbell, 2011; Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). A move away from a school-led approach, towards more of a joint relationship which focuses on learning and emphasises effective communication and dialogue between parents and school staff could improve overall involvement and engagement which could subsequently increase academic attainment (Goodall, 2018b). Interventions that increase parental involvement and ensure that parents and educators are on the same page, striving for the same goal equally, arguably have the most potential to create effective change (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019).

3.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has outlined divergent definitions of parental involvement and engagement, as well as a range of different theoretical frameworks around these concepts. Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) model for the progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with learning has been used to understand the overlapping concepts within this thesis. This model for progression illustrates the complexity of defining the concepts and posits that movement along the continuum from involvement to engagement is related to the relational agency between the schools and the parent.

Research indicates that parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning is socioeconomically differentiated, with parents from lower SES backgrounds less likely to involve or engage themselves in their children's schooling or learning (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Parental involvement and parental engagement are linked with children's school success (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005; Jeynes, 2018) and parents are often viewed as largely contributing factors in children's educational achievement or underachievement (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Whilst parents from lower SES backgrounds are seen less likely to engage in their children's learning, research has shown that parental engagement with learning can mitigate the differences typically associated with socio-economic status and family background (Leithwood and Patrician, 2015). Therefore, illustrating the need to further understand the barriers which arise from

systemic problems affecting parents' personal and socio-economic circumstances (Spear et al., 2021).

Moreover, the chapter has highlighted the negative language used in society to refer to parents who do not engage in their children's schooling or learning. Lack of involvement in school or engagement in learning is often viewed as a direct result of a parent's personal deficit which inhibits their interest or ability to engage in school or education (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Nonetheless, this research will not adopt a deficit lens when examining parental involvement and parental engagement but rather this thesis considers the structural barriers, challenges in access to opportunities and the divergence in school-home cultures, which all affect and interact to affect parents' involvement and engagement in their children's schooling and learning (Auerbach, 2007; Macleod and Tett, 2019).

4. The Impact of School Closures: Socio-Economic Inequalities experienced in School Holidays and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

4.1 Introduction

Central to this thesis is understanding the impacts of poverty on families' everyday lives and how this subsequently effects parents' involvement with school and engagement with learning. Periods of school closures are known to be particularly challenging for families on lower budgets, with the removal of FSM provision, unaffordable and inaccessible childcare, and sometimes the cessation of employment to provide childcare contributing towards families experiencing social isolation and poorer mental health and wellbeing (Stewart et al, 2018). As well as food insecurity which can be understood as "a condition that occurs when individuals and households do not have regular access to a supply of healthy and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs" (Long et al, 2020;1).

The chapter will examine the impact of school closures in the summer holidays on children and young people before discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic school closures on children and young people. An overview of the political landscape and recent policy changes which have driven up the poverty experienced by children and families, particularly during periods of school closures will be discussed. The chapter will also contribute to contextual understandings of the extent to which families on lower incomes are supported by schools and the welfare state during the summer holidays. The challenges experienced by families living in areas of disadvantage in periods of school closures, and the subsequent impacts on educational inequalities are recognised by the Welsh Government. Current policy debates in Wales centre around reviewing the structure of the schooling year, in terms of the length of holidays to better support learners and with the aim of tackling disadvantage and the attainment gap, although at this current timepoint no changes have been announced (Welsh Government, 2022).

Whilst the majority of literature reviewed is in relation to the UK as a whole, there are sections which are specific to Wales, and these will be highlighted. Table 2 details some similarities and differences between Wales summer holiday and COVID-19 school closures. For example, COVID-19 school closures saw the maintenance of home-school communication and schools providing educational content to children whereas these are not common factors of summer holiday school closures. This first section of the chapter will provide greater understanding of the challenges faced by children and families during school summer holidays and will further support understandings of some of the challenges faced by children and families during longer-

term COVID-19 school closures. Although socioeconomic inequalities in experiences and opportunities during the summer holidays are of importance to this research, the primary focus is on socioeconomic inequalities in learning opportunities more generally and therefore a greater focus is placed on the impacts of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Welsh Summer Holiday School Closures	COVID-19 School Closures
Schools closed for a six-week period.	Uncertainty around the period of time schools would remain closed.
School buildings often used for school or community programmes during the period.	Some school buildings used as 'school hubs' for children of key worker parents or for children classified as vulnerable.
School staff away from schools and not working during this period.	School staff required to work both in school hubs and at home to support children's distanced learning.
Little to no educational content provided to children by school.	Educational content provided to children and teaching provided by School staff. Teaching and learning primarily moved online or distributed via paperwork packs.
Home-school communication stops.	Home-school communication maintained on a regular basis via email communication, social media but primarily through telephone calls.
Free School Meals (FSM) provision ceases.	Alternative FSM provision implemented by Welsh government and individual schools.

Table 2: Some Similarities and Differences Between Welsh Summer Holiday School Closures and COVID-19 School Closures.

Due to the unique nature of the pandemic and the sustained period of school closures, research around the impacts of the pandemic closures on children and families is still emerging. However, this literature review will cover four key areas in relation to the impact of school closures on children and families; 1) education and learning, 2) food poverty, 3) the social needs of families and 4) child mental health and wellbeing. School closures are shown to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities in health, wellbeing and education (Blundell et al., 2020; Cullinane and Montacute, 2020; Evans, 2020; Lancker and Parolin, 2020) and therefore understanding the

impact of summer holiday and pandemic school closures on children and families is fundamental.

4.2 Welfare Reforms and the Impacts on Children and Young People During Periods of School Closures

Understanding the impacts of policy and the macrosystem on poverty experienced by families generally and more specifically during the summer holidays and the COVID-19 pandemic is essential. The 2008 financial crisis and austerity alongside welfare reforms have arguably contributed towards families struggling to financially cope with the demands of everyday life (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018). One of the most publicised consequences of poverty is food insecurity. As noted in the House of Lords (2020) 'Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food' report, food insecurity reveals how the welfare system is failing to prevent people finding themselves without the means or resources to access food. Poverty is characterised by a lack of resources and often people's food budgets may be the only budget that can be reduced (House of Lords, 2020). Problems with universal credit as well as increases in the cost of living have been contributing factors in the rise of food hunger and increases in the use of charitable food banks (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018).

Low-income families are particularly vulnerable to food hunger and this vulnerability is seen to be aggravated during the summer holidays (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018). Food poverty is defined as "insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet" (O'Connor et al, 2015; 432). Throughout this research, the terms food poverty and food insecurity have been used interchangeably in line with existing literature within the field (Long et al, 2020). National changes to the social system, rising food prices, an increase in the cost of living and poor pay have resulted in families experiencing food poverty and the poorest families seeking help from charities during the summer holidays (CPAG, 2015; McGuinnes et al., 2018b). The closure of schools during UK summer holidays sees the removal of the provision of FSM's to those entitled, as well as the removal of food provisions offered at breakfast and after school clubs which often provide food security to many children from low-income families (OECD, 2020). Parents report the financial burden of the summer holidays has resulted in parents skipping meals in order to feed their children as well as causing greater stress which in turn can negatively impact parental wellbeing (CPAG, 2015; McConnon et al., 2017). The Trussel Trust (2017) has pressed for a greater sense of urgency in addressing food hunger and revealed that increases in

the demand of emergency food for children in the summer holidays often results in food banks experiencing shortages in goods over these periods (Stewart et al., 2018).

In addition, The Child Poverty Action Group and The Church of England conducted a survey with low income-families between May 2020 and November 2020 (n= 678), in-depth interviews with families in the May/June of 2020 (n=21) and follow up interviews in November 2020 (n=10), with the aim of gaining an understanding of their experiences of the pandemic (Edwards et al., 2020). The research found that the pandemic had significantly negatively impacted families' living standards, with families reporting finding it harder to financially manage and families noting struggling to cover the costs of basic essentials such as food, utilities and child-related costs such as school uniform (Edwards et al., 2020). The detrimental financial impacts of the pandemic on low-income families has arguably contributed to an increase in the number of families noting reliance on the social security system (Edwards et al., 2020).

As discussed in chapter 2, these reforms support neo-liberalist ideas that see individuals as responsible for their own destinies and therefore justify cost-cutting agendas. Nonetheless, a review on the impacts of the summer holidays on children and young people has noted that the disadvantages that children and families from lower incomes experience in the summer holidays are an accumulation of overlapping issues including lower incomes, welfare cuts, the removal of FSM's provision and unaffordable and inaccessible childcare (Stewart et al., 2018). The accumulation of these challenges contributes to families experiencing hunger, social isolation and poorer mental health and wellbeing (CPAG, 2017; McGuinnes et al., 2018b; Stewart et al., 2018).

4.3 Routine Periods of School Closure

Literature examining the impact of the school holidays on children and families indicates that the summer holidays are often a difficult time for low-income families (Stewart et al, 2018; McConnon et al, 2017). In the UK, schools are typically closed for a 6-week period during the summer [see Table 2] and the educational and social support schools provide to children and families is often removed. A review on the impact of the summer holidays on low-income families in Scotland stated that families on lower incomes face three fundamental difficulties during the summer holidays; child food hunger, childcare and summer learning loss (see definition on page 55) (CPAG, 2015). These challenges contribute towards children experiencing periods of social isolation and inactivity which can result in poorer physical health and poorer mental health and wellbeing (McGuinnes et al., 2018b; Morgan et al., 2019; Stewart et al., 2018; Stretesky et al, 2020).

In addition, the cost of childcare in the holidays exceeds many families' budgets resulting in children being left unsupervised or parents seizing work opportunities to fulfil childcare duties (Stewart et al., 2018; The Childhood Trust, 2018). Schools are often seen to provide a form of relief for families experiencing poverty, through the provision of childcare, food and social support and therefore the closures of schools can place additional pressure and strain on families' lives. A report analysing the impacts of the summer holidays indicated that half (n=12,377) of children surveyed from disadvantaged working families reported they were left without adult supervision at one point during the summer holidays (The Childhood Trust, 2018). This limited parental supervision can lead to children experiencing social isolation as well as being susceptible to violence and partaking in anti-social behaviour due to boredom (The Childhood Trust, 2018). However, whilst many parents can afford to place their child in childcare during the holidays, many working-class parents may not be able to afford this expense and therefore have little choice but to leave their children unsupervised.

In 2017, The Welsh Government introduced 30 hours a week of early education and childcare for children aged 3 to 4 years old if families met eligibility criteria (Welsh Government, 2019). Eligibility criteria denotes a parent must be working 16 hours a week, must be earning under 100,000 per year and if a two-parent family both parents must be working (Welsh Government, 2019). However, these changes in policy and provision do not consider families living on the lowest incomes or non-working families and exclusion of non-working families potentially hinders non-working parents from looking for employment due to providing full-time childcare (Johnes and Hutchinson, 2016; Stewart et al., 2018). This includes children in the early years and does not necessarily overcome the difficulties of families sourcing accessible and suitable childcare provision for older children (CPAG, 2015; Stewart et al., 2018). School holiday provision which is affordable and accessible to all, and which does target or stigmatise those from low-incomes families could be key to supporting families who struggle to meet the financial demands of the summer holidays (CPAG, 2017).

Furthermore, the attainment gap between the richest and the poorest students is seen to exacerbate during the summer holidays (Stewart et al, 2018). The concept of summer learning loss seeks to explain how a child's learning becomes stagnant or children experience a loss in academic knowledge or skills during the summer holidays (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2017). It is estimated that children from disadvantaged families typically lose one month of learning as a result of the summer holiday whereas children from more advantaged families do not generally experience this loss of learning over the same period (OECD, 2020). A quantitative study

examining the summer learning loss of 77 primary school children aged between 5- and 10-years old attending three low SES schools in Scotland and Northeast England measured reading and spelling at 3 time points; directly before and directly after the summer holidays, and after 7-weeks of teaching upon returning to school (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2017). The study indicated that performance in spelling declined when children returned to school after the summer holidays suggesting summer learning loss, but after returning to school for seven weeks, the children's spelling scores had increased beyond the reported baseline figures (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2017). When SES was accounted for, a relationship was observed between the summer holidays and spelling learning loss for children from lower-income families (Cooper et al, 1996; Shinwell and Defeyter, 2017), but no relationship was found between the summer holidays and reading learning loss (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2017).

Similarly, a comprehensive review of 39 studies measuring achievement scores in the summer holidays in the US found there was no effect on maths or reading but detrimental effects were found in relation to children's math computation and spelling (Cooper et al., 1996) illustrating mixed findings. Nonetheless, assumptions that children, particularly from low-income households, experience summer learning loss is apparent amongst educationalists and teachers (Evans, 2020). Whilst the concept of learning loss provides estimates about losses in formally measured academic learning, these measurements only capture students' learning in relation to a specific topics or areas and not their overall education, ignoring important aspects of learning such as confidence, entrepreneurial thinking or self-determination (Zhao, 2021).

In addition, a review of studies examining the impacts of the summer holidays on children from low-income families indicated that children from lower-income families often experience unequal access and limited participation in enrichment activities in the summer holidays (Stewart et al., 2018). Enrichment activities can be viewed as "out-of-school activities which are enabled by parents in informal learning environments" (Washington-Nortey, 2017;1). Poorer children experience unequal access in opportunities to engage in informal learning during the summer holidays due to the high cost of activities (Evans, 2020). Even activities which are considered 'free' such as going to the seaside, or to the museum can incur cost to parents such as transport and food. Therefore, many activities which are culturally enriching, fun or educational can be out of reach to some children (Evans, 2020). Parents are often viewed as the key facilitators of enrichment activities; however, it may not be possible for some parents to offer their child these experiences. It is fundamental not to view this non-participation through a neo-liberalist deficit lens but instead recognise the challenges that may inhibit parents from being able to offer these

opportunities to their children such as affordability challenges, challenges with transport or availability of provision within their local area.

4.3.1 UK Summer Holiday Provision

Research on summer holiday school closures shows inequalities in learning and enrichment opportunities as well as challenges in parents accessing affordable childcare. Challenges in access to learning, enrichment opportunities and childcare can arguably contribute to children experiencing learning loss, social isolation and boredom (Morgan et al., 2019). Moreover, there are concerns around children experiencing shortages of food within the home in the summer holidays due to the removal of food provisions at school and the financial challenges faced by parents (Defeyter, 2019; Stretesky et al, 2020).

Affordable and accessible childcare provision in the summer holidays has been recognised as a policy blind spot (Graham et al., 2016; Hawkins, 2014). However, in recent years there have been increases in UK summer holiday interventions and programmes, often with these interventions and programmes specifically targeting children from low-income families. Research examining holiday programmes and clubs for children found that historically programmes purposes were often associated with the socioeconomic status of the child participating (Cooper et al, 1996; McAlister, 2014). For example, summer programmes focused solely on enrichment tended to be geared at children from higher-income families and summer programmes focused on overcoming learning deficiencies or supporting children's nutritional needs tended to be geared at children from lower-income families (Cooper et al, 1996; McAlister, 2014).

The summer holidays can be a difficult time financially for families, and often families face challenges accessing healthy food as well as enriching activities. Holiday food hunger is a term used within the literature to define when school-aged children "lack adequate levels of health and nutritious food during the school holidays" (Stretesky et al, 2020;1). Concerns around holiday food hunger as well as challenges with children accessing enrichment activities during the holiday has been documented by UK governments (Department for Education, 2023; Welsh Government, 2020). There has been a rise in summer holiday provision with the introduction of the Food and Fun: School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) (In Wales) in 2015 and the introduction of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (In England) in 2018 (Defeyter, 2019; Department for Education, 2022; Graham et al., 2016; Welsh Government, 2020). Both programmes have been heavily influenced by food and nutrition research and ensuring children receive good nutritional food which is key to their health and development during the summer

holidays (Department for Education, 2023). These programmes have developed over time and continue to receive funding from both the Welsh and Westminster governments.

As this research is conducted in Wales, further discussion around Welsh policy and the SHEP programme will follow. The Welsh Government funded SHEP [See Section 5.4.2 The School Holiday Enrichment Programmes (SHEP): A Case Study for further detail] aims to support nutritional, social and educational needs by providing a 12-day programme to children during the summer holidays. The Welsh Government (2020) continue to pledge funding to support local authorities to enhance childcare and play opportunities for children and young people, supporting children to engage with education, socialise with their peers, partake in enriching activities and partake in physical exercise during the summer holidays. This funding is primarily targeted at deprived communities and local authorities have been given autonomy in their spending, meaning funding can be allocated to support those most in need with specific areas (Welsh Government, 2020).

There is also a recognition of the importance of holiday hunger schemes in Wales is highlighted further in the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2019) report titled 'a Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the impact of poverty' which outlines practical steps the Welsh Government, local authorities and schools could take to protect those most vulnerable. Though low-income families report finding free activities which can provide learning opportunities in parks, museums and libraries (CPAG, 2015), issues of accessibility still remain (CPAG, 2015; Stewart et al, 2018). The implementation of additional holiday clubs and childcare provision in the summer holidays could provide additional opportunities for children to partake in enrichment activities. For the summer of 2021, SHEP was allocated £4.85 million to support the roll out of the programme with the aim of supporting the recovery from the broader impacts of the pandemic on children and young people particularly from areas of social deprivation (WLGA, 2023).

Nonetheless, in some cases due to the absence of a national policy to address holiday hunger, alongside a wider reluctance to address child poverty, schools, the voluntary sector and local authorities are often stepping in to provide holiday clubs for low incomes families (Mann et al., 2018). Moreover, increases in school and third sector support to ensure children's basic needs are met arguably absolves governments of responsibility for more structural change to support the elimination of child poverty. Schools are often referred to as the 'fourth emergency service' as increasing pressure has been placed on schools to support children's basic needs which is evident in the rise of food bank within schools (Baker, 2022).

The challenges for children and parents from lower socio-economic status backgrounds during the summer holidays are of concern, and arguably of greater concern post pandemic. The Welsh Government see the programme as key to supporting families experiencing financial challenges during the summer holidays and have allocated £4.85 million to the programme in the 2023 budget (WLGA, 2023). This money intends to support the roll-out of the programme through the close working of the local authorities and partner agencies. This section has discussed some of the concerns around school closures and the current government provision (WLGA, 2023). The subsequent sections of the literature review will discuss these concerns in relation to the extended period of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4 Exceptional Periods of Unplanned School Closure: the COVID-19 Pandemic

Lockdown measures implemented during the pandemic directed people to stay at home, restricting people's movements as well as the availability of certain good and services (Institute for Government, 2020). Some of the challenges experienced by families in the summer holidays such as food hunger and limited opportunities to partake in enrichment activities were experienced during the pandemic, with new challenges such as access to digital devices arising. Whilst government messaging suggested that 'we are all in this together' (Sunak, 2020a) the experiences of individuals and families were variable and those considered most vulnerable have been negatively impacted by the pandemic to a greater extent (Blundell et al., 2020). Education disruptions, fears of family members becoming unwell, reduced opportunities to play and disruptions to peer and family relationships are seen to have impacted children's wellbeing and development, with increases in relative emotional difficulties throughout the socioeconomic distribution (Moore et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk of harm for children and young people's physical health, mental health, social and material wellbeing as well as education with the poorest children being hit the hardest (Moore et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Whittaker, 2022).

Moreover, the pandemic has exacerbated the difficulties and disadvantages already faced by vulnerable groups such as young people in the care system (Roberts et al., 2020) or children with disabilities or learning difficulties. Whilst global COVID-19 trends suggest that children were far less likely to be infected than adults, the economic and social consequences of the .pandemic have shown to be harmful for children with those experiencing poverty experiencing the greatest harm (OECD, 2020). The crisis has exposed the fragility of life for many families and whilst children have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability, those with the fewest resources were often found adapting to the crisis the most challenging (UNICEF, 2020).

From a review of emerging literature on the pandemic four main challenges faced by families and children during periods of COVID-19 school closures have been highlighted and will be discussed in detail. The four areas are as follows:

1. Education and Learning
2. Food Poverty
3. The Social Needs of Families
4. Child Mental Health and Wellbeing

4.4.1 Education and Learning

The pandemic saw an estimated 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries experience disruptions to their teaching and learning (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). However, in the UK schools remained in operation, primarily in a remote manner. In Wales, school hubs opened for children aged 5-12 of key worker parents and for children identified as vulnerable. A vulnerable child in terms of hub provision was defined by the Welsh Government as a child "with safeguarding needs and supported by social care, which included children in care, children on the child protection register, looked after children, young carers, disabled children and those with Statements of special education needs" (Williams, 2020;1). Whilst this concept of vulnerability was used to define eligibility criteria the definition could be argued to be very restrictive. The term 'vulnerability' is complex, and a large set of variables which are related to the more general aspect of a child's daily context needed to be considered in terms of vulnerability and the potential risk of harm (Skinner et al., 2006). These variables could include poverty, education, disability and access to basic necessities such as shelter and food (Skinner et al., 2006).

4.4.1.1 Methods to Support Learning during Periods of School Closure

As discussed earlier, time away from school such as breaks during the summer holidays disproportionately negatively affect poorer students and periods of school closures further risk widening the attainment gap (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020; Evans, 2020). Increases in inequalities in learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic has argued contribute to the exacerbation of educational inequalities (Jæger and Blaabæk, 2020). Families' access to resources varied and parents' availability and ability to support their children's learning also varied (Jæger and Blaabæk, 2020). Moreover, parental engagement with culturally enriching activities was a significant challenge for all parents as opportunities for participation in clubs or groups were mostly suspended (Spear et al., 2021).

The closure of schools to the majority of children resulted in children's home environments adapting to also become their sole learning environment. Both teachers and students had to adapt quickly to a whole new model of teaching and learning at a distance, and some parents found themselves taking on a new role in their children's learning (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). Literature raised issues around the quality of home learning environments and children's access to digital devices, material devices and the internet as well as the provision and quality of distance learning materials and resources (Jæger and Blaabæk, 2020; OECD, 2020). Whilst children from disadvantaged backgrounds were likely to need the greatest amount of support during this time, these children were least likely to have access to the support or resources needed (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). These concerns were publicised nationally with the Welsh Minister for Education responding to concerns with a £3 million commitment to supporting digitally excluded learners as part of the 'stay safe, stay learning' policy (Welsh Government, 2020c). These funds were used to provide learners with MiFi devices and software licences, and the Welsh Government collaborated with partners across education to support children and families to get online and get used to using online education platforms (Welsh Government, 2020c).

As with existing research on parental engagement with learning much of the emphasis has been placed on the 'home' environment and parents' engagement in their child's learning which can often reinforce deficit approaches. However, it is fundamental to highlight that there were large disparities in the methods of delivery adopted across the UK and the support provided by schools to parents (Andrew et al., 2020; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020; Cullinane and Montacute, 2020), with the differences in delivery of educational content being socio-economically distributed. For example, findings from the Teacher Tapp Survey (cited in Cullinane and Montacute, 2020) conducted in March 2020 indicated that approximately 28% of teachers working in the most affluent schools reported using online 'live' video conferencing in comparison with 3% of teachers working within the most deprived schools. Similarly, when the use of physical workbooks/sheets were compared, 48% of teachers in the most deprived schools reported utilising physical workbooks/ sheets in comparison with 17% of teachers working in the most affluent schools (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). However, a survey of parents (n= 3,600) and children (n= 1,300) from low-income backgrounds reported they often did not own a printer or could not afford the costs of running a printer and therefore paper resources were only potentially beneficial if distributed by the school (CPAG, 2020).

Teaching was offered to children through different means with three predominant methods being highlighted in the literature; delivery of educational content online via pre-set tasks and

activities, delivery of virtual synchronous lessons and delivery of home learning packs or a mixture of approaches (Andrew et al., 2020; Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). As noted above there were differences in methods of delivery between less and more affluent schools. In March 2020, the Sutton Trust highlighted that schools considered less affluent were less likely to set work through an online platform and much more likely to set work for students via physical worksheets and workbooks than schools in more affluent areas (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020) which could be attributed to schools' awareness of issues with access to digital devices.

In addition, findings from an Institute for Fiscal Studies survey of 4,157 parents from eight schools in England indicated that for primary schools, 30% of parents from lower income families noted their child was offered online classes and 41% stated the school offered active help in comparison with 43% of children from more advantaged families being offered online classes and 53% of middle-class parents were provided with active help from the school (Andrew et al., 2020). These differences were further supported in a parent survey which highlighted that of the parents surveyed, 30% of parents from middle class homes reported their children partaking in live or recorded lessons once a day in comparison with only 16% of working-class parents reporting the same for their children (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020), illustrating socioeconomic differences in the delivery of educational content. Whilst it could be argued that schools did not have the ability or time to set-up online live or recorded lessons rapidly when school buildings were first closed, a subsequent report by the Sutton Trust in January 2021 highlighted that figures for the use of live online lessons were still considerably variable (Montacute and Cullinane, 2021).

There were also concerns raised over the amount and quality of work being returned by children and young people. Research indicated that for both primary and secondary children an average of 5 hours of schoolwork a day were reported to have been completed (Andrew et al., 2020). However, meaningful socioeconomic differences in the time children spent completing home learning were evident (Andrew et al., 2020; Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). The socio-economic gap in the time spent completing educational activities was greater for primary school children, with children from more advantaged families spending an estimated 1.5 hours per day longer completing educational activities than children from more deprived families (Andrew et al., 2020). These socioeconomic differences in time spent completing school-set work by primary and secondary school children could be attributed to the additional support needed from parents at a younger age. Research indicated that parents reported struggling with supporting their children's learning at home although these struggles were reported by parents from higher and lower SES backgrounds (Andrew et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the different types of home learning and how these were monitored and measured as well as the barriers which may inhibit children and young people from more deprived areas engaging in learning within the home. For example, it is unclear whether workbooks/sheets were returned to schools and were viewed by teaching staff. Whilst this method of delivery was seen to be accessible for children from lower-income families, it is difficult to measure engagement levels in workbooks/ sheets in comparison with measuring engagement in online learning content. The differences in the delivery of teaching by schools is evident and is likely to be a result of considerations by schools on what methods would be best suited to their students and families, with schools from more deprived areas likely to be holding back on providing online classes to limit the effect of inequality across the school (Andrew et al., 2020). The challenges of inaccessibility within the home as well as parents' availability and abilities to support children's learning with the home is likely to have contributed to the widening of the educational attainment gap.

4.4.1.2 The Digital Divide

The pandemic has highlighted the issue of digital exclusion, with much of the globe being viewed as digitally excluded because of a lack of internet access, limited access to digital devices and low levels of digital literacy (Lancker and Parolin, 2020; Seah, 2020). Technology has added an additional dimension to educational inequality and inequalities more generally (Seah, 2020). In the UK, it is estimated that currently 1 in 10 households do not have access to the internet and children from the poorest families are three times more likely to not have access to a phone or device for schoolwork purposes (Andrew et al., 2020; Seah, 2020). Socioeconomic differences in access to and quality of digital devices were evident in UK wide literature, with children from less affluent backgrounds being less likely to have access to a digital device, more likely to have to share a device to learn and more likely to have poorer quality broadband connections which all constrain students' engagement in online content (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020; Cullinan et al., 2021; Cullinane and Montacute, 2020; Parentkind, 2020). The digital divide is more complex than solely access to devices and the internet but other variables which effect the divide include digital skills and external factors such as parental skills, the home learning environment and teacher skills and support (Coleman, 2021). Moreover, the household conditions in which children from more deprived children live in have been seen to negatively impact children's opportunities to learn, with some children living in houses which are inadequately heated, have limited or no outdoor space or are overcrowded (Lancker and Parolin, 2020).

Access to digital devices not only inhibits children's access to school-level online learning opportunities but also inhibits children's access to other learning resources online such as eBooks, BBC bitesize or other interactive learning resources. Quantitative analysis on the use of digital library resources by families throughout the pandemic in Denmark highlighted an increase in inequality in learning opportunities as more affluent families were more likely to access library resources than less affluent families (Jæger and Blaabæk, 2020). Research indicated that whilst these higher SES- families took out more digital children's books prior to lockdown the gradient increased throughout the pandemic illustrating increases in inequalities in opportunities (Jæger and Blaabæk, 2020). Moreover, limited access to devices or the internet presented challenges in accessing social support networks during periods of lockdowns and restrictions during the pandemic (Beaunoyer et al., 2020). Isolation made it harder for some children and families to actualise the support networks around them, which could have negatively impacted the mental health and wellbeing of those digitally excluded (Beaunoyer et al., 2020).

Additionally, limited digital skills and limited digital competency act as an additional barrier to learning within the home as access to a digital device does not guarantee learning (OECD, 2020). Research from the OECD (2020) reported socioeconomic differences in parent digital literacy and competency, as parents from more advantaged households reported feeling more confident in their digital skills, more likely to encourage and guide digital activity and were arguably better equipped to support their child's learning within the home. The use of technology to learn arguably added an additional barrier to parental engagement as some parents were asked to navigate online resources and platforms they were not familiar with (Andrew et al., 2020). Moreover, in terms of educational histories, parents who were more highly educated were more likely to be in professional or managerial occupations meaning they arguably had greater opportunities to work from home, greater digital confidence and digital competency (Pensiero et al., 2020).

A Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021) survey on the digital divide in Wales which surveyed 167 school and college leaders from 19 local authorities found that 60% of schools or colleges reported fewer than 10% of their learners were without access to a device. However, 20 schools indicated that they had more than 20% of learners without access to a device (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021), which could be attributed to school-level socioeconomic composition. When device sharing was analysed, the report indicated that 36% of 148 schools and colleges noted that more than half of their learners shared a device (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021) which could suggest accessibility issues within households. In Wales, there were attempts to address the challenges of access to digital devices and the internet,

with some local authorities providing devices and internet dongles for redistribution to children (Welsh Government, 2020c). For example, a total of 10,848 MiFi devices and 9,717 software licences were distributed to children across Wales as of June 2020 by the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2020c). Moreover, charities or organisations provided funds to schools or donated devices to children throughout the pandemic.

Additional barriers to online and distance learning were also reported for children with learning disabilities, for children who English is an additional language (EAL) or those whose parents are not fluent in English. The pandemic has caused significant disruption to children's lives and to children who thrive under structure and routine (NSPCC, 2021; OECD, 2020). Concerns have been raised around the impact of the pandemic on children with learning disabilities with fears that this could lead to further marginalisation from wider society (Beaton et al., 2021). This disruption to routine alongside barriers in access to online lessons, reduced support and limited tailored tuition for children with disabilities have meant adjusting to remote learning has been challenging (NSPCC, 2021; OECD, 2020). Moreover, support services for children were either closed or severely reduced and some parents reported struggling to cope with the demands of a disabled child with limited support contributing towards families experiencing high levels of stress (NSPCC, 2021). Research from Australia also highlighted that EAL students were at particular risk of poorer learning outcomes during the pandemic (Finkel, 2020). Not only do students with EAL face barriers in terms of their understanding of educational content, research suggests these children of migrant families can often be considered more vulnerable as they are more likely to live below the poverty line, live in poorer housing conditions, and their parents tend to have less stable jobs which could have been affected further by the pandemic (Hobbs and Bernard, 2021; OECD, 2020).

Nonetheless, qualitative research with stakeholders holding insider knowledge about the experiences of children with learning disabilities during the pandemic highlighted that the pandemic has not been entirely disadvantageous for children with learning disabilities (Beaton et al., 2021). The use of online learning meant enhanced opportunities for social inclusion through increased agency for children and their families and new methods of connectedness leading to improved relationships with key stakeholders (Beaton et al., 2021). Typically, parents cannot be involved in the classroom setting however with learning from home parents become active participants in learning and arguably this challenged the status quo (Beaton et al., 2021). Possible benefits of lockdown and remote learning for EAL children included the development of a greater range of free EAL online learning resources and schools' development of different ways

to communicate with EAL parents including using bilingual texts or translators (Inside Government, 2020).

International research has highlighted that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, EAL students and children with learning disabilities are at greater risk of poorer learning outcomes as a result of the pandemic (Finkel, 2020). The challenges of accessibility alongside low parental confidence, parental working commitments and the level of support the school provides can all impact parents' capabilities to support learning from home and have all disproportionately affected families from lower- SES backgrounds (Andrew et al., 2020). Schools have worked hard to mitigate the challenges faced by children from poorer families during the pandemic as well as mitigate the impact of school closures on the inequality gap by providing resources and support to children and families in need (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). Schools provided parents with advice regarding supervised learning as well as digital devices and paper workbooks (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). However, the structural barriers which produce inequalities and constrain parents from lower-SES backgrounds engaging in their children's learning are still apparent and can arguably be seen to have exacerbated as a result of the pandemic which in turn could negatively impact the existing educational attainment gap.

4.4.2 Child Food Poverty and the COVID-19 Pandemic

As previously noted, family hunger is a fundamental concern when schools are closed during the school holidays (CPAG, 2017; OECD, 2020). However, the pandemic school closures arguably highlighted the issue of child food poverty on a national level, with the media reporting on the issue and governments having to address the issue of child food insecurity. National headlines included "UNICEF steps in to feed British children for the first time in history" (The Telegraph, 2020) and "Marcus Rashford brings food brand giants together to tackle child food poverty" (BBC, 2020). Whilst on school census day in 2019, it was estimated that 68,000 children in Wales were entitled to FSM's figures were estimated to have increased to 90,00 during the pandemic (Palmer, 2021). Provisions were put in place to support children who were eligible for FSM's (see below) (Bevan Foundation, 2020), however concerns were raised that around 70,000 additional children living below the poverty line were likely to have been experiencing child food hunger due to not meeting FSM eligibility criteria (Palmer, 2021).

In the UK, pre-pandemic statistics indicated rising levels of household food insecurity (Graham et al., 2016). However, the pandemic has contributed towards greater increases in this, and households with children are shown to be at greater risk of experiencing shortages of food within the home (Goudie and McIntyre, 2021). Whilst not having the financial means to

purchase food is often the biggest driver of food insecurity other drivers in the pandemic included households being isolated and a lack of supply of food (Goudie and McIntyre, 2021). Targeted policy interventions as well as the £20 uplift per week in universal credit and the working tax credit allowance attempted to mitigate the financial challenges posed by the pandemic (Sunak, 2020b). Nonetheless, some children were still reporting mild to severe food insecurity in January 2021 (Goudie and McIntyre, 2021) suggesting that the implemented welfare provision was falling short. The Westminster and devolved governments opted for different approaches to support families who were experiencing shortages of food. The Welsh Government's initial implementation of 'grab and go' bags saw low take up which could be attributed to the embarrassment or stigma of having to attend a designated public building to collect bags of food, or issues of accessibility (Bevan Foundation, 2020). However, alternative methods of delivery were later explored, and three differing methods were adopted by local authorities across Wales. The methods were as follows:

- Direct cash payments to families
- Shopping vouchers
- Delivery of weekly food parcels

As of May 2020, local authorities implemented the food provision system they believed was most appropriate to their local authority area with the majority of local authorities opting to provide FSMs via direct cash payments to parents (Bevan Foundation, 2020). Arguably, all of the delivery systems have strengths and weaknesses however the Bevan Foundation (2020) advocated the use of direct cash payments as this supported parental anonymity, autonomy, and flexibility. In terms of longer-term support, the Welsh Government have vowed to support families throughout periods of school closures until the summer of 2022, providing an additional £33 million to combat childhood food poverty (Bevan Foundation, 2020).

Nevertheless, whilst UK governments implemented policies to support children and families financially struggling during the pandemic, there were still concerns that many children not entitled to FSM due to the nature of the eligibility criteria were experiencing food poverty (Palmer, 2021). The end of the furlough scheme, the cut to the £20 uplift on universal credit and working tax credit, and the cost-of-living crisis have contributed to increases in families experiencing shortages of food within the home (Goudie and McIntyre, 2021; Wood, 2022). The pandemic has further highlighted there are inadequate state safety nets meaning that those in low paid jobs, those on reduced hours or those furloughed often fell into poverty with limited government support (Palmer, 2021). At the international level, the pandemic has highlighted

concerns around deep-rooted inequalities, limited social safety nets and welfare protection for people globally, with an estimated 4 billion people living without welfare protection (International Labour Organization, 2022). This has contributed to the UN's call for countries to extend social safety nets, with greater investment in health and education, greater equality and more sustainable economic systems seen as central to this (International Labour Organization, 2022).

The increased national recognition of family food shortages has also contributed to community efforts to support families experiencing food poverty. The pandemic has seen communities playing a fundamental role in the provision of food to families with local businesses and third sector organisations filling the gap in provision. In the 2020/21 financial year, The Trussel Trust (2021) reported significant increases in the demand for community food provisions and throughout the pandemic the trust provided an estimated 2.5 million emergency food parcels (UK wide) to people in crisis. Moreover, local businesses such as cafes, fish and chip shops and restaurants have been seen to provide free meals and food parcels to children and families struggling with food shortages. The Trussell Trust have called for all UK governments to commit to the development of a plan to end the need for food banks noting that the main drivers for food bank use are problems with the benefits system, challenging life experiences and a lack of informal and formal support (The Trussel Trust, 2021).

4.4.3 Supporting the Social Needs of Families

The pandemic has brought to the forefront the challenges that many children and families experience in their day-to-day lives (Moss et al., 2020). For some families the pandemic has had a significant impact on their financial security, their family relationships and their mental health and wellbeing (Howes et al., 2020). Research from the Child Poverty Action Group indicated that 8 out of 10 families (n=285) reported a significant deterioration in their living standards due to the pandemic and 43% reported finding it very difficult to cope financially (Howes et al., 2020). Not only have families experienced furloughing, reduced hours and job losses, but families have reported additional costs of staying at home as a result of the pandemic including additional money spent on food, electricity and other essentials (Howes et al., 2020). These financial concerns were also recognised by children with some children reporting they noticed their parents were worrying about money issues (RCPCH, 2020).

The poverty gap is growing and the closures of schools for extended periods of time are seen to have detrimental social and health consequences for children experiencing poverty (Lancker and Parolin, 2020). Schools are known to play a role in supporting the social needs of the children

and families they serve and sometimes the wider community more generally (Moss et al., 2020). The pandemic has highlighted how fundamental schools are in supporting families' needs, with many schools acting as one of the main service delivery mechanisms in the community, providing families with food, basic necessities and pastoral/ emotional support. One of the key priorities identified by schools in more deprived areas during the pandemic was to monitor and respond to the challenges families faced as a result of the poverty and hardship (Moss et al., 2020). Head teachers noted that they often felt they shouldered most of the responsibility for child welfare and safeguarding during periods of school closures (Moss et al., 2020). Schools were often the first point of call for many families and head teachers were involved in conversations about welfare with social services as well as providing welfare checks on children via door stop checks (Moss et al., 2020). A survey of primary school teachers in England (n=1,653) noted that the pandemic acted as an opportunity for many teachers to better understand the communities that they serve and offered teachers a different perspective on family life (Moss et al., 2020). This understanding of family life is arguably fundamental for teachers, as having a recognition of family circumstances and how best to support family-school relationships is key in supporting children's education and health and wellbeing outcomes.

Understanding the interconnectivity of schools, families and communities and the pivotal role schools play in the community is key. The pandemic has shown the extent to which, and how, schools often adopt a community focused approach to alleviating some of the challenges faced by families in their communities. Community focused schools are viewed to provide "a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community" (Welsh Government, 2009;2). This community school approach was arguably exacerbated during the pandemic as the crisis led to schools needing to actively identify families that required additional support, with schools then offering the required support or signposting (Finnegan, 2021). Schools have been an anchor to families during the pandemic, strengthening trust and relationships and creating a platform and opportunity for this relationship to be built upon further (Finnegan, 2021). The pandemic has highlighted the need for improvements in family engagement in education with more effective two-way communication between families, schools and policies makers required (Thompson, 2021). To move forward and build upon the strengthening of family-school relationships, the promotion of parental voice in education and the inclusion of parents in the co-design of policies and procedures is key (Thompson, 2021).

As would be expected, in a study by Moss et al (2020) socioeconomic differences were found between low SES schools and high SES schools in relation to their need to monitor and support

welfare, with lower SES schools providing far greater support. Schools identified as more affluent noted that parents were more concerned about maintaining continuity of learning and the need to support child welfare was less apparent (Moss et al., 2020). Consequently, these more affluent schools had a greater educational focus and faced less barriers to learning meaning greater concentration could be placed on the implementation of effective strategies to support learning within the home (Moss et al., 2020). These findings provide further insight into the socioeconomic differences in the amount and quality of schoolwork being completed by students. It could be suggested that the priority and central concern of children and parents from more deprived backgrounds was coping with the challenges of daily life throughout the pandemic, and schools were often the main public body to support the needs of families distracting away from the core purpose of schools to provide education.

4.4.4 Child Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Welsh Government recognise that emotional health and wellbeing is at the centre of education. Research on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic has shown that the pandemic has had a negative impact on many children and young people's mental health and wellbeing (Ford et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; RCPCH, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Findings from the CO-SPACE study found when national lockdowns were implemented parents reported their children's mental health deteriorated (Creswell et al., 2021). However, when school buildings re-opened after the first lockdown, parents reported some form of recovery in their children's mental health and wellbeing (Creswell et al., 2021) suggesting the fundamental role schools play in keeping children socially connected and the positive impact schools can have on children's mental health and wellbeing. Nonetheless, parents reported that children's mental health and wellbeing was seen to deteriorate again during the subsequent national lockdown in January 2021 (Creswell et al, 2021). Moreover, analysis of 10–11-year-olds' mental health in Wales found there were substantial higher estimates of emotional difficulties in children when pre-pandemic and data from during the pandemic were compared (Moore et al., 2022). Moore et al (2022) estimated that more than 1 in 4 students reported elevated emotional difficulties in 2021 compared to 1 in 6 in 2019.

Often when children reported poorer mental health and wellbeing it was associated with reductions in social contact, or the social isolation caused by the pandemic rather than associated with the COVID-19 virus itself (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020; Young Minds, 2021). Children reported loss of connection with their friends as one of their leading concerns during the pandemic with some children reporting experiencing loneliness (RCPCH, 2020). This was

particularly evident for primary school-aged children who tended to report feeling more cut off from their peers (Bunn and Lewis, 2021; Creswell et al., 2021). Nevertheless, other studies have indicated children felt closer to their friends during lockdown as they connected with their peers online (RCPCH, 2020). In terms of family relationships, there were mixed findings in relation to children's relationships with their families during the pandemic with some reporting the strengthening of relationships and others reporting there was stress placed on family relationships (UNICEF, 2020). Additional factors reported to effect children's mental health and wellbeing negatively during the pandemic included confinement and social distancing measures, stress of school closures and the impact the pandemic was having on their education and exams (OECD, 2020).

The delivery of services to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing were also severely disrupted throughout the pandemic. The closures of schools raised concerns around the detection of mental health difficulties as well as the provision of support as schools provide everyday wellbeing support to children and are sites for mental health interventions (OECD, 2020). Public health research has highlighted the importance of maintaining strong health promotion infrastructure alongside tackling the pandemic to mitigate the short- and longer-term consequences (Levin-Zamir et al., 2021). However, research shows that prior to the pandemic mental health services for children were stretched with many being unable to access essential mental health support (UNICEF, 2020). Whilst some support remained, the majority of the support offered to children was provided online or via telephone which raised further concerns around the effectiveness of support and the maintenance of child privacy (UNICEF, 2020).

Although research examining the pandemic and children's mental health and wellbeing found relatively negative findings, findings were mixed, and some children reported more positive mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020; James et al., 2021). Some studies have indicated that a break from the schooling environment as well as increased time with family members has been positive for some children, whilst others have faced challenges within the home which have negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing (Ford et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; RCPCH, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). A report by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) on the pandemic revealed that the majority (57%) of children surveyed (n=23,700) reported that they felt happy most of the time and over three quarters of children (84%) reported feeling safe most of the time. In addition, the HAPPEN survey indicated that of children surveyed in Wales (n=1,068) improvements in wellbeing and in particular happiness with family saw great improvements when compared with

figures from 2018 and 2019 (James et al., 2021). These improvements in family wellbeing were attributed to the increase in parents working within the home, increased time spent together and greater opportunities to walk, explore and spend time outside (James et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the study runs counter to much other international research and compares findings from a home-based survey and a school-based survey which is likely to give rise to response bias particularly as children from more deprived backgrounds may not be included in the sample due to issues in accessibility to digital devices.

In terms of socioeconomic inequalities in child mental health and wellbeing, the relationship between socio-economic status and mental health and wellbeing is well documented and it was anticipated the pandemic would exacerbate existing mental health inequalities due to the stresses of living in poverty and coping with the pandemic (OECD, 2020). The pandemic has increased financial and social insecurity which in turn effects overall poverty, parent mental health and wellbeing and increases children's potential exposure to stressful situations (Crew, 2020). When SES was analysed, there was evidence to show that the pandemic had a greater negative effect on the mental health of children from lower socio-economic status backgrounds (Crew, 2020; OECD, 2020). The Welsh Government noted one of the fundamental causes of mental health illness is poverty and tackling poverty could support the prevention of mental health illness in adults and young people before they emerge (Welsh Parliament Assembly, 2021). Moving forward from the pandemic, children's mental health is of concern to educators and there has been widespread recognition by schools that children's emotional health and wellbeing has been a priority during the pandemic and upon the return to school (Purdy, 2021).

Schools supported children's and families' emotional wellbeing through regular communication and maintaining the school-family connection through telephone calls (Finnegan, 2021). In terms of educators' perspectives, a report on primary school teachers' experiences of the pandemic highlighted that the social and emotional needs of children and families were at the forefront of teachers' minds, particularly in relation to the return to the school building (Moss et al., 2020). Research highlighted that primary school teachers' priority upon the return to school was ensuring the psychological wellbeing of students and school leaders and there have been calls for the prioritisation of the whole child rather than a sole focus on educational attainment (Ferguson et al., 2021; Moss et al., 2020). For younger students this could be supported through playing and socialisation with other children, with these arguably having been reduced during the pandemic. Play is viewed as essential for the growth of children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development and crucial to supporting children's social and emotional health and wellbeing (Play Wales, 2020). However, historically focusing resources on health and wellbeing have been viewed

to distract from the core business of school which is generally educational attainment (Long et al., 2020) and therefore school drives towards pastoral commitment in Wales could be tested as schools attempt to return to business as usual as well as approach the implementation of the new curriculum. School leaders have been in crisis management throughout the pandemic, and this has contributed to a shift in their priorities in line with their school needs (Reyes-Guerra et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic has severely compromised the effectiveness of child protection systems as limited face-to-face contact means challenges in assessing risk and limited contact between services and children as well as schools and children meaning fewer child protection and wellbeing concerns have been reported (OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Research from the OECD argues that the pandemic has contributed to a rise in the maltreatment of children with contributing factors including poverty, overcrowded housing, social isolation, domestic violence and parental substance misuse (OECD, 2020). The accumulation of increased concern over catching COVID-19, confinement from the imposed restrictions as well as additional financial strain is likely to have exacerbated family and parental stress levels and increased the potential risk of harm on children in the home (UNICEF, 2020). Arguably, the national level lockdowns were seen to create a 'pressure cooker' environment within the home whereby family stress may hit boiling point. Normally, schools play a role in the protection of children however with children not physically attending school there were concerns over there being limited identification of risk particularly for children and families that may not have been identified as vulnerable previously (OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). For example, children became major sources of third-party referrals to police for domestic violence during the first national lockdown suggesting increased exposure of children to domestic abuse during this period (Moore et al, 2022).

4.5 Concluding Remarks

The chapter has outlined the challenges faced by children and families from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds when schools are closed. This has included examining the impacts of school closures on children's education, mental health and wellbeing, and exploring how schools support the social needs of families and food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fundamental role schools play in supporting families' non-academic needs with teachers' and schools' roles extending beyond providing educational support to children to providing social and emotional support to the whole family (Hoffman and Miller, 2020) and Miller, 2020). The need for support is noted to be far greater for those students considered more

vulnerable including those from lower SES backgrounds, children with disabilities and children with EAL. The evidence indicates that children from lower SES backgrounds are disproportionately affected by school closures with these children found to be experiencing challenges with access to online learning, poorer mental health and wellbeing, greater likelihood of experiencing food poverty as well as lower SES families needing greater levels of social and emotional support. There have also been grave concerns around the closures of schools as institutions which identify and protect those considered vulnerable as well as concerns around the identification of mental health and wellbeing illnesses and the subsequent provision of support.

Macrosystem factors such as poverty, and policy responses to the pandemic alongside mesosystem factors such as parent-school relationships and school connectedness and chronosystem factors such as community-based resources all interact to influence child and family experiences and outcomes during the pandemic (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The closure of school buildings and the removal of day-to-day interactions between schools and families alongside the exacerbation of poverty experienced during the pandemic has had detrimental effects on children's education and health outcomes. The research in this thesis will explore further how the different levels of the ecosystem have interacted with one another during the pandemic to mitigate some of the challenges faced by families. This will include examining the impact of the pandemic on parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning and the broader consequences this has had on children's education outcomes, children's health and wellbeing outcomes and inequalities more generally.

5. Methods

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the research methodological approach adopted in this research. This will begin by outlining the research aims and questions, before discussing the mixed-methods research design, the ethical procedures followed and the data collection and analysis processes. This will also include detailing how the SHEP was used as a case study and the ontological and epistemological stance adopted. This research applied a convergent mixed-methods research design, and through a case study framework the research has used qualitative and quantitative methods to focus on lower-income families' engagement in their child's learning and parental involvement in their child's school. This research primarily used qualitative methods to conduct an in-depth exploration of the educational experience of parents and children from lower SES backgrounds and secondary data analysis provided a contextual analysis of the demographics of the schools participating in the research. The research data were collected at two-time points; during the summer holidays of 2019 and in May and June of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 Aims and Research Questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools, parental engagement with learning and how each of these impact children's educational and health outcomes. The research also aims to understand how poverty, vulnerability and stigmatisation impact involvement and engagement and subsequently children's health and education outcomes. Whilst using the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) as a case study and as a means to access participants, the research aims for there to be a broader applicability of the findings to beyond SHEP with a greater focus being placed on examination of concepts in relation to the formal school context and environment.

The research questions to be addressed are as follows:

1) What methods are schools adopting to involve and engage parents in schooling and learning?

2) What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in children's schooling and parental engagement with children's learning in areas of deprivation?

3) How do children, parents and school staff in deprived areas describe their interactions and relationships with one another?

4) To what extent can home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning reduce socioeconomic inequalities in wellbeing and educational outcomes?

5) To what extent, and via what mechanisms is an intervention focused on family engagement within the informal school environment perceived to influence parental involvement and engagement and contribute towards any longer-term educational, health or mental health improvements for children or families?

There is limited existing research which aims to understand how poverty interacts with all levels of the ecological system to impact parents from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds involvement and engagement in their children's school and learning. Moreover, the research avoids adopting deficit approaches to parents and families from more deprived backgrounds in line with poverty research. This research uses a case study approach, to gather a multi-informant perspective through an ecological lens to support the voices of families to be heard in relation to their involvement and engagement with this study being the first of its kind in Wales. The research is also unique in relation to its examination of school closures, as there is limited research which analyses case study schools' experiences of both school closures during the summer holidays and the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this research will contribute knowledge to understanding the experiences of families from more deprived backgrounds and their educational experiences, during periods of planned school closures and unexpected school closures.

5.3 Mixed Methodology and a Critical Realist Paradigm

Research paradigms can be understood as the philosophical beliefs, theories and standards of research and practice which are consensually agreed upon by a particular scientific community (Kuhn 1979 cited in Clark, 1998). On a philosophical level, paradigms are considered incommensurable sharing no common concepts, methods or measurements thus creating a division amongst scientists and contributing towards the longstanding 'paradigm war' in social and medical sciences (Clark, 1998; Oberheim and Hoyningen-Huene, 2018). The *incompatibility thesis* argues that qualitative and quantitative research paradigms and their associated methods cannot and should not be mixed, as they are opposing on both ontological and epistemological grounds

(Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). General stereotypes and underlying assumptions about the paradigms suggest that quantitative research advocates objectivity and results in generalisable, time and context-free findings whereby the truth can be approximated (Hathcoat and Meixner, 2017; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Whereas, qualitative research argues time and context-free research is not possible, nor desired as research should be meaningful, context bound and thick in description and detail (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

These generic stereotypes and the established distinction between the paradigms and their associated methods has been further reinforced in educational institutions where methods are often taught in opposition to one another, with academics often specialising and advocating one distinct paradigm (McEvoy and Richards, 2006). Nevertheless, the misconceptions that researchers must assign themselves to a singular paradigm have slowly become outdated which is evident in the increase of mixed-method research and the establishment of journals such as the Journal of Mixed Methods Research (O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2007). Pragmatists have argued there is a need to move away from focusing on the differences between the two orientations and a move towards focusing upon their commonalities, their compatible nature and the use of methods that 'work' and are best equipped to answer a specific research question (Hathcoat and Meixner, 2017; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism has been described as giving "primary importance of the question asked" (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011:41; Hathcoat and Meixner 2017) and supporting research approaches which aim to produce optimum results (McEvoy and Richards, 2006; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The *fundamental principle of mixed research* sees that study designs should strategically choose quantitative and qualitative methods and concepts with the aim of the methods "producing complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2016:127; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The combination of the elements of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches and research methods mean breadth and depth of understanding can be established and new insights into phenomena can be provided (Symonds and Gorard, 2008; Wiltshire, Lee and Williams, 2019). All methods carry various values and deficiencies, however the use of multiple methods and the triangulation of these methods may increase content validity and comprehensiveness (O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2007; Symonds and Gorard, 2008; Wiltshire, Lee and Williams, 2019). Researchers argue when quantitative and qualitative findings are not considered in conjunction with one another opportunities to provide a more complete analysis are often missed (Richards et al., 2019). Moreover, researchers have argued mixed methodologies can help to understand the complexities of certain populations or environments, such as schools to a greater extent (O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2007). The use of mixed methodologies can support the

contextualisation of the research environment within the wider environment, which arguably is necessary for policy related research (Bernhard, 2019; O'Cathain et al., 2007).

The use of a mixed methods approach in education research supports the linking of stories and statistics and therefore powerful explanations and insights on education phenomena can be produced and be of greater practical relevance and more accessible to educational practitioners and policymakers (Bernhard, 2019). Previously, educational research has been criticised for focusing on scientific statistics and standardised measurements rather than considering the voices of the participatory groups (Hood, Kelley and Mayall, 1996). However, the multi-faceted approach adopted in this research allows for the complexities of the school system to be considered and supports the unearthing of voices of disempowered groups within these population; such as the voices of children and parents in the education system (O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2007; Stokols, 1992). Whilst researchers often maintain the incompatibility of a multi-method approach, it is arguably the best way to gain a complete understanding of the social phenomena, exposing the dimensions and proving enriched explanations of the phenomena (Leahey, 2007). For example, the FSM entitlement data [further detail provided in section 5.7.1.1] can provide insight into the socioeconomic composition of the schools participating in the research which can provide context to support understandings of the multiple perspectives explored in the qualitative data. This is of particular importance to supporting understandings of school-parent relationships and school involvement and engagement strategies, as parental involvement and engagement are socioeconomically differentiated (Doyle and Keane, 2019).

This theoretical debate around the philosophical incompatibility of quantitative and qualitative methods led to the consideration of alternative philosophical paradigms such as pragmatism or critical realism (Regnault et al, 2018). Critical realism is a paradigm that is interested in understanding the interactions between the structures, agency and mechanisms that exist in society (McEvoy and Richards, 2006). The key principles of critical realism are ontological realism and epistemological relativism (Raduescu and Vessey, 2009). A fundamental feature of critical realism is its belief that the world is ontologically stratified and exists independently from our knowledge of it meaning there is a possibility of having varying accounts of any phenomenon (Eastwood et al., 2016; Fletcher, 2017; Regnault et al., 2018; Sayer, 2007). The world is argued to be much more complex than can be understood, and therefore critical realist's state that to commit to one singular paradigm would be to commit to the *epistemic fallacy* (Mingers, 2001; Bhaskar, 2008).

Critical realism is interested in understanding the interactions between the structures, agency and mechanisms that exist in society (McEvoy and Richards, 2006; Sayer, 2007). In regards to reality,

Bhaskar (1978 cited in Bhaskar, 2008) identified three overlapping domains of reality; the 'real', the 'actual' and the 'empirical'. The 'real' relates to the "realm of objects, structures and their powers" (Sayer, 2007:11) where all plausible mechanisms reside. The 'actual' refers to events caused by the activation of these powers which can either occur at observable and unobservable level. The final domain, the 'empirical' is seen as the domain of experience and is a subset of the real and the actual which can be measured empirically (Bhaskar, 2008; Fletcher, 2017; Sayer, 2007). Unlike a positivist approach, critical realism rejects regularities in sequences of events but identifies casual mechanisms and how they work under certain conditions (Sayer, 2007; Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2015). The social world is argued to comprise of countless interconnecting systems such as familial or institutional systems which each have their own generative mechanisms (Houston, 2010). A mechanism is not understood as a variable, but a contributing factor in the behaviour and the interrelationship between the processes which achieve tendencies and demi-regularities (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2015).

Context and time are considered fundamental components when explaining tendencies in the social world (Houston, 2010). Pawson and Tilley (19.97) suggest that mechanism+ context= outcome, indicating that outcomes are dependent upon the interplay between the mechanism at work within the specific context (Houston, 2010). This focus on context allows researchers to identify how and why a certain phenomenon occurs within a particular set of circumstances and supports the uncovering of what is inside the 'black box'. This research will therefore not only highlight participants explanations of social phenomena but will examine how human agency interacts with casual mechanisms and how it is shaped by social, political and economic contexts (Fletcher, 2017). A key point of critical realism is epistemological realism which posits that 'reality' is not observable and depends on the perspective in which it is viewed which supports the exploration of multiple perspective in this research and supports the understanding of these multiple social realities. For example, parental involvement with school is shaped by participant perspective as well as economic, political and social structures and therefore this contextualisation moves beyond understanding parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning as solely a parent's 'choice' to participate or engage.

Critical realism does not sit on the traditional philosophical continuum but offers an ontological and epistemological alternative. Critical realists do not advocate one method over another but see *how* quantitative and qualitative methods are used as important and argue that choice of methods should be dictated by a research problem or research questions (McEvoy and Richards, 2006). A mixed methods research design in line with a critical realist epistemology and ontology was therefore deemed the most appropriate methodology in this research as it can answer the

research questions most effectively and attempt to uncover what is within the 'black box' (McEvoy and Richards, 2006; Houston, 2010). The primary qualitative approach adopted provides insights into the social phenomena of multiple perspectives with the national educational and FSM data providing context to the perspectives within the Welsh context. Therefore, an examination of the interactions between the social structures, mechanisms and human agency via the use of qualitative case studies and secondary data analysis are presented in this research.

5.4 Methods Used in this Thesis

The following section of the chapter will outline the study design and the case study approach used in the research.

5.4.1 Study Design

This research adopted a convergent mixed methods research design whereby the quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed during a similar time frame (Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2013; Tariq and Woodman, 2013). The research was primarily qualitative in its nature but used secondary quantitative data analysis to provide contextualisation of the participating schools, in terms of their demographics, including their locality and socioeconomic composition. The research adopted a case study approach, by using SHEP to support the in-depth exploration of children's and parents' everyday experiences of school and the educational system within the context of receiving an intervention which intended to support engagement with school as well as other aims. The research draws on the perspectives of all those involved in these everyday school experiences (Crowe et al., 2011) by gathering the perspectives of children, parents and school staff. The qualitative components of the study included school observations and interviews with school staff, parents, and children.

A common issue with mixed method research or combining different forms of qualitative data is the integration and linking of methods and data (Regnault et al, 2018). In this research, the integration of data were conducted through the process of merging as a plan for collecting all datasets was designed and data were brought together for analysis and comparison once the data were analysed individually (Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2013). The data were analysed independently using techniques typically associated with each type of data before the findings from each of the datasets were combined and compared (Tariq and Woodman, 2013; Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2013). Another important consideration in this research is the collation of different qualitative methods to illustrate multiple informant perspectives.

Multi perspective interviews can be particularly useful for understanding relationships and interactions within a specific social group and for understanding a certain phenomenon as members will have different views and experiences of that phenomena (Vogl et al., 2019). The individual interviews offered freedom for the participants to express their own world views in a private setting, however the combination of these perspectives illustrate individuals' interrelation and the connectivity of their life contexts (Vogl et al., 2019). Each set of data were analysed individually (child, parent, school staff) as well as in relation to one another showing areas where findings were complementary or divergent (Vogl et al., 2019). Moreover, observations supported the understanding of these relationships and interactions further as the behaviours, verbal and non-verbal communication between the actors were analysed. For example, observations brought a greater understanding to how events and behaviours occurred naturally, and the interviews supported understandings of perspectives on these occurrences (Ritchie and Lewis, 2005).

The processes and procedures within this research study including the data collection and data analysis of each component of the study, are outlined in more detail below. The qualitative data were collected at two time points, with initial observations and interviews with school staff, parents and children conducted in the summer holidays of 2019 (July-August) and subsequent interviews with head teachers or deputy head teachers were conducted between May-June of the 2019-2020 academic year during the period of school building closures as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Secondary data analysis on school-level FSM data from the 2015/16 academic year to the 2018/19 academic year was conducted to provide some understanding of the socioeconomic composition of the schools implementing the SHEP and the schools recruited to participate in the study. Below, the case study approach and methods used in the research are outlined in more detail.

5.4.2 The School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP): A Case Study

The research has used the 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP), a Welsh Government funded multi-agency school-based scheme, which provides healthy meals, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children and families living in areas of social deprivation during the school holidays as a case study (McConnon et al, 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2019). The programme aims to prevent some of the challenges faced by children from low-income families in the school holidays including food hunger, decreased levels of physical activity and social isolation (McConnon et al, 2017). The development of the programme aligns with the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) which was established to enhance

relationships between public bodies, people and communities to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health and educational inequalities.

The programme incorporates the core components of the Healthy Promoting School Framework (HPS) by including health and nutrition education, health promotion through a holistic whole school approach and the engagement of families and the community within the programme (McConnon et al, 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2019). A logic model developed by a research team from Centre for Development, Evaluation, Complexity and Implementation in Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer), Cardiff University underpins the key elements of SHEP (Powdrill and Thomas, 2019). As outlined in the logic model [see Appendix 1], the 2019 implementation of the intervention focused on the inclusion of the family and community, and aimed to improve child health, mental health and wellbeing and child educational achievement outcomes. Components considered essential for the delivery of the SHEP are listed as; free and healthy breakfast and lunch, a minimum of one-hour physical activity daily, enrichment activities, nutrition education and a family lunch for families at least once a week (McConnon et al, 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2019).

In terms of school involved in the programme, the WLGA (2020) eligibility criteria denotes that a school must have a FSM eligibility population of over 16% to be included in the programme suggesting it is targeted at schools in areas of deprivation across Wales. At the school level, research has highlighted that family recruitment strategies varied, with some schools adopting universal approaches and other schools using more targeted approaches whereby children who met pre-specified criteria were invited to attend (McConnon et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2019). Children engaged in the programme ranged from 2 years old to 18 years old, although the majority of the children participating in the programme were aged 7 to 11 (Key Stage 2). Prior to nationwide roll out of SHEP, the intervention model was piloted in Cardiff during the summer of 2015, leading to 12 schools participating in the initial 2016 roll out (McConnon et al, 2017). Since then, the programme has run yearly (excluding 2020 due to the restrictions of the pandemic), with a total of 136 participating in the programme in 2021, a 79% increase from 2019 (N=76). The clubs are located across 21 of the 22 local authorities in Wales, with clubs opening for a total of 12 days over either a 3- or 4-week period (McConnon et al, 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2019).

Previous evaluations have discussed the potential benefits of the programme on children's learning and engagement, and project staff anticipated the holiday clubs could improve children's education by providing new learning opportunities (McConnon et al, 2017). In relation to the

impact of SHEP on parents, research suggested that the programme had the potential to reduce parents' stress levels and negative feelings often caused by the financial pressures that families experience in the school holidays (McConnon et al, 2017). Nevertheless, there is limited evidence examining the impact of the SHEP on educational attainment, or little exploration around family relationships and families' connectedness with schools. The SHEP was used in this research as a case study as the programme takes places in schools in deprived areas in Wales and brings parents and families into the schools during the summer holiday for a family lunch at least once a week, meaning the population of interest could be easily accessed. The programme therefore acted as an opportunity to examine family engagement in the informal school environment, examine the daily school experiences of children and parents from lower-SES backgrounds and investigate the relationship between parental involvement and engagement and socioeconomic inequalities in health and education further.

5.4.3 Recruitment

The research has explored involvement and engagement in the SHEP however primarily the programme was used a vehicle to access schools and to explore these concepts in relation to schooling and learning more generally as well as understand the wider implications these concepts can have on health and educational inequalities.

5.4.3.1 Sampling Participating Schools

For the purpose of this research project, four schools were recruited. The four participating schools were purposively sampled (Bryman, 2016) through consideration of each school's geographical area and their SHEP tenure. A school from north, mid, south, and west Wales were recruited for the research and to maintain the anonymity of the schools, the schools were given pseudonyms (see Table 3). In terms of SHEP tenure, the research was interested in examining school-family relationships over time and therefore the research explored the relationship between parental involvement in schools, parent-school relationships and tenure of SHEP at the school (i.e. how recently the scheme had begun). In Table 3 an aggregate FSM entitlement figure has been given for the 4 schools participating in the research and individual school-level FSM figures have not been presented. As FSM data is freely available online, it would been possible for schools to be identified by their FSM entitlement figures and therefore to ensure anonymity an aggregate figure was presented.

In the 2015 and 2016 implementation year, the SHEP intended to reach schools in areas of deprivation by implementing the programme in Communities First Cluster areas across Wales

(McConnon et al., 2017). A Communities First Cluster area is identified by the Welsh Government according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, with those within the most deprived 10% and areas in Wales or areas of natural community boundaries and aligning boundaries for key partner services being identified as community first clusters (Statistics for Wales, 2014). As the programme was further rolled out over time, a greater number of schools became interested in participating in the programme. The WLGA would not reject any school's application to participate in the programme meaning the programme was extended to schools outside of Communities First Cluster areas. However, in 2019 new eligibility criteria were introduced whereby schools FSM entitlement was required to be over 16% for the school to be accepted by the WLGA (WLGA, 2020). The reach and recruitment of the programme is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

School Pseudonyms	Geographical Area	SHEP Implementation Year	Mean of 2019 Case Study Schools FSM Entitlement	Standard Deviation of 2019 Case Study Schools FSM Entitlement
Ashberry Primary	West Wales	2017	33.4%	13.9
Ferntree Primary	Mid Wales	2018		
Hazelwood Primary	North Wales	2016		
Willowhill Primary	South Wales	2018		

Table 3: Participating School Pseudonyms, Geographical Area, FSM and SHEP Implementation Year.

As the programme was intended to be targeted at schools in less affluent areas, the socioeconomic composition of schools was not considered in the recruitment of the schools for this research. However, for contextual purposes Table 3 shows the participating schools mean FSM entitlement, which was 33.4% for the 2019 implementation year. The standard deviation was 13.9% and there was a range of 34% between the least and most deprived school indicating that there was variance in the sample. However, the Welsh primary school average FSM

entitlement in 2019 was 18.5% therefore illustrating that whilst there was variation in FSM entitlement for the participating schools, the average of the participating schools' FSM entitlement was considerably higher than the national average.

The WLGA provided access to the schools and prior to recruitment consultations with the WLGA, a list of all schools participating in the programme was provided which allowed for analysis of school by geographical area and SHEP tenure. To avoid cherry picking of schools by the WLGA, a pre-compiled list of schools of interest to the research was given to the WLGA whom emailed the schools my contact details. Out of the 4 initial schools selected for the sample, 3 schools agreed to participate. There were challenges recruiting a school for the research that was new to SHEP (first implementing the programme in 2019) as these new schools wanted to prioritise the implementation of the programme and saw this research as a distraction from the implementation process. An additional school that was new to SHEP in the summer of 2019 was also invited to participate in the research but also declined. Due to the time constraints imposed by data collection, a decision was made to not recruit a school that was new to SHEP in the summer of 2019 and to invite a school that had already implemented the programme in previous years. Therefore, of the recruited schools one school was in the 4th year of running the programme, one school was in the 3rd year of running the programme and two schools were running the programme for the second consecutive year. All schools that agreed to partake in the research signed a research contract [Appendix 2] which outlined the aims of the research, the commitment of the researcher to the research and the commitment of the school to the research.

5.4.3.2 School Consent Processes

A contact from the WLGA sent information on the research project and the researcher contact details to the selected schools. If the schools were interested in participating in the research, the school would reach out to the researcher. Once this initial contact with the participating schools was made, the schools were sent information sheets on the research and head teachers were asked to sign a study contract [Appendix 6] declaring their school agreed to participate in the research. The letter informed the school that the research was independent from the WLGA and the data which would be collected for the purpose of this doctoral research and therefore the data would not be shared with the WLGA. After agreements were signed, each school provided a timetable of when they were running their programme (12-day period) and data collection dates at each of the school sites were arranged. Each case study school was visited for 2 days where observations were taken and interviews with school staff, parents and children were conducted.

Further details on how the data were collected and the consent procedures for the individual methods of data collected is provided below.

5.5 Primary Data Collection

The research used qualitative methods (observations and interviews) to examine children's, parents', and schools' experiences of home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning. The first round of data collection was conducted on the grounds of the participating schools' during the SHEP (summer of 2019) and the follow-up data were collected via the telephone during a COVID-19 pandemic school closure period (May-June 2020).

5.5.1 Observations

Observations were conducted over a two-day period at each of the case study schools. Initially the research had planned to conduct observations on solely the 'SHEP Parent Days' however parent-school-child interactions and relationships were observable on all SHEP days and thus observations were taken on both of the SHEP days that were attended at each school. The observations were semi-structured and recorded via a pre-composed observation record [Appendix 3] which was developed in line with findings from the literature review and which supported the research questions. The observation record gave a sense of structure as there were pre-set categories for observations to be placed into, including family engagement opportunities, the setup of the school and canteen, and school- child- parents dynamics. There was space to write a narrative account within each category and an 'other comments' section allowed for any observations outside of the pre-constructed categories to be recorded.

The observations were regarded as a particularly useful method in this research as the observations supported the analysis of the behaviours (language used and non- verbal communications) of several actors (children, parents and school staff) in relation to one another and the school system as a whole. Whilst the observations were used as a data collection tool, the observations acted as more of a familiarisation tool (Tyrie et al, 2023; Chicken et al, n.d) as they supported the researcher to become comfortable within, and understand the dynamics of, the holiday club environment. This process also supported the researcher to familiarise themselves with the children, parents and school staff and the other way round (Tyrie et al, 2023; Chicken et al, n.d) prior to recruiting participants for the interviews. This familiarisation process alongside the formal observational record allowed the research to record and analyse behaviours and interactions through the eyes of the researcher (Ritchie and Lewis, 2005) and sought to help

identify the casual mechanisms that drive social activities and phenomena (Fletcher, 2017). A total of 8 observation records were completed across the 4 case study schools, 1 observation per day attended at each school.

As discussed in further detail in Section 7.8, the research was conducted in line with Economic and Social Research Council's core research principles and ethical approval was obtained from Cardiff University's School of Social Science Research Ethics (SREC/3208) and a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check was undertaken prior to attendance the holiday programme. Although parental consent was not obtained for the observations to be conducted, schools signed a research contract [Appendix 2] and schools informed parents of the researcher's attendance and the aims of the researcher prior to the holiday club. In terms of the observations, schools were informed the purpose of the interviews were to support the researcher to understand the school context, to list the family activities and interaction opportunities and to observe school and family interactions. The schools were also informed no identifiable information would be recorded in any of the observation notes. The researcher also provided all parents whose children were at the programme with information sheets related to the research on the days of data collection. The school also introduced the researcher to the children, and explained the research aims to the children at the holiday programme. Children and parents were informed observations were taking place and no parents or children expressed a wish for themselves or their child to not be observed. Moreover, children and parents' anonymity was ensured as personal information (names, physical characteristics) was not recorded in the observation records but rather the records were interested in capturing the school's characteristics and the dynamics between the different stakeholder groups.

5.5.2 Semi- Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the interviews were intended to provide an in-depth understanding of the interactions and interrelations between agents and structures in the education setting. The case study approach and use of interviews sought to provide further understandings of the relationship between the school context, the family unit, and the mechanisms at play in relation to certain phenomena (for example, *why are parents from different socioeconomic status backgrounds more/less involved in their children's school?)*. Semi-structured interviews were used as they gave structure to the interview through the use of a general set of developed research questions which enabled the researcher to ensure coverage of research themes but also allowed for in-depth insights on certain areas or topics (Lichtman, 2017).

Individual interview guides were developed for the child, parent and school staff interviews with questions focusing on key areas to be addressed [Appendix 4 and 5]. For example, key theories such as Epstein's (2002) theory of overlapping spheres and the three contexts which are key to children's development and learning are the school, family and community were considered throughout the development of the interview guides. The interviews guides were developed with the intention of further understanding what is happening in these three contexts in relation to children's learning and exploring how the participants are, or are not, working with each other to support child development. Moreover, Epstein's framework of parental involvement (Table 1) highlighted 6 types of involvement in children's learning including decision-making and volunteering. Each of these 6 types of parental involvement were considered, and shaped to a certain extent aspects of the interview guides, as there was questioning or probing in relation to the six areas. For example, a question asked in the parent interview guide asked how parents facilitated their child's learning within the home in line with one of Epstein's 6 types of parental involvement.

The interview guides provided structure however a flexible approach to adhering to the interview guide was taken to support participants' perspectives on their social world to be uncovered (Bryman, 2016). The use of probes and additional questioning supported the move beyond surface level answers to obtaining a deeper and fuller understanding of meaning and uncovering hidden meaning behind behaviours and interactions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2005). Whilst the interviews were intended to be solo interviews as some of the topics discussed could be considered as sensitive, some of participants requested to be interviewed with an additional person. For example, some of the children requested to be interviewed with another children and parents requested to be interviewed with their partner or another parent friend. Therefore, several of the interviews were with multiple participants to ensure participants were comfortable during the interview process (see Tables 3, 4 and 5).

5.5.3 Child and Parent Pilot Interviews

Prior to piloting of the interviews and interview materials with children and parents, conversations were held with two academics, one with expertise in creative methods with children and one whose main research interests are strengthening connections between school and parents/families. These conversations supported discussions around how to approach the interviews, how to engage the participants and how to frame the questions. For the child interviews, creative methods such as board games or drawing activities were discussed in detail

and were regarded as useful tools for engaging children as evidenced in the research literature supporting the development of creative tasks (Kara et al, 2021).

Following on from these discussions, piloting of the interviews and interview materials were conducted with parents and children. This piloting acted as an opportunity to see how the interviews and materials were viewed from the perspectives of the public, including understanding if the language used was suitable, as well as understanding whether the tasks and questions asked during the interviews were understood and worked effectively in practice. A total of 3 parents (mothers) and 3 children (2 girls and 1 boy), aged between 5 and 8 participated in the piloting and provided comments and feedback on specific elements of the interview and interview materials. The parent interview schedule, the 3 child interview tasks alongside the information sheets and consents forms were all reviewed by the participants.

In terms of the child pilot interviews, one challenge identified was the length of time in which each activity took the children to complete, as the children would often go off on a tangent when completing a task. However, as the children engaged in all 3 of the activities, it was decided to keep the 3 tasks and see how much could be achieved within the timeframe given. Changes to the interview and interview materials were made as a result of suggested changes from the piloting process. For example, parents were asked to discuss what they understood by parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with children's learning however it was evident from parents' responses that they did not distinguish a difference between the two concepts. Whilst in academic literature and on a theoretical level there is a difference between parental involvement and parental engagement, the pilot interviews indicated parents were not necessarily aware of this distinction. Therefore, more open-ended questions which did not feature the terms would be more appropriate, leaving room for the researcher to decipher which category the activities or events the interviewees were discussing would fall into.

5.5.4 Semi- Structured Interviews with School Staff

The school staff at the SHEP schools had responsibility for the day-to-day running of the programme but were also employed by the school in the academic year. The holiday programme was primarily run by support staff with background support being provided by the head teachers. The SHEP offered school employees additional paid employment in the summer holidays which could explain why the holiday programmes were primarily run by support staff who are typically on lower incomes than teaching staff and only paid during the term time [see section for 8.4 for further discussions].

	Number of Interviews	Number of Participants	Staff Role
Hazelwood Primary	1	1	Head Teacher (n=1)
Willowhill Primary	2	2	Head Teacher (n=1) Support Staff (n=1)
Ashberry Primary	2	4	Head Teacher (n=1) Support Staff (n=3)
Ferntree Primary	1	1	Support Staff (n=1)

Table 4: School Staff Interviews: Completed Interviews (n= 6)

Purposive sampling was used to recruit school staff for the research and school staff interviews compromised of both support staff and head teachers [see Table 4]. It was important to gather the perspectives of school staff from different levels of the school hierarchy when investigating parental involvement in schools, parental engagement within the home and school-parent relationships. Not only do these staff members have different job roles and responsibilities but the extent to which they connect with parents and families as well as their perceptions of school-family relationships were key to explore (Littlecott et al., 2018b). Whilst representation from head teachers and support staff within the same schools was only possible at 2 of the schools participating in the research, there was a good spread of different school staff roles involved in the study. The focus of the interviews was primarily on day-to-day school-family interactions and parental involvement and engagement in the academic year however a section of the interview focused on the SHEP. The exploration of what aspects of the data were specific to SHEP supported understandings of what aspects of the data had broader applicability to the topic areas of involvement and engagement in schooling and learning more generally.

After schools signed the study contract each staff member was given a staff consent form. The interviews were guided by the school staff interview guide [Appendix 5] and the interviews were conducted in a private space on the school grounds during the SHEP delivery day. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

5.5.5 Semi- Structured Interviews with Parents

The semi-structured parent interviews were guided by the parent interview guide [Appendix 4] developed from literature and from the piloting. The interviews were held on the school grounds during a SHEP delivery day in a private room or space. Initially, the interviews intended to be individual however some parents felt more comfortable being interviewed with a fellow parent or their partner. A total of 12 parent interviews were conducted with a total of 15 parents

participating in the interviews. Parents were asked to participate in the research either when they dropped or picked up their child from the holiday club or when they were attending the school parent day or afternoon. In some of the schools, the SHEP assistants would assist with the recruitment of parents by asking parents they knew if they would be happy to partake in the research. The sample of parents interviewed included mothers (n=11), fathers (n=2), a grandmother and a grandfather, supporting diversity in the sample.

	Number of Interviews	Number of Participants	Parent Role
Hazelwood Primary	3	4	Mothers (n=4)
Willowhill Primary	4	4	Mothers (n=3) Father (n=1)
Ashberry Primary	2	4	Mother (n=1) Father (n=1) Grandmother (n=1) Grandfather (n=1)
Ferntree Primary	3	3	Mothers (n=3)

Table 5: Parent/ Career Interviews: Completed Interviews (n= 12)

Prior to the SHEP data collection days, schools were sent paper copies of study information sheets [Appendix 7] and consent forms for redistribution to parents. However, no parent consent forms [Appendix 8] were signed prior to data collection and therefore each parent received an information sheet and a consent form to participate in the research which they read and signed before the interviews were conducted. Moreover, as SHEP staff would sometimes support the recruitment of parents it was essential that parents understood this research was independent from the WLGA and that the information they shared would not be shared with the school or the WLGA. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim at a later date.

The interviews focused on the everyday experiences of parents in the school environment, whether this was their relationships with the school and school staff, parental involvement opportunities at the school or the facilitators or barriers to parents' involvement in the school. Moreover, additional questions focused on parental engagement with learning within the home and the facilitators and barriers to this engagement. A section of the interview guide focused on their involvement at the SHEP and investigated whether the programme had the potential to impact longer term school-family relationships. As noted earlier, this section of the interviews

was key as it supported uncovering what aspects of the data were specific to SHEP and what data had broader applicability. Investigating the family unit, the broader structural conditions and the ways in which they interacted with one another, and the school was fundamental in providing an understanding of mechanisms which support and hinder parental involvement and engagement in education and learning.

5.5.6 Semi-Structured Interviews with Children

The semi-structured interviews with children were more participatory and creative in their nature than the school staff and parent interviews. Participatory methods were seen as favourable as previous research has indicated engagement in activities allows children to express themselves more freely through non-verbal modes (Clark et al., 2014) although the drawing acted as a support to the child's narrative dialogue. Often research with children can treat children as passive respondents and adult-framed questions can pose challenges for children as well miss key things that matter to children (Kleine et al., 2016). However, children are viewed as experts in their own lives and these interviews intended to support children to express their perspectives and views. The interview comprised of three activities, two drawing activities and a timeline activity which encouraged students to become constructors of knowledge and meaning in the interviews (Kleine et al., 2016).

The methods, activities and questions asked were generally broad in their nature in a conscious effort to avoid cultural, racial, gender, religious or sexuality biases (Brady and Graham, 2019). For example, questions would not directly ask children about their family composition or how poverty may affect their daily lives and school lives, but these topics were explored discreetly. Prior to SHEP, child consent forms (for parents to sign) [Appendix 9] and research information sheets were sent to the school for the redistribution to the parents of the children who were attending SHEP. Some of the schools collected the signed consent forms prior to the arranged data collection however some parents read and signed the consent forms on the day of data collection. If parents had agreed for their child to participate in the research the child would be asked to participate in the research and given a child-friendly information sheet [Appendix 10] and assent form to sign [Appendix 11]. A total of 16 children participated in 12 interviews with 9 of the children interviewed being girls and 7 of the children interviewed being boys [Tables 5].

	Number of Interviews	Number of Participants	Gender

Hazelwood Primary	4	7	Girls (n=2), Boys (n=5)
Willowhill Primary	3	3	Girls (n=2) Boys (n=1)
Ashberry Primary	2	3	Girls (n=2) Boys (n=1)
Ferntree Primary	3	3	Girls (n=3)

Table 6: Child Interviews: Completed Interviews (n= 12)

The first activity asked children to draw 'people, places, activities or things' that were important in their world [see Figure 1 and 2]. A picture of a globe was placed centrally on an A3 sheet of paper and children were asked to draw or write around the globe. After attending a Research with Children training course and University College London, I developed the three activities used in this research. Whilst this activity was shaped by the training course, I made a conscious decision to place a globe instead of a house at the centre of the paper. This decision was made as children's households and family composition can vary and I wanted the activity to be inclusive and framed in a sensitive manner in an attempt to avoid children feeling any form of embarrassment about their home life or family composition (Brady and Graham, 2019). This activity was placed first as it was seen as an icebreaker which was aimed to put the child at ease and establish a sense of rapport (Brady and Graham, 2019).

Figure 1: My World Activity Example 1 (Identifiable information has been redacted)
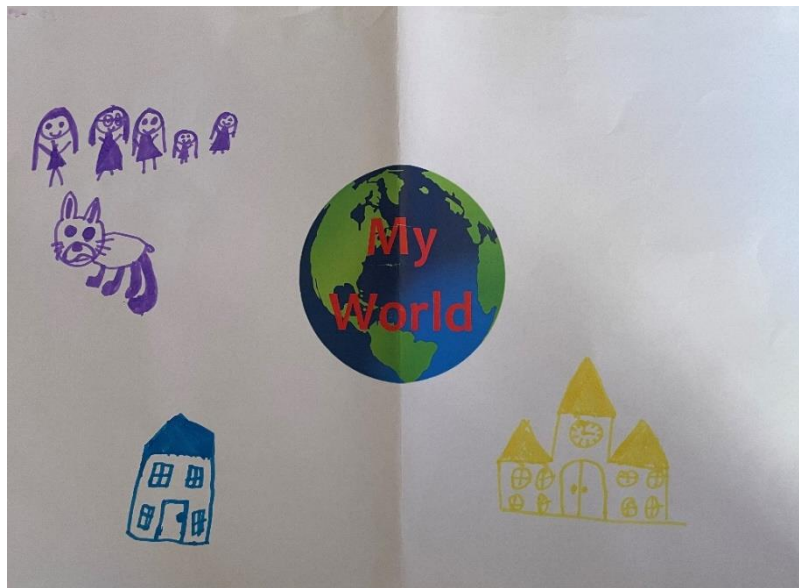
Figure 2: My World Activity Example 2

The second activity involved children placing stickers on a timeline to illustrate how their typical school day would go, alongside verbally explaining their typical day. This timeline/ storyboard approach saw the researcher create the stickers chosen by the participants in line with the research interests but supported the participants to fill in the story and helped to elicit personal narratives (Brady and Graham, 2019). The final activity asked children to think about their parents' involvement with the school, and asked children to draw or write the events, activities or reasons why their parents would come to the school. For example, an individual parental chat with a member of school staff or to attend a sport day.
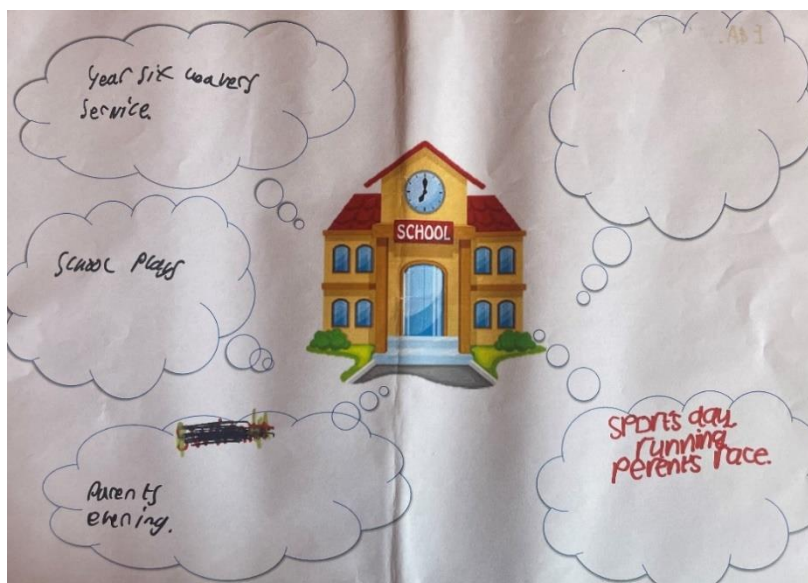
Figure 3: Parental Involvement and Engagement Activity Example 1
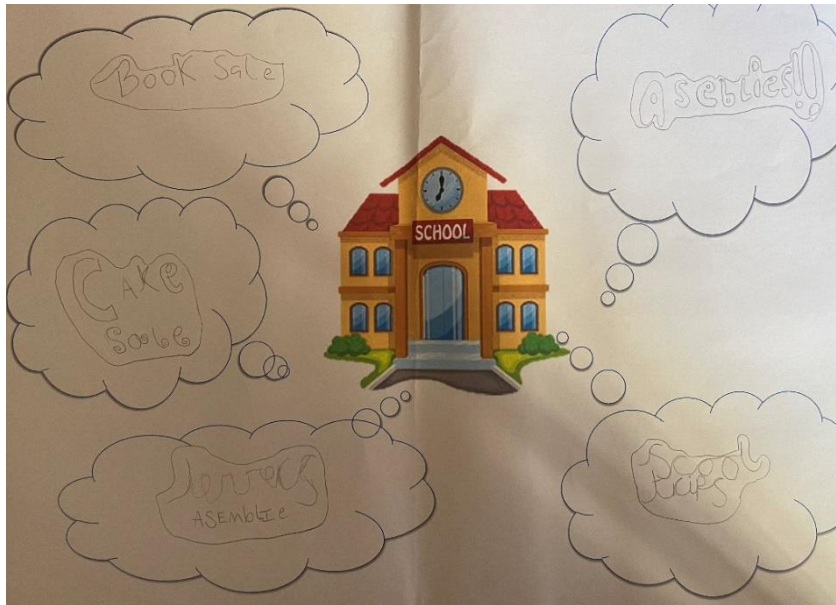
Figure 4: Parental Involvement and Engagement Activity Example 1

The final task was less participatory in the sense of drawing and creating a visual than the previous tasks as although children were asked to write or draw their responses, the majority of children choose to solely respond verbally to the questioning. However, as figures 3 and 4 show some children opted to write their responses in the sheets provided. Children opting to verbalise their answers was not a sign of children not participating in the activity but rather children responding in a way that made sense to them. Nonetheless, asking participants to discuss visual images they have created is commonplace in social science, and the narrative and visual data produced by the children supported the narrative of the image maker (the children) to be communicated (Mannay, 2016).

Whilst research has indicted that some children and young people may find creative participating methods patronising or strange (Clark et al., 2014), the prior piloting indicated that the creative methods seemed appropriate for the age range of children interviewed in this research. The interviews were audio recorded and the drawings from activity 1 and activity 3 as well as photographs of the timelines created in activity 2 were collated. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim at a later date and the children's visual creations were used to support the analysis of the narrative recordings. For example, when the transcriptions were analysed in NVivo the visual creations were examined alongside the narrative to illicit understanding. Whilst this did not arise as a problem during data collection, there were no alternative data collection tools designed if a child was unable to engage in the drawing activities (e.g if they did not have the necessary fine motor skills). In the future, I would engage with school staff prior to data

collection to discuss inclusivity of research methods, with the aim of co-producing materials with school staff and children to ensure engagement from children with neurodevelopmental or other difficulties.

As Table 7 shows children produced pictures and/or timelines at all of the schools. The differences in the numbers of children participating in each activity can be attributed to the allocated time to do the activities, children's interest or limited interest in certain activities or children verbalising their thoughts rather than creating a picture. The challenges to engaging children in the research will be discussed further below in the reflexivity section.

Schools	Number of Interviews	Number of Children	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Total Number of Pictures or Timelines Created
Hazelwood	4	7	7	7	1	**15**
Ashberry	2	3	2	1	1	**4**
Ferntree	3	3	2	2	3	**7**
Willowhill	3	3	3	3	3	**9**

Table 7: Pictures/ Timelines Created by Children by School

5.5.7 Follow-Up Interviews

The initial aim of the follow-up interviews was to explore any changes in home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools or parental engagement with learning since the SHEP. However, the COVID-19 pandemic slightly altered the focus of the interviews to examine how school closures and the impacts of the pandemic affected home-school relationships, involvement and engagement and the consequences of this on children's educational and health outcomes. A subsequent interview guide was created [Appendix 12] which focused on the same points of interest as in the initial interview, to analyse if there were changes in parents' involvement or engagement over time. But also, the interview guide asked questions around the impacts of the pandemic and school closures on families living in poverty and their parental involvement with school, their engagement with learning and their children's education.

Prior to the first round of interviews being conducted, school staff and parents were asked if they would be happy to partake in follow-up interviews at a later date in May and June of 2020. Several school staff (n=6) and parents (n=3) provided telephone numbers and email details for follow up interviews. These participants were contacted for a follow-up interview in late April 2020 and 5 school staff members from 3 schools (Ferntree Primary, Hazelwood Primary and Willowhill Primary) agreed to participate in the research. There was not representation from one

school, as one school declined to participate in the follow-up interviews noting personal and school-level challenges as a result of the pandemic and no parents responded to the follow up interview invitations.

Due to the restraints of the pandemic, interviews could not be conducted in face-to-face format and therefore participants were asked if they would rather be interviewed via Microsoft Teams or the telephone. The change in the format of the interviews required an amendment to the previously approved Cardiff University ethics application (SREC/3208), and this amendment was considered and approved in April 2020. All participants opted to be interviewed over the telephone and the interviews were conducted at a date that was convenient for the participant. After initial contact was made, all participants were emailed a study information sheet and consent form which was signed and returned via email prior to the telephone interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before the data were anonymised and input into NVivo.

5.6 Qualitative Data Analysis

For the qualitative analysis, framework analysis a method which sits within a broad family of analysis methods often termed thematic analysis (Gale et al., 2013) was used. Framework analysis supports the researcher to systematically work through raw data to draw out concepts that explain and enhance understandings of social behaviour (Furber, 2010). Framework analysis adopts a structured and rigorous approach to analysis whereby a 5-stage analysis process is adopted. Following a review of key literature on framework analysis (Furber, 2010; Gale et al., 2013; Ritchie and Lewis, 2005; Srivastava and Thomson, 2009) a qualitative data analysis plan was developed which clearly outlined [Appendix 13].

Table 8 shows the number of audio recorded minutes and number of transcribed words from the data collected. The first round of data collection accounts for the majority of data collected and is from children, parents and school staff whereas the second round is only from school staff. The parent data accounted for the largest proportion of data, followed by the child data and school staff data in relation to both minutes recorded and words transcribed.

School		Child Data		Parent Data		School Staff Data		School Staff Follow Up Data	
		Minutes	Words	Minutes	Words	Minutes	Words	Minutes	Words
Hazelwood	1	26.59	3,214	25.23	4,472	24.42	4,930	29.47	5,372
	2	18.25	1,858	12.51	2,586			24.31	4,239
	3	21.48	3,372	22.18	4,149				

		Min	Words	Min	Words	Min	Words	Min	Words
	4	24.39	3,496						
	Total	**91.51**	**11,940**	**60.32**	**11,207**	**24.42**	**4,930**	**49.18**	**9,611**
Ashberry	1	25.24	4,446	45.24	5,991	39.05	6,128		
	2	8.32	1,272	24.19	5,141				
	Total	**33.56**	**5,718**	**69.43**	**11,132**	**39.05**	**6,128**		
Ferntree	1	20.09	2,731	13.34	2,084	28.30	5,542	26.36	3,925
	2	20.16	2,863	20.54	3,023	16.20	2,374		
	3	27.44	3,620	28.22	4,769				
	Total	**68.09**	**9,214**	**62.50**	**9,876**	**44.50**	**7,916**	**26.36**	**3,925**
Willowhill	1	25.47	3,287	13.13	2,404	16.14	3,024	24.58	3,474
	2	11.17	1,625	27.25	5,016	15.15	2,912	23.05	6,049
	3	22.02	3,790	29.23	6,205				
	4			29.18	6,250				
	Total	**59.06**	**8,702**	**99.19**	**19,875**	**31.29**	**5,936**	**48.03**	**9,523**
Totals		**253.02**	**35,574**	**292.24**	**52,090**	**140.06**	**24,910**	**123.57**	**23,059**

Key: Minutes= Audio Recorded Minutes, Words= Number of Transcribed Words

Table 8: Generated Interview Data Table by School and Stakeholder Group

Before the interview and observation data were input into NVivo, the data were transcribed and anonymised, and any identifiable data were removed such as school names, individual names and geographical locations. This stage was completed alongside the familiarisation stage which involved immersion into the data. This process involved highlighting areas of text of interest and the scribbling down of ideas. Once the familiarisation stage was complete, the data were input into NVivo for continuation of analysis and case nodes were created, and case attributes were assigned to each individual transcript. For example, this included interview type, role in school, carer or parent role or gender of interviewee. The pre-defined research questions and the familiarisation stage helped to develop a working analytical framework and nodes were pre-defined before the data were indexed.

This analytical framework provided a guide for the indexing process as nodes, child nodes or grandparent nodes were applied to certain sections or lines of data to describe what had been interpreted. For example, one node was parental involvement with schools and child nodes included type of activity/ event, facilitators to parental involvement and barriers to parental involvement with schools. At the indexing stage although nodes were pre-defined there was the ability to add nodes, child nodes or grandparent nodes which emerged throughout the process. Nodes were refined at this stage if there were vast amounts of data under one singular node. Once indexing was complete the data were summarised into thematic charts and reduced into manageable sections which involved striking a balance between reducing data and keeping the feel of the interviewees' words and meaning. NVivo produced a framework matrix and sub-

populations within the data were analysed. The final stage of the process involved mapping and interpreting the data by reviewing the matrix and checking the original data files to ensure context had not been lost.

The follow-up interviews were also anonymised, transcribed and analysed using framework analysis. The same analytical framework was used to analyse the follow-up data although additional nodes were added to the framework when new themes or ideas were identified. The follow-up data were analysed separately from the initial data collected and the findings are presented in an individual chapter. This decision was made as the data were collected at different time points and it is likely that the thoughts and opinions of those interviewed may have changed over time as well as they may have had different experiences of school, relationships, involvement and engagement since the first time point. Nevertheless, attention has been drawn to themes that were identified across both timepoints in the data and the data from the initial and follow-up interviews were triangulated to inform the discussion.

The richness of the data allowed for connections and relationships between the interviewees to be analysed and therefore provided explanations for the emergence of phenomena and supported the identification of demi-regularities in the data. Whilst analysis of parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning are complex due to the interactions between structural and individual conditions, mechanisms which support positive outcomes (parental involvement and engagement) within the context of the school setting can be identified.

5.7 Quantitative Secondary Analysis of Routine Data

Re-analysis of large-scale data sets is common within health and social sciences due to the method's overall efficiency (Cheng and Phillips, 2014). One of the main benefits of secondary data analysis is the ability to analyse large-scale data which would otherwise be a challenge for a singular researcher to collect and analyse in a time effective manner (Davis-Kean and Jager, 2017). For the purpose of this research secondary data analysis was used to provide context of the participating schools' socio-economic composition. Secondary data analysis can help to provide an understanding of context, and in relation to student achievement, parental involvement and parental engagement secondary data analysis can provide a greater understanding of a school's context and the broader socio-political context which inevitably affect all children's outcomes (Davis-Kean and Jager, 2017).

All SHEP schools involved in the programme were matched with non-SHEP schools within a similar geographical area and with similar FSM entitlement. This allowed for comparisons of SHEP and non SHEP schools' socio-economic composition and children's educational outcomes which provided context to why schools may have chosen to implement the programme as well as provided further understanding of the school's level of deprivation or affluence in relation to the national picture.

School-level FSM entitlement data and education outcomes were requested from the Welsh Government via Stats Wales. The data were readily available online (www.mylocalschool.gov.wales) and therefore no data access agreement was required. However, due to the time-consuming nature of collating the data, Stats Wales were able to collate and provide the data in a single spreadsheet for analysis. Once the data were received from Stats Wales they were input into SPSS, a statistical software programme, where quantitative analysis of the data was conducted. Descriptive statistics were calculated which included a mean of educational outcomes and school-level FSM entitlement for SHEP, non- SHEP schools and national averages over time were analysed and compared.

5.7.1 Quantitative Measures

5.7.1.1 Free School Meal Entitlement

In the education sector, SES is often defined and measured as the percentage of students within a school who are eligible for FSM (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013). FSM's are available to children from families who receive other qualifying benefits and who have been deemed to meet the criteria outlined in the registration process (Perry, 2010; Department for Work and Pensions, 2013). As noted above, the FSM entitlement data were accessed from the Welsh Government via Stats Wales. The FSM entitlement data is a 3-year rolling average of students entitled to FSM's at each school. Data were provided for each school from the 2015/16 year when the programme was first implemented to the 2018/19 year when the data were collected for this thesis. The 3-year rolling national average of FSM entitlement for each year from 2015/16 to 2018/19 was also analysed to provide a comparison.

5.7.1.2 Educational Outcomes

The 'my local school' website also provides official educational attainment data for all state secondary, middle and primary schools in Wales. The Welsh government publish this data in the public domain, and data is free to access under an open government licence. Educational outcomes were measured through the percentage of students within a school who have reached

the government expected national level at Key Stage 2 as this was the age range of pupils engaging in the research. The expected standard for Key Stage 2 (7-11 years old) children to reach is Level 4.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in line with the Economic and Social Research Council's core research principles and ethical approval was obtained from Cardiff University's School of Social Science Research Ethics (SREC/3208) in March 2019. A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check was undertaken by the researcher in January 2019. Once initial contact was made with the participating schools, the head teacher at each school received the information sheet and study contract which was signed and returned indicating the school agreed to participate in the study.

Prior to the data collection sessions, schools were sent physical copies of consent forms and information sheets for redistribution to parents and children attending the programme. Nonetheless, at the data collection sessions all participants were provided with information sheets informing them of the purpose of the research and the research procedures to further ensure the participants had received, read and understood the information. This included informing participants of the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any point in time before, during or after the data collection as well as explaining how the data would be stored and used. Participants were also informed that the interviews were confidential, and the data would be anonymised using pseudonyms for the school, names of people and places. Data was stored in a locked cupboard within the university building and electronic non-anonymised data were password protected in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

Written informed consent was obtained for all interviewees (school staff, parents and children). For the child interviews a three-tier consent procedure was adopted as consent was obtained from a member of senior management at the school (for the school to participate in the research), the parent of the child interviewed, and assent was obtained from the child participating in the research. For the first round of data collection, all data were obtained using a face-to-face format however the follow-up interviews were conducted over the telephone due to the constraints of the pandemic. In this research opt-in informed written consent was obtained to evidence participants' freely given choice to participate in the research. Although opt-out consent typically yields higher participation levels and research has indicated that parents from a lower-socioeconomic backgrounds may be less likely to opt their child into research (Lacy et al., 2012), an opt-in procedure was deemed most appropriate for this research due to its sensitive nature. As school staff, children and parents were active participants in the SHEP this meant

there was relatively straightforward access to families which reduced some of the challenges of accessing and recruiting children and parents from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds.

In terms of potential harms of participating in the research, the risk of harm was low although some of the topics discussed included mental health and wellbeing and the impacts of poverty on everyday lives. Nevertheless, the consent procedures informed the participants of the voluntary nature of their participation and their ability to withdraw from the research at any time point limited this harm. Moreover, safeguarding procedures were in place and supervisors would have been informed of concerns if they arose in line with university safeguarding procedures. If initial concerns were of concerns to the supervision team, then the participating school's safeguarding officer would be informed, and Cardiff University Safeguarding Policy followed. In relation to researcher safety and harm reduction, supervisors were informed of all travel arrangements prior to data collection and Cardiff University 'Lone Working Policy was adhered to. This included ensuring personal contact details and emergency contact details were provided to supervisors and regular check-ins were held.

5.9 Researcher Position

Positionality both describes "an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (Darwin Holmes, 2020;1). In terms of the ontological position adopted, critical realists accept that there is an objective reality and that much of reality exists and operates independently of our awareness of it (Archer et al., 2016). Critical realists acknowledge that our knowledge of the world is shaped by who we are and what we do to acquire our understandings and therefore the accounts we produced are historically, socially and culturally situated and can be fallible (Archer et al., 2016). Very little research within the social sciences is value-free and therefore a reflexive approach is necessary throughout the research process (Darwin Holmes, 2020). Reflexivity is the active acknowledgement by the researcher that their researcher position effects the research process and outcomes (Stronach et al., 2007). Reflexivity informs positionality as through this reflexivity process researchers acknowledge and disclose themselves in the research process and consider how social values and personal integrity influence the research process (Darwin Holmes, 2020). Strategies for enhancing reflexivity include the researcher locating themselves about that subject, understanding how participants may view the researcher and understanding how the researcher may impact the creation of knowledge based on personal experiences, biases and beliefs (Berger, 2015; Darwin Holmes, 2020).

In terms of the semi-structured qualitative interviews reflexivity can pose an issue as the research questions asked are informed by a theoretical standpoint and reflect what is seen as important to the researcher although follow-up questions can allow for the researcher to follow what is important to the participant. Moreover, there are power dynamics present when interviewing which can contribute towards social desirability from the participants. For example, as the interviews were conducted on the school grounds at the SHEP, school staff promoted the holiday club and its benefits as if they believed the information would be fed back to the WLGA. Nevertheless, to mitigate social desirability, rapport was established through informal conversations prior to the interviews and participants were informed in the information sheets and verbally that the research was independent of the Welsh Government and that all responses would be confidential. Power dynamics were also present in the child interviews and there could have been the issue of social desirability however the creative and open-ended nature of the tasks supported children to lead the discussion. In the parent interviews, rapport was developed from the researcher's presence at the holiday club over a couple of days and there was a less apparent power dynamic issue in these interviews.

For this next section I will discuss 'my' position as a researcher and therefore I will write in first person. I am a 28-year-old woman with no children, and this could have impacted the participants perceptions of myself and affected the extent to which rapport could be developed. However, good communication skills and levels of empathy from being a child who experienced deprivation and adverse childhood experiences supported me to understand family's experiences. Moreover, these experiences could have contributed to the development of rapport and prior understandings of what the families may be experiencing enhanced my ability to ask questions in a sensitive manner and avoided the researcher adopting a patronising stance.

I have limited experience directly working with children and this could have posed a challenge. However, prior school-based data collection and the piloting of interviews with children increased my confidence to engage with children, particularly as the methods were seen as effective in the piloting. Although none of the participating schools were Welsh speaking, I am not a Welsh speaker which could have hindered the development of rapport due participants viewing me as an outsider. Nonetheless, to mitigate this challenge I conversed and engaged with the participants prior to the interviews and demonstrated knowledge of the local areas and the Welsh education system.

5.10 Reflexivity

As Table 8 shows, for the child data the number of recorded minutes and words transcribed was similar to the parent data and higher than the school staff data. Moreover, in terms of the number of completed interviews (Tables 4, 5 and 6) there were 12 interviews conducted with children, 12 with parents and 4 with school staff, showing there were not challenges with access to children at the schools participating in this research, and good recruitment of children to the research. However, there were some limitations to the data generation process and in particular the data generation process with children. Whilst the SHEP acted as a vehicle to access families, the holiday club provided children with fun, enriching activities throughout the day and asking children to participate in the research meant their removal from the activities. When first asked children were typically excited to participate in the research, and this excitement remained when going through the information sheet and asking them to sign the assent form.

Children were happy to participate in the interviews activities however often their interest in the activities would decline as time went on. The children were pulled out of activities that were enriching and fun to participate in this research, and whilst there was initial excitement to participate in the research there were instances were children would ask how much longer the research was going to take. As the researcher taking them away from the fun activities, I felt it was unfair to expect the children to participate in the research for a long period of time and would often try to get through the activities as quickly as possible. Moreover, during the activities children would often go off on a tangent when speaking and it was difficult to steer the conversation back to the interview activity. I was grateful for the children's participation in the research and didn't want to come across as an authority figure telling them to do a task as I wanted it to be a safe and open environment. Therefore, when a child would go off topic and not discuss a topic related to the research aims and questions I would let them speak about whatever they wanted to. Whilst the research aimed to foreground the perspective of children these limitations could have contributed to why there is limited accounts from children in the empirical chapters. In hindsight I could have guided the conversations which went off on a tangent back to the focus of research quicker to utilise the short time I had the children's attention.

The interviews with the adult participants generated some rich data which directly aligned with the research aims and questions. The participants seemed interested in the research and were happy to engage with the research. In particular, the parents were very forthcoming in sharing their experiences with the school but also their personal and homelife circumstances. Parent's discussed sensitive and taboo topics such as personal finances, mental health and wellbeing and self-harm. My position as a researcher did not seem to deter the parents from discussing these

sensitive topics with me. Similar to the children, parents could often go off on a tangent in the interviews but this was not to the same extent as the children, and it was easier to guide the conservations basic to the focus of the research.

The school staff interviews supported understanding of parent-school relationship and how and to what extent the schools' involved parents within the school and their perceptions of parents engaging with their children's learning. The first round of data was collected at the holiday clubs and interviews were conducted either before the holiday club opened or after the holiday club had finished for the day. Interestingly, head teachers were less critical of the school and parents in conversations than other staff members were. There were instances where the head teachers would try to sell their school, highlight areas of good practice and did not initially consider areas where the school could improve their current practices. However, probing in the interview supported participants to consider areas where the school may not be so strong, and be honest and sometimes critical of their practices. Moreover, the gathering of multiple perspectives in the research supported understanding parental involvement and parental engagement to a greater extent as the research will capture stakeholders' different views and experiences of that phenomena (Vogl et al., 2019).

There were evident limitations to data generation, particularly the generation of child data. This section supports understandings to why there is limited evidence of children's voice in the empirical chapters. Accessing children in the school term or trying different creative methods may have supported the generation of child data which was aligned more closely with the research question and aims. The limitations of the research are discussed in further detail in Section 3.10 Reflections on Theoretical Approach.

5.11 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach adopted in the research. This has included outlining how the SHEP was used as a case study and how the schools as well as the individual participants were recruited for the research. The data collection methods and the data analysis procedure have also been outlined in detail. The ethical considerations have been discussed thoroughly and there is clear consideration of the researcher's position. The primarily qualitative methods supplemented by secondary data analysis of school-level educational outcomes and school socioeconomic composition has supported understandings of parental involvement in schools and parental engagement in learning in school in deprived areas in Wales.

6. Parental Involvement with Schools and Understanding the Cultivation of Family-School Relationships

6.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this chapter is to explore parental involvement with schools and the cultivation of family-school relationships. Throughout the chapter there is discussion around, and a recognition of, the effects of poverty on children and families' daily lives as well as the existence of inequalities within education and society. The chapter will contribute to understanding the following research questions:

1) What methods are schools adopting to involve and engage parents in schooling and learning?

2) What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in children's schooling and parental engagement with children's learning in areas of deprivation?

3) How do children, parents and school staff in deprived areas describe their interactions and relationships with one another?

4) To what extent can home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning reduce socioeconomic inequalities in wellbeing and educational outcomes?

The chapter will begin by presenting the parental involvement formality and engagement typology developed in this thesis [Figure 5] before discussing how a socioecological approach can help to understand school and community relationships. Subsequently, the chapter will provide an insight into schools' open-door policies, the impact of family-school tenure on relationships and the potential role support staff can play in cultural brokerage. The findings from each of the case study schools have been amalgamated as there was consistency of findings across schools and pseudonyms have been given to each school to conceal their identity [see Table 3]. Nevertheless, any marginal differences amongst schools and participants have been highlighted in the findings.

6.1.1 The Influence of Parental Involvement Theory on Research Findings

The findings have been organised in accordance with theory which indicates that parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning are different theoretical concepts which run along a continuum (Goodall, 2018a, 2018b; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2012). Parent involvement sees agency as remaining with the school who remain in control of the flow of the information whereas parental engagement sees parents holding the agency and taking some form of ownership over their child's learning (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). It was evident in the findings that there is a certain overlap between the concepts as school-based parental involvement opportunities can involve learning which can be extended to practices within the home. Parental involvement has been recognised as a continual process and therefore a school can find themselves at several points along the continuum at any one singular point in time (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). This theory and the concepts of parental involvement and parental engagement have been fundamental throughout the research process informing the designed interview schedules, the collection of data and the identification of themes within the analysis.

School children, parents, and school staff listed a range of family involvement and engagement activities including assemblies, sports days, plays, parents' evenings and fundraising events [see Table 9]. The school event or activity that was mentioned the most frequently across the interviews and by the most number of participants was the SHEP followed by seasonal events such as a Christmas Fayre. The most frequent activity or event differed when adult and child data was compared. Both parents and school staff mentioned SHEP the most, however children noted sports day most frequently followed by parents evening. Whilst Table 9 does not illustrate the extent to which an event or activity was discussed within an interview, it further supports understanding of how frequently activities/ events were discussed.

Parental Involvement Event or Activity	Child Interviews	Parent Interviews	Staff Interviews	Totals
	Number of interviews where activity/ event is mentioned (number of participants who note activity/ event)	Number of interviews where activity/ event is mentioned (number of participants who note activity/ event)	Number of interviews where activity/ event is mentioned (number of participants who note activity/ event)	
School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)	2 (3)	10 (11)	4 (8)	16 (22)
Seasonal Events (Easter, Christmas, Valentines, Summer Festival)	4 (5)	5 (5)	4 (4)	13 (14)
Sports Day	6 (8)	2 (2)	2 (2)	10 (12)
Schools Plays or Shows	4 (6)	4 (4)	4 (4)	8 (14)
Parent Teacher's Association/ Parent Board	0	5 (6)	3 (3)	8 (9)
Parents' Evening	5 (7)	1 (1)	0	6 (8)
School- Parent Meetings	3 (3)	2 (2)	1 (1)	6 (6)
School Assemblies	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)	4 (4)
Fundraising Events	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)	4 (4)
After School Clubs	2 (2)	2 (2)	0	4 (4)
Parties	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	4 (4)
Leavers Service	3 (3)	1 (1)	0	4 (4)
School Trips	1 (1)	2 (2)	0	3 (3)
Formal Parent Course	0	2 (2)	1 (1)	3 (3)
Inset Days	0	1 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)
Totals	34 (42)	40 (42)	25 (30)	99 (114)

Table 9: List of Parental Involvement Events of Activities

Parental involvement events can be seen to have differing degrees of formality and offer differing levels of engagement. Prior research has highlighted that parents are often invited to schooling activities or events however these events often present limited opportunities for parents to meaningful participate, with participation often being token or indirect (Torres and Simovska, 2017). A parental involvement and engagement formality typology was created to help understand the formality of parental-involvement events and the extent to which parents can participate in these events.
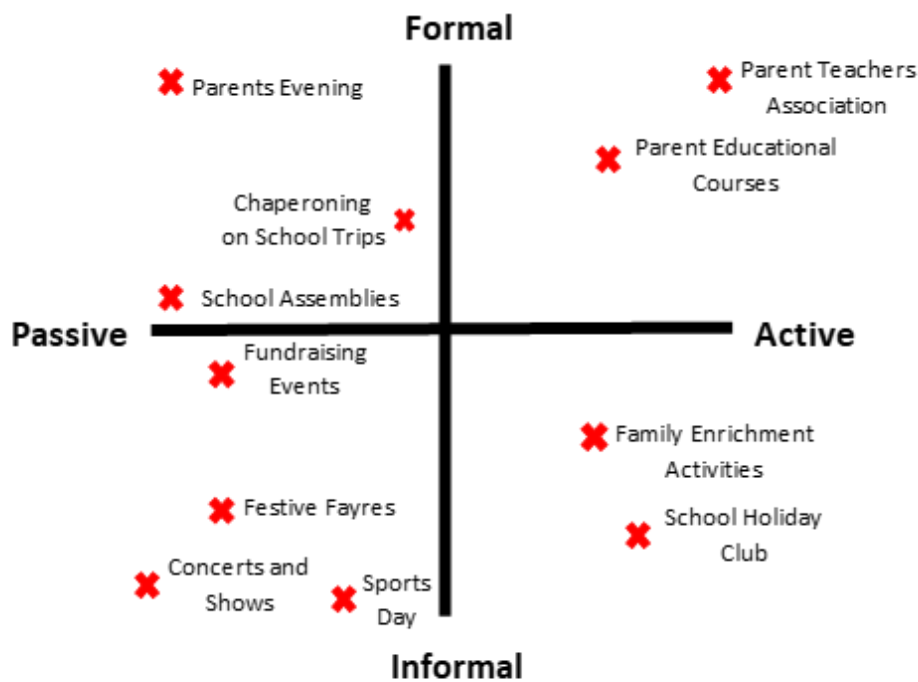
Figure 5: Parental Involvement and Engagement Formality Typology

The typology builds upon Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) model for the progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with learning. Within this typology, passive involvement is viewed as involvement that does not actively involve the parent within schooling or their child's learning but simply involves their attendance within the school building or playground. Whereas active engagement involves parents actively engaging in the schooling environment or their child's learning. At the furthest point along the X axis [see Figure 5] parents and schools engage in a two-way dialogue to support one another in supporting the learning of the child (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). For example, the parental involvement and engagement formality typology illustrates that the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) is viewed as a formal event where there can be two-way dialogue between families and the schools to support the learning of children in general. Whereas a concert or play was regarded as a

parental involvement event which is relatively informal in its nature but requires little to no parental engagement. The parent events and activities listed by participants have been mapped onto the typology in accordance with their formality level (Y axis) and involvement/ engagement level (X Axis).

In line with previous parental involvement and parental engagement continuums and typologies, parental involvement events can change position within the typology dependent on their formality and involvement/engagement level. The interview data contributed to the mapping of the events within the typology however placement of each event could vary by school, as schools will frame events differently dependent on local and schooling context. As evident in the typology above, parental involvement events are typically regarded as having limited engagement elements as schools are often seen to adopt tokenistic approaches. The purpose of these events inevitably effects their formality and opportunities for parents to participate. The previously listed events and activities were discussed by the participants and the perceived purpose of these varied amongst participants. Nevertheless, three main purposes were suggested: psycho-social benefits for children and parents, the dissemination of educational information and the provision of opportunities and the creation of memories for families and the establishment. These three main purposes were seen to support the fostering of school-home relationships, as the activities and events provided communication and relationship development opportunities and therefore fostering relationships was not developed as an individual theme. The purposes of these parental involvement events and activities will be discussed in detail further throughout the chapter.

6.2 School, Family and Community Relationships Acknowledgement of The Socioecological Approach

Socioecological theories argue that child development and outcomes are influenced by parent-school relationships and connectedness (mesosytem), community-based resources (exosystem) and national policy (macrosystem) (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). Findings from observational fieldnotes highlighted that three of the case study schools had a nursey or an external local authority organisation such as a Flying Start unit or an Integrated Family Centre on the school grounds. These organisations were seen to initiate or support family-school relationships as well as develop family-community relationships. Flying Start units and programmes such as the Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) which are universal multicomponent family-focused localised interventions on school grounds have been reported to have a range of physical health and mental health and wellbeing benefits. Family, school and community interaction as well as family's access to community resources such as Flying Start or The Integrated Family Centre can

positively impact child development, relationship building and in turn, education and health outcomes.

School staff reported that the inclusion of a nursery for early years children on the school site was beneficial for the development of long-term family-school relationships. A school staff member expressed how an onsite nursery assisted with the cultivation of school-family relationships.

> **School Staff 23:** In nursery we do a thing called special days so every child will have the opportunity to present something about their lives with their parents and their family members there as well, so that's a really good way to build relationships so in nursery the team are fantastic at building those really early relationships and then we try to continue as much as we can throughout the school.

This positive perception of an onsite nursery was supported further by a parent who saw the beneficial nature of open days at nursery, as they allowed parents to begin the process of involving themselves in the schooling environment at the very beginning of their child's educational journey. Parents also discussed how they perceived the school and the community to have good relationships as the school often involved community organisations or businesses in school activities or events. Parents saw these partnerships to be beneficial, as both schools and the community formed alliances to work together with the aim of achieving certain goals such as; libraries and schools collaborating to set children reading challenges. Parents listed numerous different school-community collaborations including children visiting local care homes, children visiting the library and families fundraising for the school by packing bags at local supermarkets. Several of these activities included the involvement of parents meaning school, family and community collaboration and provide examples of positive interaction at many levels of the socioecological model. These school-level efforts to connect school, families and communities can be seen to encourage links and integration within the community which could in turn further support positive relationship building and child development.

6.3 School's Open- Door Policies

Parents and school staff from all four schools discussed positive school-family relationships and referred to open-door policies whereby schools offered parents access to the school, opportunities for participation in school life and chances for their voices to be heard. Open-door policies and the ability of parents to reach and access school staff, in particular senior

leaders, on a daily basis has been highlighted as key in the facilitation of home-school communication (Campbell, 2011). An Estyn (2009) report on parental involvement in primary schools in Wales suggested that open door policies varied considerably across schools however the purpose of these approaches were to ensure families felt welcome within the school environment. Findings from this study showed that schools recognised the importance of open-door policies and saw that the presence of staff in the playground and the availability of staff in relation to formal matters were fundamental in this approach. These two approaches are arguably polarised but complement one another, as they offer parents both informal and formal ways to communicate with the school.

Positive family-school relationships are key to the improvement of child outcomes and support greater equity in schools and in the education system (Ishimaru et al., 2016). In general, children and parents reported positive relationships between themselves and their schools. Communication was seen as fundamental in the development of positive relationships and informal communication on a daily basis was seen as valuable in providing opportunities for the development of trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). Day-to-day exchanges which often occur in the playground were recognised by both parents and staff as an opportunity for parents to offload any required information.

> **School Staff 23:** My staff are always on the yard first thing in the morning always in the yard, after school and it is kind of making those doors open.
>
> **School Staff 1:** Were always at the door, always at the door, there always.
> **School Staff 3:** There's numerous bodies on the door.
> **School Staff 1:** Yeah, every day we take the children out so the parents can speak to us and tell us.
> **Interviewer:** As in at the end of the school day?
> **School Staff 1:** And at the beginning, there is always staff on every door that the children leave and enter through just so if there is anything that they want to pass on or anything there is staff there.

Findings suggested the concept of the schools' open-door policies was very literal, and school staff perceived that the opening of their doors at the beginning or the end of the school day was a promotion of an open-door policy. Moreover, all three interviewed head teachers emphasised that themselves or members of the school senior leadership team (SLT) were typically available

for parents to speak to at short notice, further supporting an effective open-door policy. Some parents recognised schools' open-door policies claiming schools were open, honest, trustworthy and judgement free as well as confirming a head teacher or a member of SLT was available if required. One parent expressed how they felt respected by the school and the open-door nature of the school meant they could be open and honest about their problems without feeling judgement.

> **Parent 13:** Well I feel, I feel like I am being respected really and you know if I've got an issue or anything I know I can ring or say 'excuse me', the reception is by there, if I've got something on my mind 'oh can I have a', never turn me away and that's to other parents to, never turn us away, if you need to have a chat their door is always open no matter what you can always go in for a chat, they are not gonna judge you or if you are having a bad day, they are there to help at the end of the day and they make that quite clear.

A mixture of high staff profile in the playground, informal day-to-day social exchanges and formal meetings with senior members of staff arguably contributes towards effective open-door policies. Nevertheless, this willingness of parents to communicate with schools in such an open and honest manner is dependent upon family-school relationships and the establishment of trust. Relationship building was commonly viewed by school staff and parents as a task which schools were responsible for, with the perception of how well this was achieved being placed on the school's shoulders. For example, a support member of staff believed their school did very little to involve parents in the school or to build strong family-school relationships stating this was an area where improvements could be made.

The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) was provided as an example of how parents could attempt to build relationships with the school and with other parents. However, only a handful of the parents referenced the PTA and those that did reference the PTA had little knowledge of, or involvement with the association. There was an apparent disconnect between some parents and the PTA, with parents claiming they did not know what the purpose of the PTA was or stating that they gloss over the PTA section in the newsletter as they do not view it as important. There was also the perception that the PTA was not for parents like 'them' as parents claimed the parents involved in the association were stuck up or 'clique-y'. This idea that the PTA was only for certain types of parents was also highlighted by one grandparent who was heavily

involved in the PTA. When the grandparent was asked about if parents come along to the holiday programme, the grandparent went on to say:

> **Grandparent 3:** Yes they do come, Monday there were a few parents in here then helping out, when, the problem is I suppose with the PTA when we ask for volunteers is, you might not get the person who you want, you have got to be careful, you have got a good PTA and the chairman, I am the dogs body and I have all these women surrounding me and I do what I am told so we don't want to get away from that.
> **Interviewer:** When you say be careful what do you mean?
> **Grandparent 3:** Well you don't want a parent coming along that can only see their child that is not the aim of the game... there is no one special... we are lucky on the PTA we have got a food friendly group, we go for volunteers... you have got to pick on the PTA side, the school is open to anyone but on the PTA, not that we turn people away, but we look for like-minded people.

This statement by the PTA member suggests that whilst the PTA portrays open access to all parents, there may not be a acceptance into the PTA by PTA members if the parent is not viewed by the PTA members to be like-minded. This contributes towards other findings which suggest that the PTA can be viewed as cliquey and that not all parents identify with the parents who are involved in the association. Unlike daily communication in the playground, which is seen as open and informal, school bodies such as the PTA are much more formal and closed (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). As shown earlier in the parental involvement and engagement typology, the PTA is a relatively formal parental involvement activity which could be viewed as overwhelming and intimidating for some parents. These findings parallel research which suggests that working-class students feel less able to contribute to classroom discussions and have lower levels of participation in democratic processes such as the school council (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019). The formality of these activities could contribute towards lower levels of involvement from working-class students and parents as they these students and parents may feel intimidated and fearful about expressing their opinions within such a formal environment.

Furthermore, when discussing school-family relationship building and school conflict, parents tended to negatively discuss 'other' parents viewing these parents through a deficit lens. Whilst parents within the study claimed they had established relatively positive relationships with the school they felt this was not necessarily the case for 'other' parents. One parent stated that

positive and negative relationships were 50:50, indicating that half of the parents at their school are actively building relationships with the school and the other half of parents drop their children at the door and do not attempt to involve themselves in the school. There was a recognition that negative school-family relationships exist, and parents stated issues could often arise between parents and their respective schools although they believed these issues were resolved quickly. One parent perceived that parent-school conflict was the result of schools and parents not working together to resolve an issue.

> **Parent 14:** You get some parents that think they are the big I am sort of thing and you do it my way or, and I think it's a no no, you do get a lot of parents round this way and I am saying this way cause I'm from [Local Area 18], and you see it day in and day out when you take your children, so I think it's generally if it doesn't go some parents' way they are not happy but it's not generally the school fault it's just that they wouldn't want to work with them to get to the right situation.

The statement supports the view that parents often harbour negative views of 'other' parents as they place the blame for lack of communication and resolution on the parent's reaction to the situation. Arguably, there was a breakdown of communication between the parties and a conflict between the school and home culture. However, the parent perceives 'other' parents as the problem and alludes to a stigmatisation of parents in the local area, stating it is the parents within the area that often do not work with the schools and not vice versa.

Day-to-day social exchanges and informal opportunities for communication have been highlighted as key in the cultivation of positive school-family relations and the maintenance of effective open-door policies. Findings suggested that schools can provide quick conflict resolution through opportunities to discuss school or family related problems or issues with head teachers or members of SLT. However, there is a harbouring of negative perceptions of parents which is likely to cause stigmatisation and deflect from attempts to build strong positive family-school relationships. A common theme reoccurring in the findings is that there is limited input from parents in relation to how they see relationships could be developed, or how they would wish to be involved in their children's schooling or learning. For improvements in home-school relationships, further insight is required from parents on how to move towards more of a two-way dialogue between parents and schools.

6.4 Family-School Tenure and Support with Adverse Family Experiences

There was a perception amongst parents that support staff were best equipped to deal with problematic situations as they often had time, capacity within their workload and a developed rapport with students. Whilst teachers are generally teaching 25-30 students at a time, support staff were viewed as having the capacity to spend one-on-one time with students whether this was wellbeing related or behaviour related. One parent raised concerns over a school decision to allow 'naughty children' to bring a certain toy into school to keep them occupied during lesson hours. Although the introduction of support staff within the classrooms was seen to ease problems that arose.

> **Parent 14:** It was a major issue throughout the parents cause home time we all discuss it and we all got our own opinions so it was getting a major issue but I think they stamped down on it in the more in the last couple of months cause they got TA's in there and they can deal with the children cause they're based with them then and the teacher can take the class off into class and teach while they are dealing with the children that have issues then.

There was also evidence that support staff have the capacity to support parents with their mental health and wellbeing, offering a form of pastoral care. Literature suggests that often support staff and pastoral teams have greater knowledge of the assets and challenges faced by children and their families (Littlecott et al., 2018a). Findings from this research showed that reception or office staff were often the first point of call for families, whether this was support staff directly offering support to families or redirecting families to staff members who could offer formal support. One parent discussed experiencing difficulties within the home and explained how the school has taken time to understand the challenges being experienced and offered a form of emotional and social support.

> **Parent 13:** They've gone above and beyond because some days I've been late because I've been up with my daughter has to go to hospital with her so when I come in they're not having a go because Child 82's and Child 79's late, they literally know I've come out, that's how I am, they always interact with the baby, I've gone in they've given me a cup of tea and a shoulder to cry on, they're not just teachers some of them are friends to me.

This concept of 'friends' highlighted the strength of the established parent-school relationship and indicated a high level of trust. The established relationship between the parent and school has led to the parent disclosing personal information and seeking support from the school, illustrating how the school provided a supportive environment and even a support network for the parent. This sense of the school acting as a support network for parents was also apparent within observational field notes. During the summer holiday programme, a parent seeking cancer treatment found support and comfort in the school canteen and was seen to communicate with the school caterer over a cup of tea. The parent did not join in with the parental involvement afternoon at the holiday club but sat within the school canteen talking with the catering staff and watching her child from afar.

This familiarity with staff and the school environment was seen as key in the maintenance of relationships and the building of trust between the school and families. Many parents noted that they have had a long-term relationship with the school as their other children have attended the same school previously. This sense of familiarity with school staff and the school environment was seen to positively influence school-home relationships and parents believed it allowed for the school to get to know their children, themselves, and their family's circumstances.

> **Parent 7:** The school have watched them all grown up… I've literally got a good relationship with the school, any problems or anything they are always there just to have a chat, basically I have been going through a rough time at the moment, my older daughter umm she is suffering from severe bullying, so she is self-harming, and the school has been completely brilliant to me.

> **Parent 1:** I've had no problems with any teacher from when he started in nursey to now he is going into year two, and know his teacher that's in year two, umm they've also been very open very easy to talk to, never had any problems even when my other children were here as well, my other two children came to this school as well, so obviously the teachers in the school teach those two as well, so they've always been open and very easy to talk to.

Family-school tenure was seen to positively impact the development of relationships and created a sense of familiarity for parents which could potentially mean parents felt more comfortable in the schooling environment in comparison with parents who are new to the environment. In this instance, the acknowledgement of family difficulties or challenges by schools illustrates an openness to communicate and an environment which is free of judgement. Research argues that

"trust is forged in daily social exchanges" (Bryk and Schneider, 2002;136) and not necessarily in the events that the school hold, although these events can pose other positives. Schools that demonstrate open-school policies and informal opportunities for parents to off load information and communicate can establish a level of social trust among school staff and parents (Bryk and Schneider, 2003). Notwithstanding the discontinuities between school and families, interactions that focus on the promotion of a child's education or wellbeing can strengthen relational trust as the understanding of an interdependence is acknowledged and commitment to a child's outcomes is arguably enhanced (Bryk and Schneider, 2003).

The families stated facing a range of adverse or challenging experiences in their daily lives including, mental health difficulties, bereavement, physical, psychological and emotional distress, siblings in care as well as living with a disabled family member. Child involvement in school-based programmes such as the holiday club have been shown to improve children's connectedness with schools, and act as a protective factor for children falling out of education and into risk (Leat and Thomas, 2018). Ungar's (2011) Social Ecological Theory posits that engagement in any realm such as the education realm will influence engagement in others such as the home. The Social Ecological Theory can be utilised to understand resilience and individual's ability to endure and overcome hardship and difficulties experienced. Ungar (2011;32) argues that resilience is "dependent on the capacity of the individual's physical and social ecology to potentiate positive development under stress than the capacity of individuals to exercise personal agency during their recovery from risk exposure". Resilience depends on the interaction at all levels of the socio ecological system including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Paquette and Ryan, 2001; Ungar, 2011). Whilst resilience considers the capacity of an individual to engage in processes and opportunities which demonstrate resilience, resources provided by external agencies such as the government or schools need to be available and culturally meaningful for those they intend to engage. Arguably, school-level understandings of the personal circumstances of families can support the development of culturally meaningful and appropriate support and resources for families.

6.5 Cultural Brokerage

Research focused on the relationship between child wellbeing and child-school relationships has tended to see 'school staff' as solely teachers ignoring the importance of support roles within the school (Littlecott et al., 2018a; Van Petegem et al., 2008). Support staff are seen to bridge the gap

between the school and families as support-staff often play a negotiating role between the school culture and the family or community culture (McCann and Neville, 2013). Findings showed the establishment and maintenance of school-family relationships were fundamental and as discussed above the daily social exchanges as a result of open-door policies and the availability of staff. One school staff member also suggested that parents may have preference in who they speak with, whether this be a teacher or support member of staff.

> **School Staff 1:** There is always staff on every door that the children leave and enter through so if there is anything that they want to pass on or anything there is staff there… it's normally the child's the class that the teachers at... or their TA whoever they feel more comfortable with.

Familiarity with classroom teachers or support members of staff was important in relation to who parents felt most comfortable and at ease communicating with. Support staff mentioned that some parents knew them from outside in the community and this put parents at ease when communicating. There is often a power imbalance and a social class imbalance between teaching staff and parents which may not necessarily be apparent between support staff and parents. Therefore, the perception of a more equal relationship between parents and support staff could result in parents feeling more comfortable communicating with support staff. One member of support staff argued that when approached about their children, parents could be quite defensive however due to their background and connections to the local area parents were willing to communicate with them. Moreover, one parent positively viewed seeing school staff within the local community, and school staff's acknowledgements of children outside of school ground was appreciated by families.

> **School Staff 22:** I'm lucky because I am from the area umm massive… when I sat down and talked with them the other day, I also explained I was a parent here once, so I get it both sides, so relax, we are here to have a good time.

> **Parent 4:** They say hi miss whoever it is and it's nice that the teachers still outside of school they acknowledge that the children are there they don't just I've had in the past where some teachers will just walk past.

The presence of staff within the local community seemed to create a sense of relatability between school staff and parents which could positively impact the development of positive relationships.

The role that the support staff plays in the example above is potentially a brokerage role between the school and families whereby they are using their personal circumstances and prior experiences to build relationships and build a bridge across the divide (Leat and Thomas, 2018). A handful of staff (n=3) explicitly stated how they lived in the local community and one member of staff recognised the benefits this could have on relationship building. This cultural brokerage role is critical in bridging the racial, cultural, linguistic, and power difficulties often experienced between schools and families (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Support staff can arguably contribute to the creation of an environment where families feel safe and comfortable and can attempt to decode the dominant school culture to families within the local area (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Martinez-Cosio and Iannacne, 2007).

In the excerpt above, there was a form of trust developed between the support member of staff and parent which was built on a sense of familiarity and similarity. The support member of staff and the parent are seen to relate to one another and the power imbalance between schooling professionals and parents which can be present is arguably broken down. Nonetheless, the observational field notes noted that familiarity between a parent and a school staff member at the holiday club caused an uncomfortable situation when a problem arose. Whilst attending a parental involvement afternoon a parent was unhappy with how a member of staff spoke to their child however did not want the SHEP co-ordinator to discuss the problem with the member of staff as the parent knew them personally and felt it could damage their relationship outside of the school.

The support staffs cultural broker role is complex and can encompass a wide range of activities including the dissemination and decoding of school messages to families. Support staff from three of the four schools mentioned ways in which they attempt to transmit school knowledge and information to parents in an alternative manner. A support member of staff stated that some parents may have challenges interpreting information they receive from the school and therefore they have implemented a strategy which aims to overcome these challenges and avoid embarrassment.

> **School Staff 3:** Parents will actually come and say read me what this says, once you know you can pre-empt that and says there's a letter here about such in such and such, so everybody hears and nobody is aware of who that person is that can't read a note…cause

the last thing we want to do is humiliate anyone and make them feel any worse then what they possibly already do.

In addition, there was a recognition that a parent of a certain child was not attending any school events which was causing the child great distress. The child and their family had recently moved to the UK and English was their second language meaning school- family communication was often challenging. Nevertheless, the member of support staff indicated they would give the letter to the parent personally pointing out where they had highlighted the date and time of the upcoming school event. These findings suggest that support staff feel a sense of responsibility in supporting the dissemination of information, parents' involvement in school life and the creation of an environment where parents feel comfortable.

Interestingly, two grandparents who were members of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) identified themselves as cultural brokers and described themselves as playing a role between the school and children. The grandparents were heavily involved in the school, volunteering at the school throughout the school year as well as being leading members in the PTA. They regarded themselves as 'furniture' in the school as they have been involved in the school for a long period of time and did not see themselves giving up this role once their grandchild leaves. They believed their role could bridge gaps between children and the school as well as parents and the school:

> **Grandparent 4:** I'm not an authority, not a teacher, so I am an in-between, a go between… We involve them (parents) in, before we become, fair, fun days, Christmas fair days had started to dwindle but with the PTA that brings the parents in and we try to involve them as much as we can.

However, PTA's was not seen as an effective tool for communication nor relationship building by some parents, with 3 parents having no knowledge of the PTA and 1 additional parent knowing little about what the PTA involved, suggesting the PTA does not effectively broker the school-family gap. Furthermore, findings in this study support prior research which indicates that cultural brokerage is often one-directional. Cultural brokering implies a two-way meditation between cultures however in reality the cultural brokering is often one-directional and sees the dominant culture and their expectations being transmitted to the more marginalised culture (Ishimaru et al., 2016). This was evident in findings as the transmission of culture and information was often one-directional, with cultural brokers failing to transmit information or practices from families to schools or school staff (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

As previously discussed, the participants highlighted 3 main perceived purposes of parental involvement with schools; psycho-social outcomes, dissemination of educational information and the creation of memories. These will now be individually discussed in detail.

6.6 Parent Involvement and Psycho- Social Outcomes

The growth in a child's confidence was highlighted as one of the main benefits of parent involvement within schools. Parents expressed that their involvement in schooling allowed children to show their parents what they have been doing in school, giving parents an opportunity to praise their child's work and therefore encourage their child to continue working at the same level. When children receive praise, which they believe is accurate for what they have achieved, this can contribute towards higher academic achievement and better psychological health (Lee et al., 2017). Findings suggested that parents' involvement in schooling activities provided children with a confidence boost and acted as a form of positive reinforcement.

> **Parent 1:** I think it's just quite nice, the child is so made up they can't wait to show their parents what they've done that they've done that themselves you know and it build their confidence it does.

> **Parent 14:** You see when the parents come in here for an hour now 1 day a week (SHEP) they are like 'hiya, hiya', even my daughter 'are you staying now' yeah love, I'm staying now, I'll stay until you go swimming, yeah it does encourage them it gives them that bit of oh yeah my mum is here today, even if grandma is here or step-dad it is that bit of encouragement yeah they are interested, they don't mind coming in it is good morale for the children as well.

Parents recognised that their attendance at schooling events could provide children with a confidence boost as parental involvement was viewed as a signal to the children that their parents were interested in their schooling lives. This interest and involvement in their children's day-to-day schooling was seen to act as a form of encouragement to children and was noted to be particularly important for those children that may have lower confidence levels. In addition, one parent expressed the opinion that parents' attendance at schooling events demonstrated to children and school staff that they were supporting their child's schooling.

> **Parent 7:** Yeah, cause I think if you are coming down here (SHEP) you get to know the teachers more… it is just going to be easier to talk to them then if you have an issue, but

I think maybe the teachers will look better upon the parents as well cause they're trying, they are trying to give something to the school as well.

The parent perceived that schools look more favourably upon parents that try to involve themselves within their child's schooling. Parental responsibility and parental determinism have been reoccurring themes in political rhetoric and arguably have affected societal perceptions of the extent to which parents should be involved in their children's education. This finding suggests that parents who participate in schooling events or activities are viewed more positively by other parents whereas there can be unjust stigmatisation placed on parents who do not participate, which is also evident throughout this chapter and across other empirical chapters.

Moreover, children themselves stated feeling positive emotions when their parents participated in schooling events or activities. Children expressed feelings of happiness and pride when their parents attended school events and activities, with one child seeing that parental involvement with schools signified support from their parents.

Child 82: It makes me feel happy… I know that she is supporting me and watching me.

However, observational fieldnotes highlighted that parental involvement events and activities could have adverse effects on child wellbeing. The observation data noted that at several of the summer holiday clubs, children would become visibly upset if their parent or guardian was unable to attend the parental involvement afternoon. Whilst children expressed feelings of happiness when their parents attended parental involvement events at the school it is likely that children can experience negative feelings if their parent or guardian is unable to attend a schooling event.

In addition to positive psycho-social outcomes for children, parental involvement with school events was seen to positively affect parents' psycho-social outcomes. Parents and school staff recognised that often parents may be experiencing loneliness, poor mental health or low levels of confidence which can inhibit their participation in schooling events. However, one parent expressed that once the initial fear of involvement was overcome, they felt more comfortable within the schooling environment and able to make parent-friends at the school.

Parent 12: As a first-time parent I remember feeling very nervous going to the school, you've got all these different people and I'm a very shy and inward person so I wouldn't really talk to anyone, but now I have a lovely circle of friends just through meeting through the parents.

6.7 Parental Involvement as a means to Disseminate Educational Information

The dissemination of educational information was seen to be offered on an individual basis, with information being distributed in both formal and informal manners, via specific formal whole-school parents' evenings or via informal conversations. One parent described a disconnect between themselves and the school, stating that the dissemination of educational information provided them with an insight into what and how their child is doing at school as this was often unknown. These opportunities and events allowed parents to hear about their children's educational position, whether this was their academic progress, achievements or deficiencies.

In relation to the child interviews, there was a recognition of parents' evenings as a parental involvement event and a consensus around what the purpose of these events were. However, only one parent discussed parents' evening in relation to parental involvement and school staff did not mention parents' evening as a parental involvement event at their schools. The child interviews highlighted how children considered 'parents' evenings' or 'parent days' as opportunities for the school to inform parents about their progress and the standard of their work:

> **Child 3:** the teachers tells your parents whether you've been a really high standard of work or it needs to go up, or below average.
>
> **Interviewer**: And what do they say when they come in to look at your books?
>
> **Child 56**: That I'm really good.
> **Interviewer**: And why do you think that they come in?
> **Child 56**: So that they can see our progress.
> **Interviewer**: So, they can see you progress and how does that make you feel?
> **Child 56**: And make sure that we aren't plagiarising others.

The children recognised that there was a 'standard' they should be achieving and indicated that they have some understanding of school scoring or ratings systems. Children highlighted areas where they felt they excelled, and areas where they may be struggling, claiming to be 'good' or

'not very good' at certain subjects or tasks. The perception of how well a child is believed to be doing academically, was often associated with their feelings towards parents' evenings. There were polarised feelings of fear and nervousness and feelings of happiness and excitement over parents' evening. One child expressed negative feelings towards parents' evening explaining a fear of parents stating they should have done better. Whereas more positive feelings towards parents' evening were associated with children knowing they typically receive positive feedback from school.

> **Child 16:** If it's a good reason I am proud but if it isn't then I just go hide.
> **Interviewer**: On the whiteboards, and how does it make you feel (parents attending parents' evening?)
> **Child 9:** Scared but excited.
> **Interviewer**: Why does it make you feel scared?
> **Child 9**: Hmm because just in case mum or dad says hmm like that's bad work cause you should do more better.

Parents' evening can create a sense of fear amongst some children and whilst some children report positive feelings in relation to parents' evening, these types of events could be seen to have positive or negative psychological implications. Whilst parents' evening can be a positive experience for some children it can have damaging effects for those children who feel they receive unfair negative feedback from teaching professionals. Negative feedback could not only effect mental health and wellbeing but have negative implications on children's aspirations as well as contribute towards a negative self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968).

Parents did not discuss parents' evening to the same extent as children, with only one parent recognising this as a parental involvement event. One parent stated that the school did regular parents' evenings but generally they received educational information related to their child through informal conversations with staff or through one-to-one meetings. These one-to-one meetings were mentioned by numerous parents from different schools and typically involved discussing a topic or a task which their child may be struggling with. The conversations were led by a member of school staff and parents were not seen to offer much input or insight. Parents from two schools respectively explained how the school had suggested they increased reading and learning of timetables within the home but failed to offer further guidance. Both parents stated they were facilitating this learning within the home and when requesting specific tasks for the child they were not offered much detailed guidance.

Parent 7: We got told that Child 41 was struggling with his reading, and they did help with sending books home and when he gets his tests and stuff like that, they let us know how well he has done.

Interviewer: Did they inform you of ways in which you could potentially help?

Parent 7: Umm not so much no.

Parent 1: We went through a bit of a stage in his second term where he was finding it, he was struggling a little bit in class so his teacher asked to speak to me and said he was struggling with language and his marks and we are going to lower him a group just to give him a little bit more confidence, he can do it once he knows set and he is quite happy that he knows he can do it we can move him up them and then he knows then it's not a big deal and its it yeah.

Interviewer: So, did they offer you any like forms of like any ways that you could potentially help him?

Parent 1: Yeah well, I always do things at home with him anyway and that's what I said.

As previously stated, there is limited evidence to suggest that the schools provided parents with meaningful engagement activities in relation to their child's educational progression or outcomes, which supports previous research suggesting that families' participation in school activities is typically token or indirect (Torres and Simovska, 2017). These conversations as well as formal events such as parents' evenings can arguably undermine parents' efforts to support their children's learning at home. Whilst these school-led conversations and events are intended to inform parents of how their child is doing academically, the one-way dialogue led by the school does not allow parents the opportunity to offer insight into their child's learning from their perspective. These conversations instead involve the school informing the parents of areas where the child is struggling and where the school feel parents could facilitate their child's learning at home to a greater extent. This assumption that greater work is needed to be undertaken within the home could arguably undermine parents' efforts to engage in their children's learning as there is a perception by the school that the support offered by parents at home is either inadequate or non-existent [See Section 7.4. Parental Engagement with Learning: School Staff Perspectives].

Nonetheless, several parents discussed how one staff member had previously run parent courses, arts and crafts sessions and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training for parents at the school. These events were not simply aimed at engaging parents in their children's learning and

education but also provided educational opportunities for parents. A parent noted that when their older children had attended the school, the school offered an English, Maths and Science course which enabled parents to learn how to assist their children's learning at home and offered parents a chance to achieve a formal qualification. The parent explained how they left school with no qualifications but the qualifications she gained from the school provided course supported them to follow a certain career path.

In relation to a school CPR training course, one parent stated how they were the only parent to attend the training which was laid on by The British Heart Foundation (BHF) at no cost. The parent explained how the school had previously run a similar course at a small cost to parents and this was also only attended by a few parents. From the parent's perspective, they saw the limited involvement from parents was not a reflection of the school not involving parents but suggested it is the parents not wanting to get involved.

> **Parent 8:** The BHF did it and I was the only one who turned up because previous years, me and a couple of parents we all paid £15 to do a St John's Ambulance one, and we all turned up for that because we paid. But when it was free, and they put it on it was literally me and School Staff 20 [laughter]. So, we were laying down doing the first aid like roll them over and things but honestly it is pretty bad, that is down to the parents not getting involved and not wanting to do it because it's not cheap and you can't blame the school, they think one parent turns up why should we put them on, so I think it's a bit naughty.

Whilst the parent saw limited involvement in the course as a negative reflection upon parents; schools often fail to consider parents perspectives of what, when and how schools decide upon courses and events. Schools often fail to receive parental input on courses that parents themselves would like to receive, and therefore school-led courses may not be seen as appropriate or beneficial for parents to attend which could contribute to lower levels of attendance.

Moreover, some school-led events can often be stigmatising and suggest parents may be experiencing some form of deficit which they will overcome by attending such events. For example, English or Maths lessons aimed at parents could make parents feel the school are assuming they are deficient in Maths or English and therefore need further support in this area. However, parents typically were receptive to events laid on at the school and although there was a lower attendance at the second CRP event this was not a common finding. Parents and school

staff both expressed how school events were generally well attended by parents and therefore it could suggest that the formality of courses for parents are likely to be intimidating or threatening to parents (Campbell, 2011).

6.8 Providing Opportunities and Creating Memories for Families Living in Poverty

Three of the four case study schools noted that one purpose of school events was to provide opportunities for the children to partake in activities they otherwise might not, and for families to create happy memories with one another. The school staff recognised the importance of providing family involvement opportunities, particularly for those living in poverty. These events were seen to create a fun environment where memories could be made through activities which families may otherwise not have the means to participate in. The holiday club was highlighted as a unique opportunity for families to experience new things and create memories, although this was regarded as one of the key purposes of all school-family events.

> **School Staff 3:** The biggest thing for me is that they have something really positive to do in the holidays… a lot of our children don't get the opportunity to visits or trips, so for them they've got an opportunity to try out new things, an experiences, an opportunity to make memories during the summer holidays and have a summer holiday to really you know enjoy.

> **School Staff 4:** Right, I make sure that the school for the child is a fun place to be… those events are the memory makers and I want the children to remember their school days so they are not going to remember some of their lessons in English and Maths but they will remember those events and I want them to be happy memories.

The events were seen to not just be memory makers for children but for whole families. School events offered families at one school an opportunity to spend quality time with one another away from the distractions they face at home. Research has indicated that those parents who are considered underserved are more likely to engage in fun activities which do not directly relate to their children's education as they view the task as non-threatening (Campbell, 2011). This was apparent within the findings as fun, whole-family schooling events were typically well attended but more formal events such as courses or meetings were less well attended. Another member of staff supported this view by claiming there is limited parental involvement in formal schooling activities within the classroom setting. This apparent limited involvement in formal events has

contributed to a shift in the focus of family involvement events, with a reduction in formality and a greater focus on fun for all the family.

One member of staff explained how their school aimed for school events to strike a balance between being fun and memorable and creating relationships between the school, families, and the community. The creation of memories and the strengthening of school-family relationships were also seen as important by many parents. There was an understanding that if parents involved themselves in school events, they were more likely to form attachments with the school and more likely to be involve themselves in their children's education.

In relation to memory making, a handful of parents noted that there were school events which offered opportunities for families to create memories both neurologically and materially. These family-based activities provided parents with opportunities to meaningfully engage with their children's school and learning outside of the home as well as allowing them to try new experiences and create memories.

> **Parent 4:** Me and my partner have just done an arts and crafts course with them…
> It brings the children in as well, the children get to join us and learn what different materials you can use to make different things, my kids absolutely loved it because now at home they've got little memories we made, and then the lady went back and turned them into something we could keep at home, so it's a keep sake, and its really nice, the kids are absolutely loving it.

The parent above expresses enjoyment from the art and crafts course; however, this was arguably not a parental 'course' but more a family enrichment activity. Research indicates that children living in poverty often have unequal access to and limited participation in enrichment programmes and activities (Stewart et al., 2018). However, the availability of enrichment activities to families on the school grounds provided opportunities for families to relish new experiences, strengthen school-parent ties and create memories which they otherwise may not have. Typically, research which focuses on school enrichment activities tends to focus upon child involvement and the impact enrichment activities can have on children. However, this research offers insight into the inclusion of the whole family in school involvement events and therefore provides a greater understanding of the perceived benefits of whole-family involvement in school-based events and activities.

6.9 Challenges to Parental Involvement with Schools

The reasons for why parents may not choose to attend a school event or may not feel able to participate in school events were discussed in detail by parents. The parents interviewed could be viewed as those who involve themselves in school events as they attended SHEP and agreed to participate in this research, and this could have contributed towards discussions of why 'other' parents may not involve themselves in school events and activities. There was a sense of stigma placed on parents who do not attend schooling events with the interviewed parents and school staff seeing parents through a deficit lens. Nevertheless, it could be argued that parents may be deflecting from their personal experiences and discussing 'other' parents as they may find it emotionally difficult to discuss direct experiences. Third-person talk can provide individuals with a psychological distance from direct experiences but allows them to discuss experiences or challenges they may personally be facing (Moser et al., 2017).

The findings indicated there was a clear distinction established between legitimate reasons to not attend a school event and illegitimate reasons to not attend a school event. For example, work commitments were regarded as a legitimate reason to not attend an event, but most the other listed reasons were regarded as illegitimate.

> **Parent 7:** I think its two separate things. I think work is the main thing, I've been in Uni for three years so that's been easier but when I was working that was a lot harder, umm and you have got some parents that can't be bothered.

> **Parent 14:** I think some parents, the majority of them are working but I think some of them really can't be bothered they drop their kids to school and they are like ta ra, we will see you 3 o'clock and I just generally think they can't be bothered,

There was a perception amongst parents that 'other' parents cannot be bothered to attend schooling events and one parent explained how they believed general parent involvement in schooling has decreased since their first child attended the school and that parents now cannot be bothered. Some parents expressed that once parents drop their children off at school, they see the responsibility of their child as passed over to the school, and they view the time their child is in school as their own time. The negative perception of 'other' parents expressed by the interviewed parents falls in line with research that tends to place blame for lack of involvement in education on families living in poverty (Doyle and Keane, 2019; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Spencer

et al., 2018). Unlike existing research, these findings offer insights into parental perceptions of 'other' parents' involvement in children's education and schooling.

Furthermore, this tendency to blame parents for lack of involvement in their children's education and schooling was further supported in staff interviews.

> **School Staff 3:** A lot drop the kids of and go, for the majority of the parents they just want to go.

However, some school staff recognised that often parents do not know how to involve themselves within the school and that often the community as a whole is disengaged. One staff member noted they felt the school could do more to involve parents, but parents are difficult to engage.

> **School Staff 1:** They [parents] are very much a disengaged community a lot are against the system aren't they, they haven't got the skills themselves.

As evidenced in the findings, staff and parents perceive families' disengagement in prescribed school events or activities as a cultural deficit often failing to consider a range of other factors that could affect potential parental involvement (Geller et al., 2015). There was a perception that parents have little understanding of what is happening in schools, nor feel comfortable with the schooling culture. Nevertheless, research has indicated that teaching staff often do not receive training or professional development that would counteract the deficit discourse or norms (Geller et al., 2015). The notion of the 'responsible parent' which has been become a feature of political language in recent decades has arguably been utilised as a tool by the state to place blame on and punish parents from disadvantaged backgrounds (Wyness, 2014). In this instance, there is an internalisation of the ideas of individualism and the 'responsible parents' contributing to individuals looking down on those who may be experiencing the challenges of everyday life, instead of challenging the behaviours of those within the educational setting who may have access to levers of structural change.

In addition, there was an assumption that often families may be experiencing aspects of dysfunction in their lives and within the home which could impact their involvement in their children's schooling and learning

Parent 12: Within the area… I would say it's because some parents there, I hate to say word academically inclined but some of them are not, some of these parents and children are very close in age, they have had them very very young so they are learning, so some parents are scared.

Parent 12: Some of them don't like… speaking to the teachers, there might be a threatening I'm educated and you're not kind of barrier, or they might feel intimidated or they just might not know what to say to them.

Parent 9: Hmm I think some environments in the school playground with other children can be very 'clique-y' and intimidating for parents, so if they think the minute, they walk into an event there is going to be groups of parents it might be intimidating.

Parents reported how other parents may not feel comfortable and even intimidated in the school environment with two of the parents associating parents' discomfort with parents' education level. For example, two of the parents above suggested that other parents that may have done less well in the education system may feel more intimated in the school environment. Moreover, the feelings expressed by parents raise concerns around the differences in the home and school culture, and the extent to which parents feel comfortable in the school environment. These feelings alongside the stigmatisation parents often face for not attending schooling events could negatively affect their parent role construction, as well as result in parents distancing themselves further from the schooling environment.

Whilst several of the positives of family involvement in schooling have been noted above, there are potential harmful unintended consequences of parental involvement in events and activities. Previous research has indicated that well intended public health interventions, such as the 'Food and Fun': School Holiday Enrichment Programme can cause unintended harms (Lorenc et al., 2012). Findings shows that certain parents find involvement in schooling quite challenging due to a range of reasons including work commitments, differences in home, school and community cultures, low confidence, personal issues and parents not valuing the importance of involvement in their children's schooling. One parent suggested that the school can anticipate which parents are likely to involve themselves in school related events and activities and which parents are less likely to.

Parent 1: But you will generally find, a lot of your, you generally, this is gonna, you generally know who is gonna wanna be interested in the likes of the holiday club errmm even though every child gets a letter, you generally know 9 times out of 10 who you will get back... one generally find some parents once their kids are off they don't want to be coming back out early hours to be bringing them back to school cause that their time to chill... then you've got the likes of the people that work, there obviously putting their children in different crèches and childcare which they pay for because this is still only until 1 o'clock.

The holiday club arguably does not cater to all parents' needs but the parent appears to believe there is a consistent group of parents and children which take advantage of the opportunities offered by the school. There is also the assumption that parents that are working will be seeking alternative forms of paid childcare rather than attending the holiday programme. Although a proportionate universal approach to recruitment and limited spaces at the holiday clubs would have meant that some children in need of support during the holidays were unable to attend, which could contribute towards increasing inequalities as the intended benefits of events are not being experienced universally. There is also the assumption that parents that are working will be seeking alternative forms of paid childcare rather than attending the holiday programme.

For families living in poverty the pressure of everyday life impacts all aspects of their life. For example, one parent explained how they worked 3 part-time jobs to provide for their family, explaining how they worked to live, and how they could not afford for their child to do enrichment activities during the summer holidays.

Parent 1: I mean I can't afford to be going out and forking out hundreds for him to go, cause some of these activity groups out there can be like £50 for the day and its quite a lot of money, £25 a day, it's quite, you might think its £25 pounds, but it's a lot when it is coming out, if you're working to live, that's what I do is work to live, I don't work to have extras.

Living in poverty can increase parents' stress levels, affect relationships and family dynamics as well as negatively impact mental health and emotional wellbeing (CPAG, 2017). As stated above, children living in poverty can also miss out on opportunities to participate in enrichment activities. Whilst schools seek to promote parental involvement with schools it is likely to be

compromised if parents are preoccupied with the worries of providing the basic necessities for their children.

Limited involvement by parents in their child's schooling could contribute to the exacerbation of existing inequalities in society and could be argued to be psychologically harmful for those students whose parents or family members do not attend school involvement events. Moreover, there is an assumption that the home offers children a place of safety and sanctity however this is not necessarily an accurate assumption (Hancock and Gillen, 2007; Wyness, 2014). For some children, school may be an opportunity for children to escape from the difficulties experienced within the home and the promotion of parental involvement with schools could create feelings of fear, anxiety and cause detriment to overall child wellbeing. Nevertheless, it could be argued that these unintended consequences are anticipated and foreseen by schools, but are traded-off against the intended consequences as these are likely to have greater positive impact on a larger proportion of children and therefore the potential harm caused is accepted (de Zwart, 2015).

6.10 Concluding Remarks

The chapter aimed to explore parental involvement with schools and the cultivation of family-school relationships. The variance in participants allowed for different perspectives on school-family relationships to be understood, which was fundamental in understanding cultural brokerage and school professionals' views on the challenges faced by families in their day-to-day lives. Whilst it could be argued the child interviews offered partial insights into parental involvement with schools, when triangulated with the school staff and parents interviews the data present a rounded picture of parental involvement with schools as well as participants' perceptions on the development and sustaining of home-school relationships.

School staff and parents both highlighted the benefits of open-door policies and saw that the day-to-day social exchanges that would often take place at the beginning and end of the school day were fundamental to relationship building. Whilst participants recognised that schools organised a range of events for families which varied in their formality and involvement, these events did not facilitate the cultivation of meaningful relationships in the same manner that day-to-day conversations did. For further improvements in home-school relationships greater insight is required from parents on how to move towards more of a two-way dialogue between parents and schools.

In relation to parental involvement with schools, the chapter highlighted that there were three perceived purposes of parental involvement with schools: psycho-social outcomes, dissemination

of educational information and the creation of memories. However, challenges to parental involvement with schools remains and throughout the findings there was a negative perception of parents who participants believed did not engage in their children's learning. These negative perceptions could be attributed to government policy and rhetoric which supports individualism and the idea of the 'responsible parent'. The stigma often placed on parents could arguably result in parents feeling uncomfortable within the schooling environment and reduce the extent to wish they feel comfortable engaging in their children's school and learning.

As previously stated, throughout the research process there has been consideration of the effects of poverty on families' everyday lives as the data analysed has been collected from staff, parents and children from schools in areas of deprivation in Wales. The findings highlighted that family school tenure positively affected home-school relationships and parents stated that they tended to feel more comfortable within the environment and with particular members of staff due to the time they had spent within the environment and in contact with a certain member of staff. Support staff connections with the local community and families led to participants viewing support staff as cultural brokers, who played a key role in eroding the barriers between staff and families (Markham and Aveyard, 2003). Families often discussed the struggles they faced in their daily lives and some parents noted how the school offered support to families whether this was someone to talk to or whether this was the school directing parents to support services. Whilst this chapter has focused on home-school relationships and parental involvement with schools, the next chapter will discuss parents' engagement with their child's learning within the home in line with literature which sees that parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning run along a continuum.

7. Parental Engagement with Learning within the Home

7.1 Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter considered parents involvement with school and the education system more broadly, this chapter will explore the extent to which, and the ways in which, parents from lower SES backgrounds are described as engaging in their children's learning within the home. As discussed in the literature review chapters, parental engagement with learning is seen to be socioeconomically distributed and often parents from lower SES backgrounds can be viewed through a deficit lens which suggests that their limited engagement is through choice. However, the research presented in this thesis does not adopt this view but rather highlights and considers the daily challenges, structural barriers and stigmatisation parents face in their everyday lives and within the education system.

The chapter contributes to understandings of the following research questions:

1) What methods are schools adopting to involve and engage parents in schooling and learning?

2) What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in children's schooling and parental engagement with children's learning in areas of deprivation?

3) How do children, parents and school staff in deprived areas describe their interactions and relationships with one another?

4) To what extent can home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning reduce socioeconomic inequalities in wellbeing and educational outcomes?

As noted in Chapter 6, the findings have been organised in accordance with theories that position parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning as different theoretical concepts which run along a continuum (Goodall, 2018a, 2018b; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2012). Although the concepts overlap, the primary focus of this chapter is considering the extent, and ways in which, parents engage in their children's learning from the perspective of children, school staff and parents from schools in areas of deprivation in Wales. Throughout this chapter there is consideration of how limited parental engagement can

exacerbate educational inequalities and the chapter closes with discussions around the relationship between parental engagement and educational inequalities.

Due to differences in participant perceptions of the extent to which, and how, parents are engaging in their children's learning, findings from the participant groups will be discussed separately from one another. Sections 7.2 and 7.3 will consider parent and children's perspectives on parental engagement with learning and barriers to this engagement as there was consistency across findings whereas section 7.4 and 7.5 will discuss school-staff perspectives on parental engagement with learning.

7.2 Parental Engagement with Learning at Home: Family-Level Perspectives

Out of the 12 parent interviews, 10 of the interviewed parents discussed engaging in their children's learning at home. Parents described engaging in their children's learning in a range of different ways and supporting their children at home with academic learning set by the school as well as parents engaging in more general non-school led learning activities such as playing games.

Parent 1: Errm, adding so many numbers together, those were things I did at home as well, he did it in the morning as a choose type thing, get in the shower then he comes downstairs and we do his timetables, coming down stairs and we do a timetables a table, it would be twos Monday, fives, threes on Tuesday, fives on Wednesday and that's how we did it and obviously its build his confidence up that by the end that now he has gone back to his higher group.

Parent 13: Every night we sit down, and they have homework, we read books together, go through their homework and everything.

Interviewer: And thinking about learning within the home, in what ways do you help Child 56 with learning within the home?
Parent 9: She is just a sponge, so TV programmes, interactive programmes, umm the computer, what else do we do, crafts and that lot, at the moment we are concentrating on her hand eye co-ordination, watch her throw a ball.

Interviewer: And thinking about home is there ways in which you help the girls with their learning?

Parent 14: Yeah do you know what we do, do arts and crafts and we do play games, play bingo and things like that where they have got to do the numbers and we have got the timetable chart and if they ask a question then I will say no the times tables chart is on the wall go and look for it and teaching the time, it's bad but where the play it on their computers and things like that they are learning technology.

The parental engagement activities noted by parents varied, as well as the extent to which the activity was informed by the school, and the extent to which parents participated in the learning activity. For example, arts and crafts activities or playing games were seen as parent-led activities which could involve high levels of parent engagement whereas interactive games on devices or watching television could be activities monitored by parents but did not involve their engagement as the activity could be independently undertaken by the child. As well as activities involving varying degrees of parental engagement, there was a distinction established between school informed and non-school informed engagement activities. For example, activities such as homework or practicing times tables could viewed as school informed and seen to directly impact education outcomes whereas other activities such as arts and crafts were not viewed in the same manner. Findings from the child interviews supported parental statements made in relation to parents engaging in their learning at home.

Interviewer: What homework do you get?
Child 55: Hmm probably about maths.
Interviewer: And does anyone help you with your homework?
Child 55: My mum does.
Interviewer: Your mum does and how does she help you?
Child 55: She comes up with the piece of work, she kinda helps me with the maths.

Interviewer: Spending time with Daddy, and what kinds of things do you and Daddy do?
Child 78: We play UNO

Child 82: And then, sometimes in the meetings I get some homework to do and then once I have done it my mum sees and says how much my handwriting has improved and all that.
Interviewer: And do you get help with your homework at home?

Child 82: Sometimes.

Interviewer: And who helps you?

Child 82: Sometimes my sister.

Children further reported parents engaging in their homework, supporting them with their handwriting, practicing counting and playing games with them such as UNO. Parents engagement in these activities illustrated parents' engagement in additional learning activities within the home, as the activities are arguably educational in their nature. In the child and parent data there was a differentiation established between formal learning activities directly associated with academic learning, and informal learning activities which are indirectly associated with educational outcomes, but which are educational in their nature and associated with learning more generally. The importance of these informal learning activities were noted by parents, with parents valuing the importance of informal learning activities in conjunction with formal learning activities.

> **Parent 14:** If I ask a question and they go Google it and find out and then they have got to read the paragraph and it's not just playing on the computer they are reading as well and they are playing the games, just generally life skills, it's like my daughter cooking she will cook her own food I will stand there or sit there on the breakfast bar she knows how to turn the oven on, she knows how to cook burgers as long as she is supervised she knows how to do it yeah, I am there when she's doing it but it is life skills it's not just learning your maths and being clever that way its learning life skills, like how to cook, how to make stuff, how to put ingredients together, so it is a bit all mixed in in my house, I don't sit there and say read a book and memorise it, I sort of combine it with life skills, it's great to be brainy but if you've got no life skills and don't know how to cook then I am sorry but you are failing a bit.

> **Parent 12:** It is just helping her helping to reinstall the things she has learnt at school… helping with different veg and cutting them up for different meals so she can see the benefits of it.

Parents viewed supporting and providing children with formal and informal learning activities within the home was of greater benefit to their child than solely providing their child with formal learning activities. The support of the development of life skills within the home was not seen to

undermine academic learning but rather illustrated how parents valued both forms of learning and recognised the importance of both forms of learning in their child's overall development. Literature can suggest that parents from lower SES backgrounds are less interested than middle-class parents in their children's learning (Doyle and Keane, 2019) however findings from this research suggest that parents from lower SES backgrounds are engaging in their children's learning within the home in both formal and informal manners.

The distinction highlighted in this data between parents' engagement in formal learning activities and learning activities which are not directly related to educational outcomes such as maths or English is important to discuss. Working-class families' lives are often highly localised and families' aspirations for their children are often associated with the needs of their local communities and the development of skills which are valued in their local environment (Wheeler, 2018). This consideration of both formal and informal learning by parents could be an attempt to support children to develop skills which are valued in their environments.

This distinction between parental engagement with formal and informal learning activities will be discussed further in relation to school staff's perception of parents' engagement in home learning activities [Section 7.5]. In school staff data, there was no recognition of parents engaging in informal learning activities, but rather school staff solely focused on parents' engagement in formal learning activities, suggesting school staff placed a greater value on formal learning activities. This limited recognition of the importance of informal learning activities could reflect the participating schools primary focus on their responsibility to provide formal learning opportunities. Moreover, there are complex boundary dynamics evident between schools and parents and therefore there could be limited school intrusion into informal parental engagement activities which take place within the home.

When parents and children (Child 82 above) discussed 'who' would engage in supporting children's learning within the home, it was noted that engagement in learning activities could often involve family members other than, or as well as, parents.

> **Parent 1:** I help in every way I can… and even though I work as much as I do, we all, we all muck together his older sister helps him with his reading and my husband's there to help him with sums and we do help as much as we possibly can.

>**Parent 10:** I always say at parents' evening is there anything at home I can help with, and If I don't know my partner or my parents might but sadly my partner's Dad, he passed away… we always used to ask him if we didn't know but now I suppose we can use google.

Parents noted how supporting their child's learning within the home could be a whole family effort, with different family members 'mucking' in to provide support for a child's learning. Parents reported that different family members provided support for different subject areas, and if one family member was unable to provide support on a given task then another family member would often assist. In addition, the parent below discussed how they have implemented a reading technique which their parents used with them as a child to help their own children recognise words. This cross- generational technique was also noted as being used by the grandparents, illustrating how a method for learning which is understood and valued by family members can be effective in supporting learning with the home.

>**Interviewer:** Thinking about learning at home, is there ways in which you help with the kids' learning?
>
>**Parent 4:** Yeah they love playing, reading, my mum and dad used to teach me when I was younger how to learn or memorise words if we were reading a book they used to tell me to go to a page and then go to a word on that page then split it up if I couldn't spell it, so my kids have learnt that way how to read and they absolutely enjoy it especially if they are going to Nain and Taid's[3] they are like do you wanna read with us and my mum will be like go to page 3 and look for this word and it helps them recognise what words they were.

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In some cases, engagement from extended family members was seen instead of parents' engagement whilst in other cases the family engagement was an extension or continuation of what parents were already doing. As noted earlier, findings suggested that families from poorer backgrounds often live more localised lives and therefore the role grandparents play in their grandchildren's lives could be greater than those from higher SES backgrounds. Prior research has indicated that parents from higher SES backgrounds often use their social capital to support their children's education and educational journey. However, in these findings a three-generational transmissional approach to supporting children's learning was evident, suggesting

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[3] Nain and Taid are common Welsh names for Grandmother and Grandfather.

that it is not solely parents who transmit knowledge to their children but extended family members and in particular grandparents (Mare, 2011; MØllegaard and Jæger, 2015).

7.3 Barriers to Parental Engagement with Learning: Family- Level Perspectives

The two main barriers highlighted in the parent data were parents' educational histories and home-school communication in relation to guidance on how to support children's learning within the home.

7.3.1 Parent Educational Histories

As discussed above parents were seen to use their broader social networks to support their children's learning. One of the contributing factors for this additional involvement could be parents' own educational histories acting as a barrier to parents' engagement. Parents' prior educational experiences and qualifications can affect their view of school, how they view their role as a parent and their parent self-efficacy (Auerbach, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2013). Findings highlighted that parents' prior educational experiences were seen to affect their engagement in both positive and negative ways. One parent disclosed challenges with engaging in their children's learning noting a belief that their child's spelling and reading levels were higher than their own which posed a challenge when the parent tried to help the child. The parent also disclosed having a specific learning difficulty which they believed was a contributing factor to why their child's reading level was higher than their own. Research on parenting practices and the experiences of parents with learning disabilities and difficulties indicated that parents face challenges in relation to bringing up their children including negative expectations and stereotypes of parents with learning difficulties (Norah Fry Research Centre, 2009). However, schools believing in parents' abilities, clear information and explanations, and enabling parents to overcome challenges in their lives can support parents to engage in their children's day-to-day lives and arguably their educational lives (Norah Fry Research Centre, 2009).

> **Parent 10:** We try to, I mean to be honest Child 70 probably knows more than I do, I know stuff obviously but when it comes to spelling and reading, she is pretty much, you know I try and help, in saying that, I don't mean to blow my own trumpet but she is a high level in literacy better than I am with my dyslexia.

Parent 14: Do you know what honestly I was useless at school, I was never ever there but I made sure my kids are nothing like me... the way you learn, maths these days, it's all changed since I've been in school so if they come home and ask me and I'm a bit stuck then Google comes in... so they are teaching me as I am supposed to be helping them they are teaching me then maybe I am on my phone trying to look for the answers but yeah it is totally different from when I was in school.

One parent noted how they struggled at school and that their engagement in their child's learning was a learning process for them. The parent discussed how learning techniques have changed since they were at school, and how this poses a challenge for them in supporting their child's learning. However, the parent reports using technology to support their children's learning suggesting that the process of looking for answers online was a joint learning process. Technology can be regarded as a tool to support parents accessing knowledge, and in this case, Google supported and equipped the parent to support their children's learning. Whilst the use of technology has become commonplace in society, and there are arguments to technology acting as a leveller in terms of access to knowledge there are still issues in terms of inequalities in access to digital devices.

Moreover, the parent also alludes to a negative schooling experience, as the parents declared they were 'useless' at school and stated, "I made sure my kids are nothing like me". In some circumstances negative schooling experiences can positively affect parental roles and practices (Auerbach, 2007). In this case, the parent seems to have internalised the notion that education is highly important and expresses a sense of shame in relation to their educational history. The parent's own negative educational history has arguably positively impacted their engagement in their children's learning and their view of schooling as the parent hopes their children can have more positive schooling experiences than their own.

In addition, a parent's positive educational history was seen to positively impact their parent self-efficacy. Self-efficacy informs how a parent behaves and informs whether a parent attempts a task, how much effort they put into a task and how much they persist with the tasks if challenges arise (Bandura, 1997; Harpaz and Grinshtain, 2020). Parent self-efficacy reflects parents' beliefs in their abilities to influence their children and their children's learning (Harpaz and Grinshtain, 2020) and therefore a negative self-efficacy can have negative consequences on a child's development. For example, the parent below noted how their positive schooling experience and

their partner's experience of higher education enabled both parents to support their children with their learning at home.

> **Parent 8:** We went to school, you went uni, I wouldn't say we were Einstein's but we can help the kids but I suppose with some parents they can't even do that at all.

Whilst these parents do not blame other parents for limited engagement in their children's learning, blame for limited engagement is often attributed to parents' individual characteristics. One interviewed parent presented a stigmatising view of parents who may not engage in their children's learning, suggesting that some parents may not have the capacity to support their child's learning.

> **Parent 12:** Some parents they're not I hate to say word academically inclined but some of them are not, some of these parents and children are very close in age, they have had them very very young, so they are learning, so some parents are scared, not necessarily scared that's the wrong choice of words but some parents' children overtake them intellectually.

The parent suggested that some parents may have had children at a young age which they believed meant they are still learning themselves and therefore do not have the capacity to support their child's learning. In addition, a pair of interviewed grandparents debatably placed blame for limited parental engagement in a schooling event on parents not bothering to attend.

> **Grandparent 3:** The primary school had a centenary year… they asked all the parents to participate in could they dress as in 100 years out of the entire school just Grandparent 4 and myself, Grandparent 4 as a flower lady and I had a waistcoat with a fob as you would do a 100 years ago, and the head mistress said to us if it was down to her we would be the only parents sat down and watching the play, so this is not new, they can't be bothered.

The grandparents noted that they were the only parents or grandparents to engage in the fancy-dress activity at the school which led to the grandparents suggesting that other parents could not be bothered to engage. In line with the parent involvement formality and engagement typology established in Chapter 6 [Figure 5] this parent involvement activity is viewed to require active involvement and be relatively informal in its nature. However as noted in literature, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement run along a continuum (Goodall, 2018a,

2018b; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2012) and this activity could be seen to require a degree of engagement as parents will have had to prepare outfits prior to the event and would have likely been involved in activities at the event.

The grandparents adopted a negative view of parents who did not engage in the fancy-dress element of the school event. Literature suggests there is often a binary relationship formed between what is deemed as a correct behaviour and what is deemed as an 'other' behaviour (Hughes and Mac Naughton, 2000). This binary relationship between what is perceived as normative and what is perceived nonnormative can have damaging consequences for parents who may not engage in their children's learning although often the barriers and challenges which contribute to limited engagement are not considered. Othering creates a differentiation between those who benefit from the status quo and those who are poorly served by the system although the structural conditions which affect parental engagement are often not considered (Goodall, 2019).

Whilst the grandparents place blame on 'other' parents for not participating in the school event, factors such as fear of the schooling environment or limited funds to purchase fancy-dress outfits are not considered. Many school events come at an additional cost to parents and can serve to reveal a family's poverty as some families cannot afford the additional cost of purchasing items such as costumes for a school event. The Child Poverty Action Group highlight that school events such as non- uniform days and coffee mornings for charity can require a monetary donation from families or come at an additional cost to families and this monetary element can act as a barrier to their participation (CPAG, 2022). Families' limited participation or engagement in such activities could be a rational mechanism to defend against the shame and stigma the families could face in relation to not being able to afford to participate which could in turn be interpreted by others as evidence of fecklessness. Discussions around this binary relationship and deficit approaches to parental engagement are further discussed in school staff perceptions of parental engagement with learning [Section 7.5].

7.3.2 Home-School Communication and Parental Engagement

According to the parent data, school informed home learning tasks and activities varied from school-to-school, with some schools providing reading books and/ or homework and other schools providing limited or no set home learning activities. Several parents interviewed indicated how homework is variable at their schools suggesting there was no regularity in the amount of homework set which could result in unclear expectations of what learning parents and children should be engaging with at home.

Grandparent 1: It varies, I mean sometimes they get homework don't they?

Parent 2: Yeah, and sometimes they don't.

Grandparent 1: There's nothing specific you think she has a spelling this week then it doesn't come.

Parent 13: Every night we sit down, and they have homework, we read books together, go through their homework and everything.

Nevertheless, one parent noted sitting down with their children to go through homework and reading on a nightly basis suggesting a regularity of homework and reading at their school. Data from the child interviews in relation to the distribution of homework was also limited. This limited discussion of homework in the child interviews further suggests there was inconsistencies in the amount of homework distributed to children across the participating schools. Data from some of the child interviews also supported the view that there was limited homework provided by the schools.

Interviewer: Do you get much homework at school?

Child 16: No barely any, it's mostly reading.

Interviewer: Yeah, what about reading and homework do you do any of those things?

Child 41: No.

Child 40: I don't have homework.

Interviewer: Do you get homework from school?

Child 40: Not really no.

Nonetheless, when parents indicated their children did receive homework from the school, parents noted there were challenges around how to complete the homework due to a lack communication or unclear explanations from the school to parents on the home learning activities.

Parent 10: Umm, maybe there is not enough information maybe sometimes, yeah apart from dyslexia or not having the knowledge sometimes there is just not enough information, umm so not being, so not clear so not sure what to do… and there they

might one parent saying blah blah this is what we do and then another parent saying blah blah blah this is what we do and then you are like okay which one.

Parent 7: They could if you needed a little help with your Maths be like, this is how we are teaching the kids, this is how we are doing it because you don't want them taught in two separate ways.

Blame for limited parental engagement as a result of poor communication from schools to parents on homework tasks cannot be placed on parents. Whilst teachers are viewed as professionals and are professionally trained, parents are from varied backgrounds, with different educational histories and are not trained in teaching practices. The rise of the 'responsibilisation' of parents raises concerns over the expectations placed on parents to engage in their children's learning and supports deficit approaches to parental engagement. Unclear communication and expectations were noted by parents as a barrier to their engagement in their children's learning. However, school staff from two of the participating schools noted providing parents with learning materials or establishing parent- school contracts which outlined what schools expected of parents in relation to parental engagement with learning and participation in schooling.

School Staff 14: When they are new starters, what we did last year to put in their book bag, we made the numicon set and we give them stuff to help them start learning.
School Staff 15: And a little sheet breaking it down, how we use it, why we use it.
School Staff 14: And like the reading characters, that starts them off.

School Staff 26: When the parents first come in in reception, we do sessions with them and we give them packs, give them learning materials, go through expectations with them, when new parents and children join the school, we have a meeting and outline our expectations in a home-school agreement that is signed, we always try to note learning at home.

School staff reported the provision of learning materials to parents at the beginning of a child's schooling journey as well as the outlining of the schools' expectations of parents. Although parents noted issues with the communication of home learning tasks, school staff reported providing parents with explanations on how to support their child with certain learning activities. However, school staff only note the distribution of resources or a parent-school meeting at one-

time point, the beginning of a child's learning journey. Whilst children's transition to primary school is met with the distribution of resources or a parent-school meeting which could be a good introduction for parents, there was no discussion of a continuation of these practices or the distribution of further resources throughout a child's learning journey. Moreover, as with much school-home communication, the resources were one-directional with school staff outlining expectations of the home-school relationship and expectations of parents, with no input from parents.

Prior research shows that positive and collaborative relations and dialogue between the school and home can increase parents' involvement in school (Harpaz and Grinshtain, 2020). These findings further suggest that increased dialogue with parents in relation to relationships and parental engagement as well as longer-term guidance and support for parents throughout a child's learning journey could enhance home-school relationships and increase overall levels of parental engagement. Research shows that some parents require assistance from teachers to support their engagement in their children's learning and to promote their child's development (Harpaz and Grinshtain, 2020). The asking and receiving of help from the school to parents is plagued with power relations and often sees parents feeling they need support from the school but often not asking for this support due to embarrassment, stigmatisation and power imbalances.

Nadler (2002) distinguishes between two forms of help, autonomy-oriented help and dependency-oriented help which can support understandings of how asking and receiving help can have positive or negative consequences upon parents, their identities and self-efficacy. Autonomy-oriented help aims to provide the recipient with the tools to effectively solve their own problem whereas dependency-orientated help aims to provide the recipient with the solution to a problem. Above parents note not receiving effective information on school-set home-based learning tasks and although school staff note initial conversations and the provision of home-learning resources there is no mention of longer-term continual help or assistance given to parents. If schools were to provide autonomy-oriented help to parents through continual discussions, guidance and workshops on how to support their children's learning this could improve parental engagement as well as increase parent self-efficacy and promote the social identity of the recipient (Nadler, 2002).

The importance of parental voice and home-school relationships was recognised by one member of staff who stated it is fundamental to include parents within conversations around learning, behaviour and expectations.

> **School Staff 24:** If you are positive with the parents and you are coming from the same angles, the same positive angles then it does have an effect on the children, whether it is through learning, promoting behaviour, expectations, if the parents are on the same page as you and you are on the same page as the parents, it is a team effort and we couldn't do it without them, and if we were resistant to what they bring to the table then the barrier would go straight back up, it is making them feel valued and making them feel important, which we do and which they are, they are a massive part of what we do as a school.

Above it is noted how if parents and schools work together this can have a positive effect on children's learning and behaviour. Learning is viewed as a joint responsibility between the school and home and therefore clear communication between both parties is fundamental. The member of staff noted how not including parents voice within discussions and the school being resistant to include parents could result in parents feeling undervalued and create a distance between the home and school. The member of school staff felt consideration of the whole family is key and a massive part of what the school does generally, and this whole-school approach to the inclusion of families was viewed as beneficial to children's learning and behaviour and could positively impact children's overall educational outcomes.

7.4 Parental Engagement with Learning: School Staff Perspectives

School staff data on parental engagement with children's learning within the home highlighted that there was a difference in the extent to which parents were reporting to be engaging in their children's learning and school staff perceptions of the extent to which parents were engaging. Whilst parents and children reported how they engaged in their children's learning at home both in relation to supporting school-set home learning and less formal non-academic learning, there was a clear disconnect between what parents stated and what school staff perceived.

> **Interviewer:** Thinking about learning outside of the school, how do you see parents engaging with their children's learning at home?
> **School Staff 3:** They don't.
> **School Staff 1:** They don't.

School Staff 24: Some parents will want to engage with their children's learning, some will not.

Interviewer: Do you think that there is a lot of engagement in learning outside of school?
School Staff 31: No, no.

School staff were negative in their responses to the extent to which they believed parents in their school were engaging in their children's learning with school staff noting some parents do not engage in their children's learning reinforcing deficit approaches to parental engagement. Othering plays a fundamental role in the deficit discourse as it creates a division between those who are served well by the system and those who are served poorly by the system (Goodall, 2019) as well as supporting meritocratic ideology. The rise of the responsbilisation of parents alongside the othering of parents and deficit discourses support the idea that those who do not achieve well educationally or do well in society are responsible for their own fates (Goodall, 2019). Parents from lower income backgrounds are viewed to not be engaging in their children's learning to the same extent as more affluent parents although the barriers to engagement are not considered.

Furthermore, school staff noted challenges with homework being completed and school reading books being returned to school, with some blame for this being placed on parents.

School Staff 1: No, we get barely any, you know like reading books, we don't get reading books back, they don't read them at home, homework has kind of gone off, gone off now because we don't really get that back do we
School Staff 4: Its only year 6 that give it out now isn't it
School Staff 1: I don't know, I don't think parents do anything that involves learning

School Staff 31: Homework then put it that way, we were sending homework home, but it doesn't get done.

School Staff 26: It does vary, we do have challenges with homework being completed when we send books out they don't always get returned.

Three of the four schools participating in the research reported challenges with homework being completed at home. One school staff placed blame for homework not being completed on parents, indicating that parents do not involve themselves in their children's learning supporting earlier discussions illustrating deficit approaches adopted by school staff. Whilst school staff project some form of blame on parents for homework not being completed at home, school staff did recognise that limited access to digital devices within the home acted as a barrier to homework not being completed.

School staff recognised that one of the challenges of children and parents completing homework was limited access to digital devices or the internet within the home. The school staff member reported how they have implemented different strategies to overcome the challenges of digital deprivation experienced by families within their schools, suggesting that low levels of engagement in homework could be associated with digital deprivation.

> **School Staff 31:** The PTA have paid for a programme that the children can access on tablets, no computers, on their phones and it is a learning game, there is maths, English there is maths timetables work , there is addition, subtraction, then reading, writing and spelling games and that has been the most success and we can monitor who is accessing it, how long they have been on it , how much progress they are making and that seems to work for the majority.

> **School Staff 26:** So we've got things like a school homework club so they children can complete homework if they don't have devices at home or if they haven't got time at home.

One of the schools implemented a homework club and a programme which could be accessed via tablets and phones rather than a computer suggesting the school had considered how access to digital devices is a barrier to the completion of homework for some children in their school. The pandemic brought to the forefront the digital divide and socioeconomic differences in access to digital devices for learning within the home. However, data from this research shows that schools were aware of the socioeconomic inequalities in access to digital devices prior to the pandemic.

Moreover, schools' recognition of the challenges of the completion of homework has led to schools changing the ways in which they distribute homework to children. Variance in the amounts of homework distributed from schools to children was evident and schools implemented strategies to overcome digital exclusion and noted adapting the nature of homework tasks in an attempt to increase overall engagement.

> **School Staff 24:** Over the next term rather than give out weekly homework we are looking to give six tasks over a half term… we would like if you could do them all, over to you and then the children will be able to do those tasks and be collected in over half term so maybe we are looking to adapt.

> **School Staff 26:** They have made love spoons, lots of different things or they have been out to visit a castle and they've written about it so things like that have been very beneficial, umm I think it is more the spelling and reading that we struggle with… home -school tasks like that parents generally get involved and we do have a lot of stuff back but it is the spelling and the reading that we do struggle with.

> **School Staff 13:** We have, once a week, homework assembly don't we, it is changing now it is going to be more based on topics.

School staff discussed the promotion of home learning activities which were less directly associated with academic subjects such as maths or English but more related to learning activities which were creative or connected to their local environment or Welsh history. The adaptation of homework to a more topic-based learning and a move away from traditional maths of English homework was noted by several schools. As highlighted earlier, parents noted engagement in learning activities which were not directly associated with the curriculum but related to broader learning. This adaptation by schools to distribute homework tasks which are less focused on academic learning such as spelling or maths and more focused on general learning opportunities could increase overall parental engagement.

The change in the nature of homework tasks was potentially an attempt to reduce the barriers associated with parents' engagement in more formal academic tasks. Nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest parents' involvement in this decision-making process suggesting that schools have made these adaptations with no parental guidance. Schools' promotion of home learning

activities which are topic based rather than centre around subjects such as maths or English could support further parental engagement. However, engagement with parents in relation to the nature and content of home-learning activities alongside parental guidance on how to support their child with the activities could enhance engagement further.

7.5 Barriers to Parental Engagement with Learning: School Staff Perceptions

Although school staff tended to place blame on parents for limited engagement in their children's learning, school staff did recognise that parents face barriers to engagement. Some of the barriers noted by school staff were in line with the barriers noted by parents, these being parents' educational histories and parent confidence. The consistency across findings suggests that schools have some understanding of the barriers parents face in relation to supporting their children's learning. However, unlike in the parent data, school staff did not report that poor school-home communications were a factor which could influence parent's engagement.

When school staff were asked about parental engagement, the school staff tended to adopt a deficit lens and had a negative perception of parents who are unable to engage in their children's learning.

> **School Staff 3:** I think some of our parents try damn had by they don't have the skills of the knowledge, they weren't brought up.

> **School Staff 13:** I think some of them probably haven't had the best upbringing themselves and now they are parents, and the cycle carries on, they don't know how to break that cycle.

There was a perception amongst school staff that the circumstances in which parents from poorer backgrounds have been educated and raised affects how and the extent to which they are able to engage in their children's learning. There is a pathologising of parents through which school staff can be seen to be associate parents' poor childhood and the challenges that they have faced, with parents not having the knowledge or skills to support their children's learning. Statements such as 'the cycle carries on' and 'they weren't brought up' illustrate a relatively fatalistic view of parents and parenting practices, as the school staff members are suggesting that parents individually cannot break the cycle of deprivation and poverty. However, the school staff

do recognise the challenges faced by families in changing their outcomes, and arguably the offloading of responsibility on to parents without fundamental change and support from wider structures and systems is likely to further impair their ability to 'break the cycle'.

Research has shown that parents who are experiencing poverty are more likely than their more affluent peers to be experiencing a range of issues associated with material deprivation including fewer educational qualifications, a lack of access to jobs and services, and poorer health and mental health which can all influence their parenting (Katz et al., 2007). The blame and stigmatisation on parents for their limited engagement focuses on the individual characteristics and behaviours of parents and could have a detrimental impact on school-home relationships and acts a further barrier to parental engagement with learning and involvement in their child's schooling more generally. As argued by Treanor (2020), in *Child Poverty Aspiring to Survive* we need to move towards understanding how political, economic and institutional structures such as the education system contribute to the inequalities in experiences and outcomes rather than focus blame on individuals or families and their characteristics or behaviours.

Parents possess complex identities and historical relationships with schools which influence and shape parents' interactions with schools as an institution and parents' engagement in their children's learning (Auerbach, 2007). Prior research suggests that there is often a mismatch of culture between parents and the school often due to schools' 'one size all' approach to parent engagement (Auerbach, 2007; Crozier, 1999; Macleod and Tett, 2019). The school staff recognised that parents may not feel comfortable with certain subject areas as the ways in which they are taught and the methods used have changed over time, meaning parent knowledge of current methods to support learning can be limited. Whilst schools noted parents not engaging, and often attributed this limited engagement to parent behaviours and characteristics, school staff did not report providing any guidance or information on how parents could support certain subjects or areas.

> **School Staff 26:** I think that some of our parents don't feel as comfortable with umm literacy and numeracy, I think a lot of parents say everything has changed… I think sometimes parent confidence levels might not be as high.

> **School Staff 15**: A lot of it is confidence, there is one parents, and she had no confidence and she kept saying he is behind, and I was saying do something this

weekend to help him and she came back in on Monday with books galore, showing me what he had done and that is all she needs is that 1 person to praise her.

The confidence of parents was mentioned by the school staff members, and low-parental confidence was seen as a barrier to parental engagement. In one case, effective communication and positive reinforcement shown to a parent resulted in the parent engaging in their child's learning and suggested that the praise increased the parent's confidence and belief in their own abilities. As noted earlier, autonomy-oriented help can provide individuals with the tools to effectively solve their own problems (Nadler, 2002), and the staff member's guidance and positive reinforcement had a positive impact on the parent's engagement and could have potentially increased their confidence to support their child's learning further.

7.6 Parental Engagement and Educational Inequalities

Discussions above have highlighted how the barriers to parental engagement with learning for parents from lower SES backgrounds, as well as the deficit approach and the stigmatisation parents face, could lead to the widening of existing educational inequalities. Whilst the findings above did not necessarily directly discuss the impact of limited parental engagement on children's educational outcomes and the attainment gap, inferences to the relationship between engagement and children's outcomes can be made.

Nonetheless, there was evidence from one of the school staff interviews which explicitly noted how children were not at the national level expected and this was attributed to parents not engaging with their children's learning within the home prior to their child starting school. One member of staff reported that children at their school are starting primary school at levels lower than the national average, with some children experiencing speech and language difficulties.

> **School Staff 3:** Our kids are coming into nursery two levels below where they should be coming in, 75% of my class this year had speech and language difficulties… cause they are not being talked to and engaged… you know the parents that do read with their kids at home because they are the ones that have got the higher, I know that there are abilities involved in that but you know when parents practice read-write sounds and how they do it with the reading, you just listen to the kids read, you just know… whereas some [parents] drop them off on the phone and still on the phones and there is no interaction with the kids.

The school staff member attributes blame on parents for children entering school at a lower level than expected as well as some children experiencing speech and language difficulties. The participant believes that school staff can tell the difference in the children whose parents have engaged in reading and practiced read and write sounds as their levels are higher than the children of parents who have not engaged with their children. The school staff's perception of some parents' limited engagement in their children's early years development illustrates how some parents can be viewed through a deficit lens before a child's entry into school therefore suggesting that some parents face stigmatisation at the very start of their child's school journey.

Research shows that stigma is bound up in "access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of differences, construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons into distinct groups, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and social discrimination" (Link and Phelan, 2001; 363 cited in Wilson and McGuire, 2021). Stigmatisation of working-class parents and the othering of parents who do not conform to expected behaviours outlined by neo-liberalist ideology can result in parents who do not engage in their children's learning being viewed as lazy, irresponsible or opting to not engage (Wilson and McGuire, 2021). This stigmatisation could also impact the way in which and the extent to which school staff attempt to communicate, interact and forge relationships with parents who they view as non-conformists. Viewing parents through this lens can be damaging to parent self-efficacy and self-esteem which can contribute to parents withdrawing from situations whereby they may experience stigma (Wilson and McGuire, 2021).

A case study piece of research by Wilson and McGuire (2021) understanding the impact of stigma on working class parents' parental engagement has highlighted that parents can feel unheard when communicating with the school, with one parent stating that they weren't listened to in pastoral meetings as the school had already made their minds ups on their view of the situation (Wilson and McGuire, 2021). As with the quotation above, some parents are seen to face stigmatisation before their child's point of entry to school therefore supporting research which reports that in some cases, school staff have negative perceptions of working-class parents which are established prior to meeting parents.

Moreover, a school staff member noted sending out letters to parents regarding their child's reading age in line with national reading age levels and reported there was no response from parents whose children were not at the expected level for their age.

> **School Staff 31:** I have put the letter out that child is X amount of months behind their reading age please come and see us so we can support you at home, I haven't had one parent come and see us to ask about, so the extra support for reading comes from school.

The school staff member reported that the although the school offered parents an opportunity to ask the school for support in relation to engagement in their children's reading, parents did not respond to the letters they received. Nonetheless, schools did not consider the power dynamics between school staff and parents which may act as a barrier to parents asking for help as this could evoke feelings of shame or embarrassment. As noted above, parents who struggle to engage in their children's learning often face a great deal of stigmatisation which could contribute to parents withdrawing from engaging with the school to avoid situations where discomfort or shame could be experienced.

Furthermore, school staff fail to consider the effectiveness of communication tools. As noted in Chapter 6, support staff were identified as cultural brokers who often de-coded school information and messages to parents, with these support school staff recognising the importance of verbal communication in terms of school-communication. The sending of formal letters to parents could pose a challenge in terms of parents fully understanding the content of the letter as well as intimidate parents and create feelings of shame that their child is not meeting the standardised academic level for their age. Within the health care setting communication style is considered as a key factor in supporting behavioural change and interactions during routine consultation were seen as key in the provision of specific health information relating to behaviour change (Keyworth et al., 2020) whereas there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of communication on behaviour change via letters (Grimani et al., 2021). Therefore, day-to-day social exchanges between school staff and parents could act as a more effective opportunity and method of delivery when detailing matters related to supporting their children's learning within the home.

The conditions in which children are born and the conditions where early child development occurs dramatically affects educational, employment and social relationship opportunities and outcomes (Marmot et al, 2017). Poverty has been shown to affect the functioning of family

systems (Banovcinova et al., 2014; Johnson, 2010; Wheeler, 2018) and research into childhood inequalities has found that poverty effects three core areas of family life; the use of language, interactions with social institutions and the organisations of daily life. Nonetheless, school staff are seen to place blame on parents and noted individual parent behaviours such as parents being more interested in their phones or not responding to school letters as reasons for why children may not be meeting the expected national levels. When school staff discuss lower levels of parental engagement with children's learning negatively affecting children's outcomes, they do not appear to have considered how poverty, or other structural conditions impact family's daily lives and the consequences this can have on parents' ability to involve themselves in their children's schooling and engage in their children's learning.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored the extent to which parents from lower SES backgrounds are engaging in their children's learning from the perspectives of parents themselves, children and school staff. Despite parents and children reporting that parents are engaging in their children's learning within the home, school staff presented the view that there was limited engagement in children's learning within the home. Whilst school staff had relatively negative perceptions of the extent to which parents were engaging in their children's learning there was recognition by school staff that parents faced barriers and challenges to supporting engagement. Both parents and school staff noted that parents' educational histories and parental confidence were barriers to parental engagement. Although only parents reported home-school communication in relation to home learning activities as a barrier suggesting schools were unaware of the effectiveness of their communication of homework activities. The consideration of effective two-way communication in terms of the content and distribution of homework is arguably key in increasing parental engagement with learning within the home.

There was a distinction established between engagement in learning whereby the learning is formal and academic and whereby learning is more general in its nature and not directly aligned to educational outcomes. Activities such as playing games or cooking were valued by parents to the same extent as school-led formal learning, and parents viewed both types of learning as essential to child development. However, school staff did not discuss parents' engagement in these less formal learning activities and were more concerned with parents' engagement in their children's reading or homework. Therefore, school staff did not consider these activities when discussing whether parents engaged in their children's learning which could contribute towards their perceptions of limited engagement.

Limited engagement in children's learning was often attributed to factors associated with parents' individual characteristics or behaviours and throughout the chapter there is a stigmatisation of parents from lower SES backgrounds. Blame for limited engagement was often placed on parents by school staff and other parents, with structural factors for limited engagement not being considered. Phrases such as parents "can't be bothered" or comments such as parents "haven't had the best bringing up themselves and now they are parents, and the cycle carries on" illustrate the stigmatisation families who may have faced challenges in life face and are supported by neo-liberalist ideals. The 'othering' of parents was evident by parents and school staff, and those who were not seen to engage in a manner which was deemed correct by the system were viewed as not normative although parents from a lower SES background are often poorly served by the system and face a multitude of barriers to their engagement.

In relation to the impacts of parental engagement on socioeconomic inequalities in education, the barriers and challenges parents face in terms of engagement in their children's learning inevitably impact upon their children's acquisition of knowledge within the home. Throughout the chapter the relationship between limited parental engagement and children's educational outcomes are discussed however the closing section of the chapter outlines school staff's concerns over limited parental engagement widening existing educational inequalities.

8. The 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP): Educational Inequalities in the Summer Holidays

8.1 Introduction

As discussed throughout this thesis, The Food and Fun: 'School Holiday Enrichment Programme' (SHEP) has been used as a case study. In line with the research's overarching focus on poverty and inequalities, the chapter will consider and discuss the everyday impact of poverty on children's and families' lives, in particular focusing on how poverty affects families' everyday experiences of the summer holidays. The chapter will present both quantitative and qualitative findings, with the quantitative findings providing context and insight into the educational position and socioeconomic composition of participating schools. The chapter will begin with a secondary data analysis of School-Level Key Stage 2 (KS2) educational outcomes data before presenting the qualitative findings from child, parent and staff interviews and observations conducted at the 'Food and Fun' programme (SHEP).

Whilst the findings were collected at the holiday programmes, and some of the data is specific to SHEP there is broader applicability of the data to support understandings of parental involvement and parental engagement more generally.

Therefore, the chapter will deepen understandings of the following research questions:

1) What methods are schools adopting to involve and engage parents in schooling and learning?

2) What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in children's schooling and parental engagement with children's learning in areas of deprivation?

3) How do children, parents and school staff in deprived areas describe their interactions and relationships with one another?

Moreover, the chapter will discuss the reach and recruitment of the SHEP, the purposes of the programme, the benefits for children attending the programme and the benefits for parents whose children attend the programme. The chapter will primarily contribute to understanding the following research question:

5) To what extent, and via what mechanisms is an intervention focused on family engagement within the informal school environment perceived to influence parental involvement and engagement and children's outcomes?

8.2 Reach and Recruitment

This section of the chapter will explore quantitatively and qualitatively the reach of the programme and the participating schools' recruitment processes. Table 10 shows the average of SHEP school FSM entitlement was considerably higher than the national average for each year of SHEP recruitment. The SHEP programme is intended to reach schools in areas of deprivation and schools were initially targeted and recruited on this basis. However, as programme funding increased and the programme developed further, a greater number of schools became interested in participating in the programme. Nonetheless, each cluster of new schools is seen to have a similar socioeconomical composition, as FSM entitlement for each yearly cluster is relatively comparable. In 2020 the WLGA announced eligibility criteria for the programme denoting that schools must have a school-level FSM eligibility population of over 16% to be included in the programme (WLGA, 2020).

In order to examine the reach of the programme in terms of socioeconomic and educational demography, secondary data analysis was performed on Key Stage 2 (KS2) educational outcomes data provided by StatsWales. These data were used to explore school-level educational outcomes for all pupils and pupils entitled to FSM at SHEP schools from 2016-2019, allowing for analysis of KS2 educational outcomes and the point each cluster of schools implemented the programme.

	Number of Schools	Average of FSM Entitlements (%)	Standard Deviation	Confidence Intervals (95%)	Difference in Average FSM Entitlement at School-Level and National Average by Year (%)
Schools Joining SHEP 15/16	7	36.7	17.3	16.0	16.7
National Average 15/16		20.0			
Schools Joining SHEP 16/17	13	33.4	13.5	8.5	14.5
National Average 16/17		18.9			
Schools Joining SHEP 17/18	15	37.6	13.1	7.3	19.2
National Average 17/18		18.4			
Schools Joining SHEP 18/19	26	33.7	15.5	6.2	15.3
National Average 18/19		18.4			

Table 10: School-Level FSM Entitlement and National Average of FSM Entitlement from 2015/16- 2018/19.

Figure 6 indicates that the earliest adopters of the programmes KS2 educational outcomes for 2015/16 were in line with the national average for KS2 educational outcomes in 2016, despite the clusters of schools having higher levels of deprivation when compared to national averages (see Table 10). Hence the 'earliest adopters' of the programme seemed to be schools who already

appeared to be doing better than might be predicted if assumptions were based on the socioeconomic composition of their student intake. Nevertheless, all subsequent school clusters' KS2 educational outcomes were slightly lower than the year's national average for each year measured.
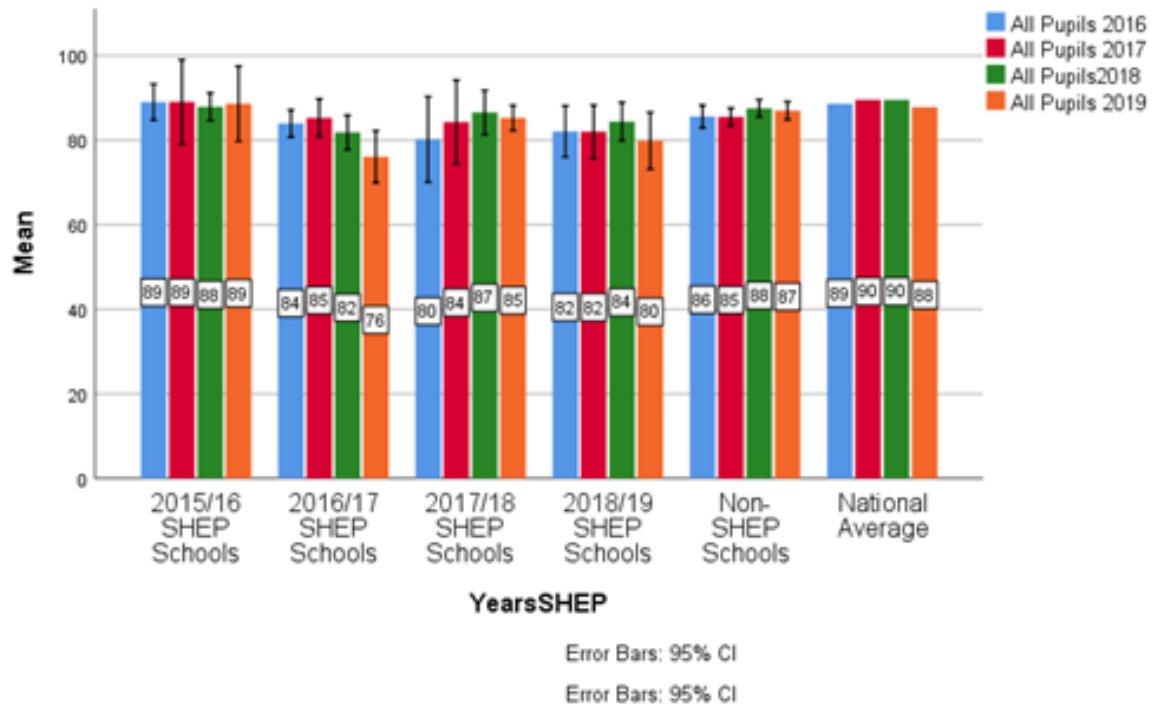
Figure 6: School-Level KS2 Education Outcomes for All Pupils at SHEP Schools, and Matched Non-SHEP Schools 2015-2019.

Similar to Figure 6, Figure 7 indicated that although the schools participating in the research were in greater areas of deprivation in Wales, the KS2 educational outcomes for pupils entitled to FSM at SHEP schools were generally slightly higher than the population-level national averages. The KS2 outcomes data for pupils entitled to FSM at matched-SHEP cluster schools showed was comparable to SHEP schools. These findings suggest that pupils entitled to FSM at SHEP schools and matched-non SHEP schools were outperforming population-level national averages. This could mean that SHEP cluster schools are already implementing practices to support children from lower SES backgrounds in their schools. These quantitative findings support the contextualisation and broader understandings as to why schools may have chosen to implement the SHEP.
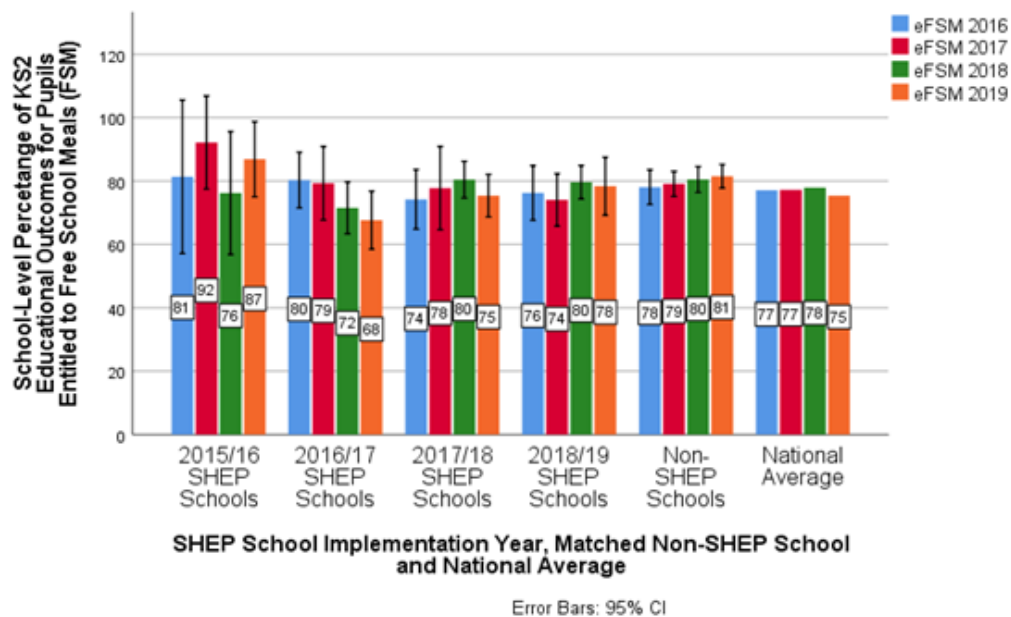
Figure 7: School-Level KS2 Education Outcomes for Pupils Entitled to FSM at SHEP Schools, and Matched Non-SHEP Schools 2015-2019.

The qualitative data provided additional insight into the school-level recruitment processes and participants' perceptions of these processes. Schools typically had a far smaller number of places available than there were students in their school and hence, some form of selection was necessary rather than the school being able to offer provision to all. When discussing the recruitment of families to the programme, parents and school staff listed a range of different ways in which families had been recruited. Parents listed methods including names drawn out of a hat, children selected on the basis of good behaviour, letters to all children and staff selecting particular children to attend. These recruitment methods raised questions around balancing issues of reach, stigma and equity, with some parents feeling recruitment was based on equity whilst others deemed the fairest approach to recruitment would be based on need.

Parent 9: We had a newsletter from school, and a letter sent home saying, 'would you like your child to join'?

Grandparent 1: We were given, they send out a leaflet but they weren't send out to every child were they?
Parent 2: No, I know it's with good behaviour.

Parent 12: SHEP Co-ordinator 1 and I think the head teachers had a meeting and chose some of the children.

Parent 15: Well unfortunately they only had 40 spaces, SHEP Coordinator 1 said it was pick names out of a hat and whoever got it was whoever got it because it's the fairest way.

Families were recruited for the programme through different methods and for different reasons. Some parents seem to be informed of recruitment processes by staff members whereas others indicate there was some degree of uncertainty around the recruitment process. It is likely staff were not explicit about recruitment methods and processes to avoid informing parents of any targeted approaches adopted as this could create stigma towards certain families and create negative feelings of shame. One school indicated that the programme adopted a targeted approach which aimed to recruit those families who schools deemed to need additional support in the summer holidays. Three of the four schools participating reported adopting a proportionate universal approach whereby the programme was open to all students, but the staff privately spoke with particular families to encourage their attendance.

School Staff 26: So, it was opened out to parents but there were certain parents who were, but there were certain parents who were targeted, umm for a range of reasons, umm for some that would really benefit from a financial point of view if their children are involved in it, some children for the emotional social aspect we felt would really benefit from the school holiday club.

School Staff 24: The response has been incredible, I don't like turning children away I know we have to target certain groups… the FSM children, but there is a group of children above the FSM bracket and their families still need to be supported and its those families that are neglected sometimes and that's where I see the importance of the programme as well as the FSM children.

The WLGA programme documentation states that a universal approach to the recruitment of students and families should be adopted to avoid targeting and stigmatisation (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). However, throughout the findings there was an underlying tacit understanding by school staff that the programme was primarily targeted at children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The schools noted targeting certain families or children for specific reasons including for financial and emotional reasons. Schools' targeted approaches seemed to centre

around the targeting of children entitled to FSM's in line with how deprivation is measured within the education sector. These findings further support findings from the development of the SHEP logic model which indicated that amongst stakeholders there was a strong consensus that a universal approach to recruitment was required with the lead of the programme encouraging the attendance of children who they had identified as 'needy' (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). Nonetheless, within programme documentation there is no reference to a targeted recruitment approach suggesting that this is left to interpretation at the school-level.

As listed above, parents' perceptions of how families were recruited for the programme varied between and within schools. It was unclear whether there was a miscommunication between schools and parents or whether the recruitment process is not something that is disclosed to parents fully. If schools were to disclose a targeted recruitment approach, centred on the targeting of children entitled to FSM this could cause stigmatisation, pose major ethical implications, and breach data protection regulations. Within social policy, this from of recruitment can be seen to be based upon the concept of progressive universalism as the programme provides support universally but encourages participation from those that may require specialist support without the attached stigma (National Assembly for Wales, 2011).

8.3 The Purpose and Core Components of SHEP

As previously discussed in section 5.4.2, the core components of the programme outlined in the SHEP logic model include the provision of a 'healthy' breakfast and lunch, structured physical activity sessions, enrichment activities, nutrition education and curriculum delivery and a weekly family lunch (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). The school staff viewed that the purposes of the programme were in line with several of the intended outcomes outlined by the WLGA; school engagement and educational attainment, improved physical activity, improved dietary behaviour, improved aspirations and improved mental health and emotional well-being (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). However, school staff and parents viewed the nutritional element of the programme as the primary focus of the programme.

Amongst school staff there was a perception that the fundamental purpose of the programme was nutritional, whether this was to combat summer holiday food hunger to promote healthy eating and healthier foods choices. School staff across all schools noted nutrition as a key purpose of the programme with many adding this is how the programme was sold to them by the WLGA.

School Staff 31: Umm the purpose of it to make sure that the children have good, they are fed basically and their lifestyles become a bit healthier because there is a lot, I know there is a lot of children here that would stay at home in their bedroom, on the TV, on tablets umm so it is to get that physical activity and are well fed, we do have a lot of parents that are short of money.

School Staff 26: I think it's about educating the children on making sensible nutrition choices and obviously there is another side to it as well obviously the food poverty side of things which is providing opportunities in the school holidays for children to have activities but also health food during the schools holidays as well.

School Staff 29: To promote going forward in life healthy, active sport on the self-esteem and all that but also the parental engagement.

Nonetheless, school staff viewed the programme as having additional purposes including providing a safe place for children during the holidays, providing children with enrichment opportunities and creating opportunities for families to create positive memories in the summer holidays. This list of core purposes provided by the school staff could be seen to be secondary to the nutritional element of the programme, as whilst school staff recognised other components of the programme, they saw the provision of food and nutritional education as the central component. Whilst the purpose of the programme was not considered by the majority of parents, one parent highlighted a similar understanding to school staff.

Interviewer: What do you think the purpose of the programme is, what have you been told?
Parent 12: The purpose is to get them eating healthier and promoting a healthier lifestyle and generally being better body better mind.

Interviewer: And what do you think the purpose of the programme is?
School Staff 1: To sort of combat the holiday hunger we kind of targeted the children that we know don't have as much food in the holidays or who are going to be left to wonder the streets so basically, we know that they are safe and they're fed.

Although some parents view the programme as having a nutritional focus, the enrichment component of the intervention contributes to the programme creating a more rounded approach

and detracts from the targeted nature of the programme. Previous research indicates that families who may be experiencing poverty and may require support from non-profit organisations such as food banks can experience feelings of embarrassment and stigma (CPAG, 2017, 2015). The title of the programme ('Food and Fun') could possibly reduce the potential stigma attached with providing food to children from lower-incomes backgrounds during the summer holidays. Universal initiatives or programmes such as SHEP which centre around the provision of nutritious food and enrichment activities have been shown to have the potential to ease the challenges faced by low-income families in the summer holidays, as well as avoiding the stigma of "feeding stations for the poor" (CPAG, 2017:3; Stewart et al., 2018). Universal interventions can provide a range of support for families and address inequalities throughout the socio-economic distribution as they are not solely targeting the very poorest (Marmot et al., 2010).

8.4 Participation and Engagement in the SHEP

In relation to the implementation of the intervention, the consideration of schooling environments, systems, dynamics, and relationships were apparent at all case study schools, as schools worked to ensure the core components of the programme were implemented with consideration of their delivery context. The majority of the schools implemented the holiday club during the first 3 weeks of the summer holidays, running the club in the morning. However, one school choose to implement the club for the first 2 weeks of the holidays and the final week of the holidays, and another school ran the club for whole school days. The flexibility of the programme allowed schools to consider their individual school dynamics and tailor the intervention to the local context which has been shown to promote successful intervention implementation (Moore et al., 2018a).

> **Interviewer:** And just a couple of logistical things you chose to do the first 3 weeks what was the rationale behind that?
> **School Staff 2**: Totally honest, I want a holiday as well.

> **Interviewer**: Second year, and this is more to do with the timetabling, what where the decisions behind why the club run for the first 3 weeks?
> **School Staff 3:** So, it was really a logistical decision, umm in terms of staff members, holidays and things like that they were already arranged and when the school was open as the school isn't open for the six weeks during the holidays, so it really did, it was logistical really.

School Staff 4: Well, the criteria is you run for 3 weeks.

Interviewer: Yeah.

SHEP Staff 4: 4 days over 3 weeks, so last year we did it in the second week but by then the kid's routine has changed with their sleeping, so I thought just keep it going, also I wanted a holiday as well, umm but a lot of kids won't come in then because they are tired and that week of school there sleeping patterns change, and I thought just keep it going.

Whilst there was consideration of children's daily routines and logistical factors such as school's opening hours during the summer holidays the main consideration listed by school staff was staff availability around personal holidays. Typically, the summer holidays could be considered a period of respite for school staff and therefore staff's preferences in relation to the dates in which the holiday club should run could be vital to avoid overburdening staff members. Furthermore, the final excerpt below suggests a clear theory of change in relation to the school's decision of when to implement the programme. The school staff noted that children's sleeping patterns change during the summer holidays and therefore their decision to run the programme following the end of the academic year would minimise this change and therefore maximise engagement. The school has anticipated how the dates of the programme could affect programme engagement and therefore has backward planned to identify how maximum engagement can be achieved.

Additionally, previous findings from SHEP evaluations indicate that the use of existing staff within schooling facilities was fundamental to the success of the programmes (McConnon et al., 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). Observational data showed that there was a total of 21 staff members (including kitchen staff) working at the participating schools holiday clubs. Of these 21 staff members, 17 (81%) of the staff employed at the holiday club were support members of staff in the academic year. A SHEP-coordinator, who was a support member of staff in the academic year indicated that their involvement in the summer holiday programme was to a certain extent financially motivated.

Interviewer: How come you got back involved again?

School Staff 1: Well I didn't do the, my partner lived in County 1 so I spent the summers with him for those two years and now he lives with me… and we're getting married so selfishly it was for money reasons… nobody else really wanted to do it, so the

girl that ran it for the two years after me she has a holiday so she didn't want to do it, I thought if no one could do it I would.

Whilst previous evaluations have noted that the benefits of SHEP staff working in the summer holidays included increased confidence and enjoyment of working during the summer holidays, there was no consideration of the financial benefits (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). Within schools, support staff are often on contracts which mean they are only paid in term time unlike teaching staff who are paid all year round. Therefore, employment at the school holiday club can offer support staff members of staff additional income in the summer holidays. However, whilst this additional employment could ease potential financial difficulties it could have adverse effects on health and wellbeing due to additional workload and reduced time away from the school in the summer holidays.

In relation to the logistics of the programme, a number of interviewed parents disclosed that the timings of the holiday club might not be suitable for all parents.

> **Parent 1:** You generally find some parents once their kids are off they don't want to be coming back out at early hours, early to be bringing them back to school cause that's their time to chill as well isn't it.

> **Parent 9:** A lot of parents are being lazy and not getting up and taking them because they don't have to, they have just dropped out.

> **Parent 4:** Probably because they (parents) are enjoying their lie-ins in the summer holidays, not having to get up early in the morning and rush.

Parents noted that the half day holiday clubs may not be suitable for working parents as this only provides half a day of childcare when a full day is required, which could result in parents paying for their children to attend private holiday clubs or crèches. Across all interviews, there was no discussion around the inclusion of parents in the planning or delivery of the programme and decisions were seen to be made at the school or local authority level.

> **Parent 4:** I don't know, I would probably ask the parents what days they would be available so it would make it make it more fairer on the children because there is maybe children here today that their parents aren't be able to come.

If schools were to consult parents on what times would be most suitable for families and family circumstances this could increase participation and engagement from both children and parents and reduce the financial burden of childcare in the summer holidays. Nevertheless, as the programme is run in the summer holidays it needs buy-in from staff and therefore the preferences and availability of staff during this period is likely to be viewed as a priority. These findings support earlier findings which indicated school-run parent courses or learning opportunities took limited to no consideration of what types of learning opportunities parent would like, or when and how courses could be run. Nonetheless, observational data showed that parent engagement at the programme was generally high.

8.5 Perceived benefits for Children Attending SHEP

The findings suggested that the holiday club posed a range of perceived benefits for the children who attended. The benefits were primarily seen as individual however three main benefits of the holiday club emerged: The provision of food and nutritional education, increased opportunities for socialisation and the provision of enrichment activities during the summer holidays. This section will reflect upon similarities between these findings and previous SHEP evaluations as well as offer further insight into the beneficial aspects of the holiday club, for those children who attended the programme.

8.5.1 Food and Nutritional Education

The provision of a 'good meal' and an opportunity to learn about and try new foods were highlighted as core benefits of the programme from the perspective of parents and school staff.

> **Parent 10:** It's free and also it's nutritional and about food and everything that's very important and also being comfortable knowing they are going to be fed properly.

> **School Staff 1:** Umm the food aspect is huge, they are eating a good meal, I know I'm sending them away with a good meal, that's probably one of the biggest things I take from it.

There were concerns raised by both parents and school staff around the availability of food for children in the summer holiday which could support why schools adopted a targeted

proportionate universal approach. The excerpts above exemplify how participants felt a sense of comfort knowing that children were being 'fed properly' during the summer holidays suggesting that the programme has the potential to alleviate child food poverty experienced by children in their schools during the summer holidays to a certain extent.

Moreover, parents saw that the nutritional education sessions provided children with knowledge but also with an opportunity to try certain foods they may not have tried before.

> **Parent 11:** Child 72 has learnt a hell of a lot about food, he is not as fearful of food, cause if you don't like the look of it, you aren't gonna like the taste of it and he has been pushed with his boundaries and been experimental with food like you know a bit of celery it is green, it looks like a cucumber I don't like cucumber but he will try, he has never tried a pepper, a beetroot before because he didn't like the look of it, and its like pushing his boundaries to say it is alright, it's okay, it's kinda like learnt a lot and surprised himself with the realisation of why I was thinking that before when it is not that bad now, the realisation of we had a lettuce last night and he helped me chop stuff.

> **Parent 2**: Child 3 came last year [to SHEP] and he eats so much more different types of food than before he came, he worked out that he liked mangos and kiwis… He never ate fruit before.

Unlike the excerpts relating to food poverty, the parents above do not suggest there is unavailability of food at home but suggest that attendance at the holiday club has led to a greater exploration of foods and in particular foods with high nutritional value. The findings suggest that children were unlikely to have encountered the foods listed by the parents (mangos, kiwis, cucumbers, beetroot). Furthermore, school staff from one school highlighted that when children were informed of the nutritional value of certain food this increased the children's awareness of nutritional values, stating they believed children engaged in and understood the content of the sessions.

> **School Staff 3**: They (the children) are also getting healthy meals during the day as well and learning about nutrition so there a range of benefits, I think.

School Staff 14: One of their targets was swap a sugary drink or snack for a healthier option and then we go through the next session and you can get a sticker on your chart and we had someone say I swapped a chocolate bar for a grape, I was like yeah okay.

School Staff 15: Probably has both.

School Staff 14: But some are believable, but they get the kids the understand, they might not be doing it, but they understand the sugar aspect and the healthier option is better for them, but we can't force them to eat it.

School Staff 15: I do think they go home and share the information.

School Staff 13: One girl has a packed lunch when we were doing the sugar and she came over to us…and was like I've got four.

School Staff 14: Oh whoa.

School Staff 13: I have got 4 whoa things in my lunch packet and she was really concerned about it.

School Staff 14: And she knew, for some it would have gone over their heads, but they were engaged in it, and they enjoyed the activities.

Furthermore, it was seen that it could be beneficial for the parents to attend the nutritional education sessions as they are the gatekeepers to children's diet. A sociological examination of holiday programmes has highlighted programmes have the potential to not only reduce food insecurity but educate families on food preparation and nutrition (Defeyter, 2019). However, parent invitations to nutritional education classes could raise issues around stigmatisation, as parents may not understand why they would need to attend such a session or feel a sense of shame if they were invited to attend. The educational focus of these sessions were considered core components of the programme however the provision of nutrition education supports the discourse that people from poorer backgrounds are responsible for their health. Educating families that live in poverty that they should feed children in a healthier manner ignores the conditions in which can prevent them from doing so and can cause stigmatisation and even a distancing of families from the school and schooling environment.

8.5.2 Socialisation

The findings suggested that one of the key benefits of children attending the holiday club was that the programme provided an opportunity for children to socialise with other children during

the summer holidays. Parents acknowledged difficulties finding things for their children to do in the holidays and saw that the holiday club reduced their child's boredom and offered children opportunities to participate in enrichment activities without expense to parents.

> **Grandparent 1:** Six weeks is a long time, and she must get bored.

> **Parent 9:** With the internet at the minute all they want to do is get up and go on social media and as parents trying to fill the six weeks with activities and pay out for the school uniform, you just can't, in six weeks there is only so much you can afford.

> **Interviewer:** And what benefits do you think there are for Child 70 attending?
> **Parent 10:** I think it is endless really, socialisation, it is something for you to do, you can only go to the park so many times before it gets really boring, umm and obviously we try and do other things, and also it being free and also its nutritional.

The parents above discussed how parents felt they can only do so much with their children in the holidays due to finances and this can result in their children getting bored and potentially experiencing social isolation, supporting previous findings which suggest the risk of loneliness being far greater for children from poorer families in the summer holidays (Morgan et al., 2019). These findings were further supported by a child who stated they experienced loneliness in the summer holidays due to living in a remote area.

> **Child 42:** I don't have any friends at home.
> **Interviewer:** Aww how come you don't have any friends at home?
> **Child 42:** Because I live far away from the school, I live in Local Area 11 and none of my friends live up there, they all live down here so I have no friend up there.
> **Interviewer:** And you said at home you don't have any friends and umm how does that make you feel?

> **Child 42:** Lonely because I used to have a friend up there her name was Child 48 she was younger than me but her dad knew her dad so when he came up she came up so we could play games together but my dad and him, but she doesn't come up anymore because her dad and her mum split up so never comes up anymore and I used to have a friend called Child 49 who lived close to me but our dads had a fight because they were

trying to fix a car but they both had two ideas and they couldn't decide so we couldn't be friends anymore.

The child's experiences of loneliness during the summer holiday support parents' perceptions of children's loneliness. Whilst the child discloses feelings of loneliness in the summer holidays, this loneliness is arguably attributed to the child living in a remote area. Moreover, socialisation with children of different ages was also seen to be a benefit of attending SHEP. Whilst previous evaluations of SHEP recognise the benefits of children socialising with friends in the summer holidays (McConnon et al., 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2018), these findings provide insight into the benefits of children mixing with children of different ages at the holiday club. Parents reported that interaction with children of different ages was beneficial for their children with one parent stating this was good for social and emotional development.

> **Parent 11:** He came this year and his behaviour has increased 10 fold, he has grown not just socially and psychologically but it has brought out a side in my child 'I am going to run across the playground and do a stupid thing without thinking' he is actually going stop, think, consider others around me because not everybody is my age, there is younger ones, there is little ones, he is an only child he doesn't have a brother or sister and with these events it makes him think of being considerate and caring, thoughtful to others.

> **Parent 9:** Now she has got more friends because she has got the older kids cause SHEP like to put them not in the same groups everyday so isn't of everyday going with your friends you'll go with everybody, so now she has got friends that are eleven years old she's 7 but she's now got an 11-year-old friend and 8-year-old.

The socialising function of the programme and children mixing with different children was viewed positively by parents. Parents provided examples of the positive ways in which parents viewed their child's socialisation with different children; from children learning to have greater consideration of others to children making more friends in general. The opportunity for children to mix with different children was also noted by a child who claimed that they enjoyed interacting and participating in activities with children they have not before.

> **Interviewer:** What've you liked about all the activities and things you've done?
> **Child 78:** Umm to do them with new people.

These opportunities for children to interact with children of different ages could also provide opportunities for the older children to foster a sense of responsibility in relation to their younger peers (Belderson et al., 2001). A similar study which evaluated breakfast club provision in England also found that a degree of social interaction between age groups was viewed positively by the children who attended and their parents (Belderson et al., 2001). This interaction was seen to strengthen relationships between students, increase child self-esteem, promote children's sense of independence as well as foster children's sense of responsibility (Belderson et al., 2001). The socialising function of the programme arguably contributes to the 'fun' in the 'Food and Fun': School Holiday Enrichment Programme.

6.5.3 Provision of Enrichment Activities in the Summer Holidays

The final noted benefit of children attending the summer holiday clubs was the opportunity for children to partake in enrichment activities during the summer holidays. Whilst there is no conceptualisation of the term 'enrichment' in programme documentation, within academic literature enrichment activities are generally considered as out-of-school activities which are enabled by parents in informal learning environments (Washington-Nortey, 2017). Enrichment experiences are predominately viewed in terms of educational enrichment and are seen to pose opportunities for children to engage in learning in real-world settings (Miller and Gentry, 2010; Washington-Nortey, 2017). In line with academic research the enrichment activities listed by stakeholders were educational in their nature and included cooking, activities with a science technology engineering and maths (STEM) agenda and engagement with local libraries (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). The recommendations listed in the 2018 evaluation of the programme suggest a strengthening of the educational elements of the programme in line with the Welsh Government's STEM agenda (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). This focus on education further supports evidence which implies a move from a bottom-up approach to a top-down approach as the purpose and components of programme are heavily steered by programme funders.

Nevertheless, the findings suggested that participants did not explicitly see that 'enrichment activities' were educational however noted that the activities offered children an opportunity to try something new and therefore arguably learn something new. These activities were not necessarily in line with the Welsh Government's STEM agenda but rather the activities were fun learning opportunities. In the findings there was no evidence to suggest that children viewed the

programme as educational. However, one child noted that at the club they ate food and went out to play highlighting that the child recognised to a certain extent a few of the planned components listed in the logic model; a healthy breakfast and lunch and enrichment activities.

> **Interviewer:** Summer club… What happens at summer club?
> **Child 1:** You have food you go out to play.

Moreover, observational data noted that activities at the holiday clubs were wide ranging, from a visit to a local police station to a judo lesson from a local instructor. As suggested above in the findings children did not view the activities as being educational but rather saw the activities they participated in as playing. Parents also stated that the school holiday club provided children with opportunities to partake in enrichment activities which encouraged learning through play.

> **Parent 15:** Yeah, the other thing that is really good is they do fun stuff, and they tell the kids obviously even though it is fun, you're learning and then they are explaining to them how they are learning through fun and now Child 87 doesn't see learning as oh my god it's so boring it's so not good.

The parent noted that the school had altered the child's perception of learning, showing the child that learning can be done through having fun, playing and participating in activities. The findings indicated there was a perception by school staff that many children would not be provided with opportunities to participate in enriching activities outside of the summer holiday clubs. School staff noted that children would typically spend a lot of time indoors at home during the summer holidays, potentially spending considerable amounts of time in front of electronic devices.

> **School Staff 26:** The biggest thing for me is that they have something really positive to do in the holidays cause often you will speak to our children and they will say its umm they spend a lot of time in the house, umm maybe gaming, a lot of our children don't get the opportunity to visits or trips, so for them they've got an opportunity to try out new things, an experience, an opportunity to make memories during the summer holidays and have a summer holiday to really you know enjoy.

> **Interviewer:** And what do you think the main benefits of the children attending are?
> **School Staff 15:** The fact that they are doing something.

School Staff 13: Most of them are out of their comfort zone.

School Staff 14: They are trying activities which they will have never have done, like you have PE in school but it only covers a certain amount of activities whereas each day we have had a different activity, we had cricket yesterday, how many of them would have actually played cricket beforehand.

The interviews highlighted that parents and school staff felt that the programme offered children something positive and often new to do in the summer holidays. As discussed above, enrichment activities are regarded as educational in their nature and whilst the activities at the holiday club may not have direct academic outputs, learning is arguably discreetly achieved through play. Similar to school staff, parents declared that their children would often be stuck at home doing nothing, being less active or spending time on social media during the summer holidays.

> **Parent 9:** She is more active, with the internet at the minute all they want to do is get up and go on social media and as parents trying to fill the six weeks with activities and pay out for the school uniform, you just can't, in six weeks there is only so much you can afford.

> **Parent 12:** It gives them something to do, keeps them off the streets, they are with their friends, they've got three weeks to basically just have fun with their friends and learn things.

> **Parent 14:** It is hard enough with 2 kids trying to take them out places and keep them occupied but they are down here for three weeks, it is great because they are taking them out and doing stuff and you wouldn't necessarily say let's go tie dying, where would you find that you would have to pay for it.

The provision of enrichment activities was seen as more than just a learning experience but was viewed as positive on a social and emotional level. Research has indicated that children can often face poverty shaming at school whether this is intentionally or inadvertently (Goodman and Cook, 2019). This shame can be related to hygiene, lunch boxes, school clothing or in this case could be related to children's experiences of the summer holidays (Weale, 2019). Upon return to school after the summer holidays, schooling discussions and activities focused around the summer holidays can be difficult for children who experience poverty as they may have not had

the same opportunities to partake in activities, trips or holiday as their peers and therefore may experience feelings of shame. The provision of these enriching activities could create positive memories for children and mean children can discuss their positive school holiday experiences upon their return to school.

Moreover, the school staff discussed how the activities at the holiday club may push children out of their comfort zone as children may be trying activities which they have never experienced before. Whilst it could be daunting for some children to participate in activities that may feel alien to them, these opportunities can also provide learning and developmental experiences. Arguably, the holiday club offers children something to do in the holidays whether this is something new, something they have done before, or something educational and this is seen as positive in itself.

8.6 Benefits for Parents of Children Attending SHEP

Whilst the holiday club is primarily targeted at children, the holiday clubs can pose benefits for parents and families as a whole. These benefits can either be a direct or indirect effect of their child's involvement in the programme or a direct or indirect effect of their personal involvement in the programme. For example, parents disclosed financial struggles during the summer holiday and the provision of childcare, food and activities for their children at the programme was seen as a direct benefit of their child's attendance at the holiday. However, their child's attendance at the holiday club could mean their child is fed at the holiday club which means they can afford to feed themselves (indirect effect). The findings from the parent and school staff interviews highlighted that there were 3 major benefits to parents; the easing of financial stress experienced in the summer holidays, the promotion of positive family-school communication and relationships and the opportunity for parents to catch up on their daily lives.

8.6.1 Easing of Financial Stress Experienced in the Summer Holidays
The main parental benefit of the holiday club disclosed by parents was the easing of financial stress typically experienced during the summer holidays. The six-week holidays were considered a long time by parents and the holidays were seen to put a financial strain on families, particularly those who may financially struggle during the school term time.

Parent 9: So, it is brilliant you know keeping them active and everything and not costing me a penny.

Interviewer: And what benefits do you think there are for the kids coming to the clubs?
Grandparent 1: Well, it's a long, six weeks is a long time to be off school and financially we can't afford to take her away for weeks.

Parent 13: Amazing cause otherwise they would be stuck at home doing nothing, like this now for 3 weeks… I haven't got much money, you know I am on benefits and I've been benefit capped so what that means is basically I pay full rent, so I've got to pay £132 a week out of my own money and I only get £200 a week so then obviously I gotta pay that every week and then you gotta make what's left gas, electric and food, I haven't at the end of the day I haven't got enough money to take my kids somewhere.

Interviewer: And what about for the benefits for yourself for Child 87 going?
Parent 15: Umm cost wise it is a life saver because for 6 week it is a lot because if you haven't really got a lot of money then it is brilliant, and they feed them so that's an extra.

Parents discussed how the SHEP can ease the financial pressures of the summer holidays, with one parent referring to the programme as a 'life saver'. These findings further support quantitative research which found 80% of surveyed parents (n=233) in Glasgow disclosed increased pressures on family budgets in the summer holidays, with two thirds reporting an increase in debt during the period (CPAG, 2015). The provision of childcare, meals and enrichment activities can be seen to offer parents a lifeline in the summer, reducing the overall cost of the holidays and meaning their budget can be stretched further.

A school staff member also recognised that parents could benefit financially from the holiday club and discussed how parents' financial positions were considered when targeting families.

School Staff 26: So it was opened out to parents but there were certain parents who were, but there were certain parents who were targeted umm for a range of reasons umm for some that would really benefit from a financial point of view if their children are involved in it, some children for the emotional social aspect.

Nonetheless, other than in relation to food poverty there was limited discussion around how poverty effects family life, and how the programme could alleviate parents' financial pressures. It could be argued that poverty and the impacts of poverty are relatively unspoken about in the school staff interviews whilst poverty was a central feature of the parent interviews. This could be interpreted in one of two ways, firstly that the effects of poverty are explicitly known and understood by school staff and therefore they feel there is no need to specifically discuss them as it is known to affect all aspects of life. Or secondly, that school staff may not have adequate understanding of the reality of poverty and therefore do not consider its effects upon families (Gupta and Blumhardt, 2016). Nevertheless, within this research there is a continual recognition of the importance of discussing poverty, inequalities and the impact poverty has on everyday lives of families (Gupta and Blumhardt, 2016).

8.6.2 The Promotion of Positive Family-School Communication and Relationships

The holiday club was viewed as an opportunity for families, the community and school staff to join and connect in a less formal environment than the usual schooling environment. Prior research indicated that SHEP parent activities acted as a mechanism to help increase family awareness of community opportunities and improve school engagement through the social contact between school staff and families (Powdrill and Thomas, 2018). This social contact within the informal schooling environment was viewed by parents to positively impact their relationships with schooling-staff as well as the schooling environment in general.

> **Parent 12:** On a normal school day when there is loads and loads of parents loads and loads of teacher loads and loads of children it can be daunting for some of them but on days like this, weeks like this when there is only a few of us in it's not so scary for the parent to come have a chat or be engaged.

> **Parent 15:** I feel so much more confident going back in September that there is a member of staff that completely understands (their family's circumstances).

Parents noted that the summer holiday club was a less intimating environment than the usual schooling environment. The school and playground culture can often be seen viewed as dissimilar from the culture of those families from lower income backgrounds which can result in feelings of discomfort within the environment. Parents involvement in the holiday club could

help parents decode the schooling culture further and ease feelings of intimidation as parents are able to participate in a range of enrichment activities and communicate with school staff and other parents in a more informal and colloquial manner.

One support staff member also recognised that parental involvement in the programme could be beneficial for parent-school-community relationships.

> **School Staff 29:** This year to get them more engaged (parents) I thought it better to bring the community in… so yesterday we had Person 23 in who runs the youth club, children's play services, he has been coming in every week with play equipment, then we had Person 24, she brings Local Area 12 Garden Villages, she also runs the local football team which a lot of the pupils from here are already on but to be able to introduce them to the parents, like there is football camp Friday which a lot of them are going to go to its that, I think that's more beneficial, I think that makes them feel at ease here, having a relaxing time together getting to know you.

In line with the parents' view, the staff member perceived that parental involvement in the programme had the potential to make parents feel at ease within the schooling environment. The holiday club allowed parents the time to get to know school staff on a more personal level which is often not possible on a school-day. Moreover, the inclusion of local services and clubs at the programme meant parents were able to connect with services and clubs in the club area which they otherwise may not have been aware of.

The holiday club was also seen to alleviate an ongoing issue between one parent and their respective school. One parent disclosed they had experienced personal conflict with the school which had seriously affected their child's and their relationship with the school and their overall trust in school staff. The parent expressed their voice was not heard by school staff, there was no trust between the parties and overall communication between the parent and school resulted in hostility. When the parent was asked how they felt when speaking with school staff they stated:

> **Parent 15:** Not good at all, I personally don't feel confident so I was videoing our sessions cause the one session I went in and they were all, it seemed like they were picking on me and I had four people round me talking to me… it is like they were shouting out me I didn't feel comfortable so in the next session then they said they didn't

say something they did, so the next session cause they leave you in the room and then they go get the rest of them so I put my phone on record and put it in my lap and just made out my phone was there, I recorded it all.

The parent stated that meetings with the school made them feel uncomfortable and un-confident in the situation particularly due to the power imbalance in the meetings. The communication difficulties resulted in the parent recording the meetings via their mobile phone which they later explained caused further hostility. Nevertheless, the parent's involvement in the school holiday club contributed towards the building of a more positive relationship. The parent indicated that their attendance at the holiday club had allowed them to start to build a relationship with a support member of staff that at the holiday club. The parent declared that from then onwards they would feel much more comfortable leaving their child at the school as they felt comfortable in the presence of the member of staff they had built a relationship with at the holiday club.

8.6.3 Opportunity for Parents to Catch up on Daily Life

The parent interviews highlighted how many of the families participating in the holiday club found the summer holidays a challenging period of time. The summer holidays were considered a long period of time by parents and parents saw that the holiday club offered them an opportunity to be alone and catch up on daily chores and their daily lives. The findings from parent interviews suggested that occupying their children during the summer holidays was time consuming and the holiday club was seen to provide parents with a break from their childcare responsibilities which allowed them to complete domestic tasks or take time for themselves.

> **Interviewer**: And are there any other benefits just to yourself apart from the cost?
> **Parent 9:** Just having that little break away when I'm not trying to think about what I am doing next with her.

> **Interviewer:** And what about the benefits for yourself for Child 70 coming?
> **Parent 10:** Umm you just get general time to catch up on housework or go food shopping or just have a minute.

> **Interviewer:** And what about the benefits to you for the kids coming?

> **Grandparent 1:** The house is clean [laughter] you get to tidy up, they get back and mess it all up again, I think in my case it's a break.

Previous research has shown that holiday programmes can support low-income parents to remain in employment as well as fulfil family commitments (Mann et al., 2018). However, this research has further highlighted that holiday clubs provide parents with a form of respite and are seen to alleviate some of the everyday pressures in line with previous research which suggests that government policies such as holiday club provision can reduce parental stress and improve wellbeing (Stretesky et al, 2020). Although, some of the parents stated it gave them a break and a chance to clean the house in a jovial manner this manner could be used as a way to detract away from the struggles and challenges they faced in relation to providing for their children over the summer holidays. Findings suggested that the provision of childcare at the holiday club provided parents with the opportunity to deal with the difficulties or challenges they may be facing in their daily lives.

> **Interviewer:** And how about yourself, do you think there are any benefits for you?
> **Parent 1:** Yeah it is because it gives me chance then, because I work, see I do, I do 3 jobs, 3 jobs, 2 in the school and 1 in the evening, so I work all day and I go back to work in the evening, I'm only home for an hour this is my general routine, if I'm in school all day I'm only home for an hour then I go back to work in the evening, so I don't get a time, my house is clean but it's not clean to what you would expect… this gives me the opportunity to go and do my house and do all my washing and ironing and things like… this is what has benefitted me this year.

> **Interviewer:** And what about to yourself are there any benefits for you them coming along to the club?
> **Parent 13:** Well yeah obviously with the situation I'm going through it gives me time off with the baby and my older daughter and it gets them out of the house, they know what's going on with their sister you know but they know what they think they know… We say Child 80's not very well at the moment you need to give her that time and they do and when I pick them up they are like Child 80 you alright, leave me alone shut my door and they leave her alone they've got respect and you know I think me and dad are bringing them up the right way, well I hope so you know.

Both the parents above discuss how the challenges they faced in their day-to-day lives were eased by their children's attendance at the holiday clubs. Research indicates that parents with lower incomes face higher levels of stress as a result of poverty and associated issues such as higher levels of adversity, relationship breakdowns and poorer mental health (Hooper et al., 2007). One of the excerpts indicates how the holiday club has eased the pressures of the parent working 3 jobs and given the parent time for themselves at home to complete daily tasks. Parents on lower incomes can find themselves experiencing a conflict between their parenting role and working role as there is economic pressure to provide for their family as well as the requirement to meet the needs of family members (Banovcinova et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the additional excerpt above alludes to the fact the parent's child is experiencing mental health difficulties which has been challenging for the whole family. The holiday club helped the parent to offer the child experiencing mental health difficulties the support required as their younger children were being cared for at SHEP. Families living in poverty can experience multiple disadvantages which inevitably affect their family functioning and everyday life experiences. Children's attendance at the holiday clubs has offered some of the parents a form of respite and helped alleviate some of the pressures experienced by families in the summer holidays. As discussed earlier, the effects of poverty are not fully recognised by the school staff and whilst parents discussed in detail how the holiday club offered them a form of respite this was not noted in the school staff interviews.

8.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has aimed to explore how and the extent to which families' involvement in a summer holiday programme implemented within the informal school environment can affect parents' involvement in schooling, parents' engagement in their children's learning and children's outcomes more generally. There were three benefits reported for the children attending the programme: food and nutritional education, socialisation and the provision of enrichment activities in the summer holidays. Advantages were also highlighted for parents, whether these were direct benefits from their attendance at the programme or indirect benefits from their children attending at the programme. The two indirect benefits noted were the easing of financial stress and the opportunity for parents to catch up on daily life, whereas the direct benefit was the promotion of positive family-school communication. As with previous findings from SHEP evaluations, the use of the schooling building and existing school staff was

fundamental to the success of the programmes (McConnon et al., 2017; Powdrill and Thomas, 2018) due to a sense of familiarity and safety. However, this research has also showed these core components of the programme were beneficial to the promotion of home-school communication and supporting the development family-school relationship more generally.

In terms of the school implementation of the programme, the schools considered their school contexts and their families in relation to intervention implementation. For example, the schools considered the dates and times of the programmes and how these would impact school staff and children as well as considering what activities would be most beneficial for the children and parents attending the programme. Nevertheless, as with many school-led events and activities the school did not request input from families in terms of what dates, time or activities would be suited or beneficial for the children and parents, as decisions were solely made at the school-level arguably undermining the extent to which the participating schools' families were considered. Moreover, in terms of the purpose and intended outcomes of the programme there were differences in how school staff and parents viewed the programme in comparison with the purpose and intended outcomes outlined in the SHEP logic model and WLGA documentation. As noted in the WLGA documentation the intended outcomes outlined included school engagement and educational attainment, improved physical activity, improved dietary behaviour, improved aspirations and improved mental health and emotional well-being. However, school staff and parents viewed the programme as primarily focused on overcoming food poverty and supplying nutritional education.

The chapter's secondary data analysis of school-level FSM entitlement data and KS2 educational outcomes data also provided a broader understanding of the socioeconomic composition of the schools participating in the SHEP. This analysis alongside schools' proportionate universal recruitment approach to inviting families to participate in the programme supports further understandings of the levels of deprivation amongst the schools participating in the research.

9. Parental Engagement in Learning: Educational Inequalities and the COVID-19 Pandemic

9.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on parental involvement with schools, parental engagement with learning with the home and the maintenance of school- family relationships. The findings presented in this chapter are comprised of data collected in follow-up interviews conducted with school staff during the period of national school closures in the Spring of 2020. All school staff that opted to leave their details for follow-up interviews in the first round of data collection (Summer of 2019) were contacted for the follow-up interviews. 4 interviewees from the first round of data collection agreed to participate and an additional interviewee from a case study school agreed to participate. The additional interviewee had become a head teacher at one of the participating schools since the first round of data collection and requested to participate in the research. Nonetheless, there was no representation from one of the initial participating schools with reasons for declining to participate in the follow-up interviews centred around the pressures and challenges of being in crisis management due to the pandemic. A total of five interviews were conducted, and participants were given different participant numbers to further than they were assigned in the first round of data collection to support anonymity.

The chapter will contribute to understanding the following research questions:

1) What methods are schools adopting to involve and engage parents in schooling and learning?

2) What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in children's schooling and parental engagement with children's learning in areas of deprivation?

4) To what extent can home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning reduce socioeconomic inequalities in wellbeing and educational outcomes?

The chapter has focused on providing a greater understanding of how parental involvement and engagement were shaped by the pandemic and how this has affected socioeconomic inequalities. The data analysed can provide broader understandings of home-school relationships as well highlight the lessons learnt during the pandemic, whether these were positive or negative. The chapter can also provide further contribution to our understandings of an additional research question:

> 5) How do children, parents and school staff in deprived areas describe their interactions and relationships with one another?

Whilst the chapter primarily focuses on the interactions between children, parents and school staff during the pandemic this can provide a greater understanding of the interactions and relationships between the participants and schools more generally. The findings from this chapter only outline the perspectives of school staff as there as there was no input from the perspectives of children and parents. The findings from each of the schools participating in the research have been amalgamated as there was relative consistency across findings.

9.2 COVID-19 School Closures: The National Education Hub System

The closure of school buildings during the pandemic was unprecedented in the UK and the move to teaching at a distance posed many challenges for schools, parents and children. The majority of children had no access to the school building but were provided learning provisions through online services or via paper learning packs (discussed in further detail in section 9.3). Although during periods of the 2019-2020 academic year schools were closed to most students, school hubs were established in local areas to provide childcare and education to children deemed as 'vulnerable' by child services and for children of key worker parents. All three participating schools discussed their school hub systems and noted working with other schools in their area to run community school hubs. None of the schools were selected by their respective local authorities to hold the school hub on their school grounds but the schools collaborated with other schools in their local areas to run the school hubs.

> **School Staff 25:** A hub is in another school, but we work with them on a rota, so all the schools involved, all the schools in [Local Area 20].

School Staff 27: We joined a school up the road with [School 9] along with one of the local high schools and then we just had the hub then a base for 3 sets of children in that school… the high school they had one part of the school, [School 1] our school had 1 classroom, [School 9] the other school had one classroom and then it was managed then umm sort of daily by staff, we put our staff on a rota and then went in and just looked after those children.

School Staff 24: [School 4] isn't one of those schools that is open however… there is one school that is open, the local hub and all my staff are on a rota for that, it means that they are going into the hub once a week, maybe once a fortnight and are providing childcare to children whose parents are key workers but also those vulnerable learners as well.

School Staff 26: The LA made the decision of where the hubs were going to go and we worked together to get timetables set up, procedures set up following the LA guidance and went from there really but worked really closely together as hubs and there has been really good communication.

Whilst one school noted each school within their local hub remained segregated from one another within the school building, it was not noted whether this was the same system for the other school hubs. Concerns around the spread of the virus in the hub schools could have contributed to why schools would have remained in their individual school cohorts although this could mean increased numbers of staff needed across the hubs as a whole. The schools noted a collaborative approach to the hub systems with school staff from the different schools working together to run the community hubs through a rota system. The inclusion of multiple schools within one school could present logistical challenges however one school noted how the schools worked closely together and communicated well. When interviewees were asked about school staff's interest in supporting the school hubs, the interviewees noted school staff were on board and positive.

School Staff 25: There has to be a senior leader, a teacher and LSA, we are all on different rotas throughout the school, so we all play a part.

School Staff 27: So as head of SLT we put an email out which said we need to staff this hub if you are willing to volunteer let us know and then we can sort, we are looking at a day a week or every two weeks and I was in a very fortunate position that I had enough staff that volunteered to do it, who were willing to come in so I never had to get to the point where I had to say you need to come in.

The findings suggested that there was the pulling together of school staff to support the school hubs with school staff accepting their part to play in the hub system. Whilst the school staff would have remained supporting children's learning at home via online learning, phone calls to families and the provision of at home learning packs, school staff also seemed willing to support the school hub provision. This collaborative form of working both within the schools and with other schools seemed to support the smooth delivery of the school's hubs and is also likely to have supported the development of relationships between schools in local areas. The health, education, social and financial challenges posed by the pandemic arguably saw the collaboration of schools and services within areas which research has shown to support under-resourced and underserved communities (Maler et al., 2017). Whilst schools are aware of local schools and there are likely to be some prior relationships between the schools, the pandemic saw a greater level of communication and collaborative working between schools in local areas to support the community.

Nevertheless, school hubs were only accessible for children of key worker parents and those identified as vulnerable by child services. The identification of children of key workers parents and vulnerable students was not a school-led process, but a process led by the local authorities. The participating schools noted guidance was provided from the Welsh Government to their local authority and from the local authority to the individual schools.

School Staff 24: There was quite a strict list from the Welsh parliament months ago when it started which filtered through to our local authority which we promoted as a school and stated only use it as a last resort and if there is no other alternative and the facilities are here to support you if you are in a job which cannot provide childcare for your children, in regards to our vulnerable learner there is a set of criteria.. initially it was those that were engaged in children's services but then there was also those that aren't engaged with children's services but are still in need for whatever reason.

School Staff 26: So they [the parents] had to apply to the local authority so initially the provision has been for key worker children umm so they have had to complete an application form in order to be accepted and that was quite difficult at first… a family whose mums a career and dad is a taxi driver and they weren't able to access it and that was really difficult and I knew if they didn't access it they wouldn't be able to carry on working… so I did operate some leeway.

School Staff 27: So the key workers was fairly straightforward so they had to give us their key workers, they had to fill out their shift pattern and their managers name, anyone vulnerable again that was initially who applied… through family services through social services and they will do an assessment.

The identification process outlined by the Welsh Government involved an application process or an assessment of whether a child was eligible to use the hub provision and was viewed by two of the schools as a stringent process. Whilst one school noted that the guidelines for children of key worker parents was fairly straightforward, the other schools noted the application process was strict and acted as a barrier for some families. One school noted operating some leeway in terms of access to the hub, however it was unknown whether this was supported by the Welsh Government, or whether schools used their autonomy and knowledge of families' personal situations to support the families they believed needed access to the hub provision.

Furthermore, the application process could have acted as a barrier to parents applying for hub provision due to challenges of accessing online systems, challenges of finding time and challenges of understanding and completing the forms. Research from the pandemic has highlighted that some lower-income families did not have access to digital devices or the internet which has inhibited their child's access to online learning (Andrew et al., 2020; Seah, 2020) and this could have potentially limited access to hub systems online application form. The closing of public services and libraries such as schools could have further hindered parents' access to digital equipment and the internet. In addition, some parents from lower-SES backgrounds were reported to feel less confident in their digital skills and reported lower levels of digital literacy in relation to supporting their children's learning (OECD, 2020) which could have also impacted their confidence and ability to complete online forms.

As noted above, one of the participating schools further noted that the criteria for the hub provision was strict in terms of eligibility for vulnerable children. The schools in this research are

all in areas of deprivation in Wales and the interviewees noted that in terms of vulnerability, the schools considered a far greater number of children vulnerable than those solely identified by child services as vulnerable. Moreover, whilst provision was in place for those considered vulnerable by the LA, this provision was not compulsory, and parents were given the choice on whether to send their child to the hub provision meaning those considered most vulnerable may have become invisible to the school and child services during this period. Whilst literature notes parents were given a 'choice' on whether their child (Coughlan, 2020) could attend the hub provision there may have been challenges with transport, working hours or concerns over the spread of the virus within the hub which could have acted as barriers to parents sending their child or children to the hub provision.

> **School Staff 26:** If I really considered the children that I would say are vulnerable in my school you know I could have filled that hub 2, 3 times over but we have been following our own methods of keeping in touch with families.

> **School Staff 27:** Half our school are vulnerable in some way shape or form so basically what happened then it was clearly taken out of our hands in the school, because it is quite awkward for us to say we are taking you and not you, so why are you taking that family, so I was really pleased the county took the lead on that.

Schools recognised the vulnerability of their families however one school noted gratitude to the local authority for setting vulnerability criteria as this meant the decision on what children were deemed as vulnerable was not left to the school. The invisibility of children during the pandemic was of national concern (Coughlan, 2020) and concerns over the vulnerability of the families and children is central to this empirical chapter with the notion of vulnerability being discussed in further detail in Section 9.3.

9.3 COVID-19 School Closures: Communication, Vulnerability and Supporting the Social and Wellbeing Needs of Families

The lockdown restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant the day-to-day face-to-face contact between families and schools was removed and alternative forms of communications were quickly enhanced or implemented by the schools. Research indicates that open-door policies and families' abilities to access and reach school staff on a daily basis is key in the facilitation of home-school communication (Campbell, 2011). Therefore, the removal of informal daily contact posed a challenge for the participating schools with schools increasing the

use of other forms of communication in attempts to remain in contact with families and maintain home-school relationships.

The participating schools indicated that the primary method of communication used by schools to contact families during the school closures period was the telephone. Whilst schools' communication with parents and children via email and via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter continued or was enhanced, telephone calls from the school staff to parents and children were the preferred method of communication by the school.

> **School Staff 28:** We have been calling them every other week… just to check up on how they were doing!

> **School Staff 24:** Teachers have regular contact with every family, we have bought a set of mobile phones for every staff member, for every teacher and they phone up the family to touch base to see how the children are getting on without school, see how the families are coping and managing.

The closing of schools 'open doors' reduced opportunities for parents to offload important information to schools meaning key messages in relation to learning, wellbeing and welfare may not have been shared. However, the regular phone calls between schools and the home to a certain extent could be seen to increase opportunities for parents to offload any key pieces of information. The telephone calls were aimed at both children and parents and the purpose of the telephone calls was not necessarily educational but there was a greater focus on understanding the social and wellbeing needs of families and providing support, reassurance, and signposting to families where necessary. For example, the participating schools noted that phone calls were more about checking in on families and seeing how families and children were coping with the pandemic, the national lockdown and home schooling.

The pandemic has brought to light the challenges that many children and families on lower-incomes experience in their day-to-day lives, with the challenges lower-income families face in their day-to-day lives arguably been exacerbated during the pandemic (Moss et al., 2020). Findings showed that during the pandemic schools acted as one of the main service delivery mechanisms in local communities, with schools particularly in deprived areas supporting the needs of parents and families experiencing poverty and hardship (Moss et al., 2020). The case study schools reported supporting families' social, and welfare needs, providing parents with someone to reach out to for reassurance or support, or solely providing someone for parents to

have a conversation with. All schools developed individual systems to support the individual and localised needs of their school children and families.

> **School Staff 25:** We are running a really good system, supporting them, phoning them and I have been delivering packs having chats with parents, it not necessarily about work it is more about are you okay, can we do anything for you, it's just making sure it is like a community thing, everyone have pulled together during this time.

> **School Staff 27:** On the whole we have kept in contact with all families and to be fair the ones I have spoke to on my list, they have been very appreciative of a call and have welcomes the fact if you need anything we are her 8 till 2, we have kept the school open the whole time to answer the phone and to help out where we can, you know we have a small food bank in the school so the families that have struggled, there are food parcels, so we have sat there a couple of times and said is there anything more, but I think we did everything we could during the time and the vast majority were kept in contact with.

The findings further highlighted the ways in which the schools' role within their community is much wider than solely an educational role. Whilst schools arguably have this extended role typically, the pandemic highlighted this further. Particularly with the reduction of other services in the community such as community groups and child services. The pandemic highlighted that existing state safety nets to support families were not sufficient with families struggling to find the financial resources to purchase basic necessities such as food. Schools noted the establishment of small school-level food banks, the delivery of food parcels and home learning packs illustrating how governmental support and provision was not meeting the needs of the families and suggesting that some families were falling through the gaps. The targeted policy interventions such as the £20 universal credit uplift did not meet the needs of all families experiencing poverty and exposed an infrastructure which often failed to meet the needs of those most vulnerable.

The participating schools' levels of social deprivation arguably affected the degree of potential vulnerability faced by the children and families. Whilst the nationally implemented hub systems aimed to support those children who were identified as 'vulnerable' by child services, the schools noted there were many children outside of this definition of vulnerable that were considered vulnerable by the school. The notion of vulnerability is difficult to define and arguably a subjective concept however in regards to the eligibility criteria for the hub provision, a vulnerable

child was deemed to include "those with safeguarding needs and supported by social care, which include children with care and support or support plans, children of the child protection register and looked after children, young carers, disabled children and those with Statements of special education needs" (Williams, 2020;1). This restrictive definition of vulnerability was arguably not aligned with school-level notions of vulnerability and concerns were raised around vulnerability eligibility criteria as noted earlier in the chapter. Although it is important to note the definition of vulnerability at the timepoint the data was collected was more restrictive than notions of vulnerability later in the pandemic.

Concerns around child vulnerability and welfare were also evident as the participating schools all created school-level vulnerability lists. Vulnerability lists saw the school identify and compile a list of children/ families that they considered vulnerable, and those that the school had additional concerns for during the pandemic. Whilst these lists are likely to have included those who had been identified by child services and those considered eligible for the hub provision, the lists of children and families viewed as vulnerable by the school was far greater than the lists of children eligible for the hub provision.

> **School Staff 27:** We had to create a list… who we consider our most vulnerable families and the list were 80+ children and they were the ones we were to have regular contact with, we created a list for a weekly call, some for bi-weekly, some every 3 weeks.

> **School Staff 25:** We keep in contact with every pupil, there is a more vulnerable order but everyone is contacted, it is inclusion for everyone.

> **School Staff 26:** We did set up a vulnerability list and assigned staff to key families so we have stayed in contact with those families throughout.

Vulnerability in the eyes of the schools was much broader than the LA's definition and schools noted if all children considered to be experiencing poverty or hardship were seen as vulnerable this could have been large proportions of the children within the schools.

> **School Staff 27**: It is such a deprived area, unfortunately in the circumstances it is not allowed, but there are so many children I would love to be able to get in there [school hub] with their circumstances.

Moreover, whilst schools created vulnerability lists of children they believed were vulnerable, these lists were seen to be compiled from pre-pandemic knowledge. There are emerging ideas that the COVID-19 pandemic has been an adverse childhood experience (ACE) in itself, as the pandemic could be deemed as a traumatic event which is likely to have longer-term implications of an accumulation of risk and harm (Duncan, 2021; Sanders, 2020) and therefore at this time all children and young people could be regarded as vulnerable.

As noted by two of the participating schools, the vulnerability lists created directly impacted the frequency and level of contact and communication between the school and families. Schools highlighted that they would attempt to contact the children/ families that were identified by the school as the most vulnerable on the most frequent basis although all families at the school would be contacted regularly. In terms of concerns over child welfare, the invisibility of a child or limited contact between schools and a family raised child welfare concerns. If the vulnerability or welfare of a child was of concern to the school, the case study schools noted a physical welfare check would be conducted by the school or child services.

> **School Staff 26**: We always target children who we can't speak to on a Tuesday we have a senior leadership meeting and we start off by talking about staff and pupil wellbeing and asking if there any concerns about families… on our way home we do a welfare check at these houses but we have also done it through the police if we have been concerned, so police have done welfare checks if we haven't sighted the children.

> **School Staff 27:** We have had a couple of referrals during this time and we have had to escalate this to county level to gateway social service and they have had to case up some families as well I think they have done a couple of visits, the ones they couldn't get hold off, a door stop visit.

Telephone contact between the school, children and parents was seen as the primary method of checking on child welfare and identifying concerns during the period of school building closures. In the typical schooling year, child welfare concerns are identified through physical contact and communication between children and the school and therefore this limited physical contact posed a significant challenge and was of serious concern to schools. Whilst schools could not see into the family home, the telephone calls were seen to act as a means of monitoring the welfare of children. A one service seen approach to ensuring child welfare was arguably adopted by one of the participating schools, meaning that the school, children's services, or the police would

communicate with one another to ensure a child had been seen by one of the services to ensure that child's safety.

Whilst limited or no communication between the school and a family was reported to raise levels of concern and fear amongst school staff, one of the schools noted that these concerns were often a result of the school not having up to date contact information for families.

> **School Staff 27:** I could have probably have-written a very accurate list of the families that we would struggle to contact and they are the ones that are forever changing their mobile numbers and haven't given us an email address and some have been very challenging to track down… and ultimately you fear that something is wrong but in the vast majority of cases it is just that they have changed their mobile number and haven't let us know.

One of the schools noted that the some of their families were difficult to contact due to the school not having up to date contact details for the families. Two of the participating schools reported the initial use of ParentPay to contact parents as the system held parent email address, with schools asking for and collating up to date telephone numbers for parents via the ParentPay system.

From the perspective of the schools, the telephone communication between the school and families was seen as positive and schools believed that the telephone communication supported the maintenance and development of relationships. Whilst the telephone was used in the 'normal' academic year, telephone communication was not used to the same extent that it was during the pandemic due to schools and families typically communicating in-person.

> **School Staff 28:** It has been quite positive, a lot of ours have really appreciated it they weren't expecting us to call I don't think and when I have I speak to both parents and child and I think that has helped both parent and child, and the child has had the boost as cause they have spoken to someone from school it is quite a nice thing to have I have suppose, a lot of the parents were appreciative of the phone calls so I think it has helped strengthen the relationship between school and home.

> **School Staff 25:** The parents' involvement was defensive and they have realised now we are not there to criticise, there is a support network, we are there for them, it has made the relationships between staff and parents stronger.

The school-family communication was seen to be appreciated by the parents although one school noted that parents were initially defensive which could have been due to parents feeling a sense of schools encroaching on their home lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the school-home boundaries become blurred, with telephone calls to home and videoconferencing teaching breaking down the physical walls between the school and home. Nonetheless, the regular telephone communication between the school and parents was reported to have received positive feedback from the parents with schools feeling the parents felt a sense of appreciation for the calls. As noted earlier, the phone calls were not necessarily educational in their nature but were a method used to check on how families were doing and to ensure child wellbeing and safety.

9.4 COVID-19 School Closures: Teaching and Learning through a Pandemic

The national closure of school buildings resulted in a rapid response by schools to provide learning for children at home via alternative methods whether this was online or via home learning packs. All three schools listed the ways in which they supported children's learning at home using online systems. The systems used included Google Classroom, Seesaw and Microsoft Teams. However, all schools also noted the use of paper alternatives primarily referred to as home learning packs which were used to reach students that faced challenges accessing online systems and resources. Similar to during the academic year [see Chapter 7] educational information was disseminated to parents at an individual and whole-school level. Whilst whole-school or whole-class level information was provided through the uploading of work online or the distribution of home learning packs, parents were also informed of educational information and provided with support for educational engagement through telephone calls.

Two schools noted how the pre-existing use of online learning at school allowed the school and children to quickly move to online learning and this supported the children to be relatively independent.

> **School Staff 26:** So we were already set up on Google Classroom and the children know how to use it and are very independent with Google Classroom, so we were in a good position from day one to start learning at home.

> **School Staff 28:** So the children use it all the time in school, they all have a QR code which allows them to get on their classroom Seesaw and through there they can chat to us… work is uploaded on there so we can see what they have been up to.

This prior use of online learning within the school meant that schools could upload content online in a relatively fast manner and the school staff and children could both use and were familiar with the systems. However, unlike two of the participating schools a different school noted a lack of digital infrastructure in the school noting the pandemic had highlighted this was a school-level area of weakness.

> **School Staff 24:** Our IT resources are very minimal and very basic and out-dated and I think that investment in IT has to be one of our priorities coming back and we have already got some plans and ideas for that but also then to continue that investment process and I think that is one area that we will have to change.

The school reported their basic and out-dated IT equipment impacted their ability to transition to online learning and the school suggested that their school staff and children may have found the transition to online learning within the home a greater challenge than those with prior experience of accessing and using these systems. Nevertheless, all participating schools noted there was limited engagement in online learning activities and work set by the school which could be attributed to factors such as digital exclusion and low levels digital literacy and confidence.

9.4.1 Digital Exclusion

Whilst all schools noted the use of different materials to support the diverse range of students in their schools, the issues of digital deprivation and the digital exclusion of children from less affluent backgrounds was evident. Schools reported concerns over families not having access to the internet or an appropriate device to complete educational work on which resulted in lower levels of engagement from those families. One of the participating schools estimated that approximately one third of their families did not have access to a device.

> **School Staff 28:** To be fair I think the internet and having access to devices is quite a big thing, I do know a lot of families have asked for home learning and I don't know if they have done them, they've taken them but we can only physically see what they have been

doing online but we haven't been able to see what they have been doing at home on the paper side.

School Staff 27: A lot of our families wouldn't have internet connection at home and lots of them only have phones and they say the screens are too small to see or do anything and some just don't have the technology to do it.

School Staff 26: We are able to do lots online the problem was we were having really low levels of engagement… we found out 160 families didn't have a device, so you know it is a massive amount really.

Not only did limited or no access to digital devices and the internet inhibit children's access to learning activities set by the school online, but also other online learning resources such as BBC Bitesize and My Maths. Research on inequalities of opportunities in the summer holidays indicates that children from lower-socioeconomic families can miss out on opportunities to participate in enrichment activities due to families being unable to afford meeting the costs of activities (CPAG, 2017). The physical lockdown and financial constraints of the pandemic could have also contributed to parents not having the means or access to purchase physical educational items or activities for their children to complete in the home. The findings suggest that children from lower SES backgrounds have not only experienced inequalities in opportunities to access school-set online educational content. But children also may have experienced inequalities in opportunities to participate in enrichment activities which is likely to have had a further adverse impact on the educational inequalities gap.

Nevertheless, schools attempted to mitigate the harms of digital deprivation by providing families with home learning packs and loaned out digital devices. One school reported loaning devices to families in the school in an attempt to overcome unequal access to learning opportunities and noted how their LA provided the school with devices for re-distribution to families. The school reported the distribution of devices contributed to the school recognising different names on the online system.

School Staff 26: Since we provided devices, we have loaned out devices from school and we have also been loaned devices form the LA to share with families now we have had an increase in family members getting online and children completing work… I am seeing different names now from where children have obviously got devices… there are

lots who aren't at the moment, so engagement rates vary from about 40-60% so there is still some way to go.

School Staff 28: It is very very random, some weeks we will have quite a bit on there and some it will be completely nothing on there, umm my class teacher had a really big stress one week because she said nobody was doing anything on there … it is very very hit and miss on ours, we did try and take away from working and put up challenges up that wasn't, they didn't really interact with that either, it is very very hit and miss with the work side of things.

School Staff 27: We went very much down the line of trying to use the online platforms that's what we felt was best, but the engagement wasn't great… speaking to parents after our first round of telephone calls it became apparent quite quickly that they wanted paper and pens and that's when we then we produced learning packs.

Whilst the school above noted an increase in online engagement after devices were loaned to families there was still a long way to go in terms of overall engagement, with the school estimating that only 40-60% of children participated in the online learning. Moreover, home learning packs were not re-collected by the school meaning there was no measurement of their engagement or understanding of how children were progressing academically. The provision of learning packs to families were seen as an attempt to overcome limited or no access to digital devices but it is unknown to schools the extent to which the learning packs were completed as engagement in the learning packs was not measured. The closures of schools arguably highlighted the digital divide between children from more and less affluent families. Whilst this divide would have been evident during a normal schooling year and may have impacted children's access to additional academic content and homework, as online learning was one of the primary methods of home learning during the pandemic it has arguably exacerbated pre-existing educational inequalities.

The longer-term impacts of the pandemic and school closures on the education attainment gap were considered by two of the participating schools. One of the schools noted that those who would be considered to already be educationally struggling are likely to be those who are most affected. Whereas it was believed that those considered average or above would be able to catch up on lost learning quickly upon return to school.

School Staff 27: I don't think that personally we will see a huge decrease in educational levels apart from maybe the very very weak ones may have taken a step back but the average middle of the road children and above will just get on with it, and catch up quickly.

School Staff 26: I think the [attainment] gap will have widened between schools as I said there have been children who have been completing lots of work for a long time and others that haven't done anything or have only just started cause they've now got devices so the gap is already widening with the school but if you compare schools with more affluent peers will have increased even further because a lot of those children might have had positive experiences and supported with their learning whereas a lot of ours haven't.

The schools implied that the children may not have learnt the same amount of academic content that they would have if they had been in the school building however the effects of the pandemic cannot be mitigated. Nonetheless, one school discussed how they anticipated the attainment gap would widen between the least and most affluent students in the schools as well as between the school in general and more affluent schools. The schools attributed some of the growth in the attainment gap within the school to some families having limited access to digital devices within the home and therefore being unable to complete work online in comparison with more affluent families who were more likely to have had access to devices and the internet from the beginning of the school closures.

The school also considered how their school is in an area of deprivation and children from more affluent areas are likely to have had more positive experiences of the pandemic in comparison with children from their school. Although many enrichment activities would have been closed for periods during the pandemic, children from lower SES families may have had fewer positive experiences then those from higher SES families due to the financial pressures and the consequences this may have had on families and on family dynamics.

Moreover, a member of staff considered how parental engagement with learning within the home during the pandemic could have contributed to growing inequalities between students within their school and between students from more affluent schools. As noted in earlier chapters, parental responsibility and parental determinism have been reoccurring themes in political rhetoric and have arguably contributed towards societal expectations of the extent to

which parents should be involved in their children's learning. The assumption that children from more affluent families and schools would have received greater support with their learning in comparison with children from their school reinforces deficit discourses which suggest that parents are the biggest contributing factor in children's educational outcomes. The pandemic has arguably forced greater pressure on parents to conform to the societal expectations imposed on them as learning has primarily been undertaken in the home under the supervision of parents or guardians. Parental engagement with learning during the pandemic has the potential for further stigmatisation to be placed on parents who do not engage in their children's learning at home. Some of the school staff placed blame on parents for children not meeting national level academic expectations and attributed parents limited engagement to potential increases in the attainment gap. There was arguably little consideration of the structural conditions which may have affected children, families and parents' abilities to engage in learning within the home during the pandemic.

9.4.2 Parental Engagement with Learning Within the Home

Although the data from the follow-up interviews discussed home-school relationships and children's learning within the home, there is limited discussion around parental engagement with learning during the pandemic. One school discussed the positives of parental engagement in terms of the impact it had on parental confidence and parent self-efficacy.

> **School Staff 27:** Mum to be fair has gone above and beyond with the home learning and she has said she is thinking of going back to college, she really enjoyed it… you expect the worse and plan for the worst but I expect there are many kids, lots of the kids who we consider vulnerable actually have embraced being at home and without the added stress of getting them dressed, coming to school in an environment that they are anxious about, they have been a lot healthier at home.

Parents arguably took a greater role in their children's learning during the pandemic and the school staff above noted how some parent embraced supporting their children's learning. Spear et al (2022) posits that parents moved from supporting their children's learning at home through assistance or general support with activities to parents being integral to the learning process during the pandemic. This new form of involvement/ engagement has been conceptualised as "parental participation in schooling" (Spear et al., 2021;14) whereby parents enable access to learning resources and/or participate in supervising or completing set learning activities.

The was a school-level recognition of the pressures that had been placed on parents in relation to home learning. For many parents it is likely that the methods or techniques for teaching certain subjects have changed since they attended school and therefore this could pose a challenge.

> **School Staff 25:** It is a lot put on them so the fact they are trying is really good, and like I said to them the way of teaching different subjects is different to when they were in school, so don't beat yourself up, there has been packs with information on for parents, like how to do problem solving and things... I think it's the communication between teachers and parents keeping them together and letting them know that it is okay and if there is any problems getting that done.

Schools noted that parents were communicating and trying to support their children's learning at home, and the school staff above is arguably praising parents for the extent to which they tried to communicate and engage, with the school using verbal positive reinforcement to show the parents they were doing okay. The school noted providing parents with information packs which included explanations on how to support their child's learning with certain activities however it is unclear how useful or effective these information packs were for parents. Although parental engagement is potentially lead by the parent, there was limited two-way dialogue between parents and the school on how best parents believed they could support their children's learning within the home or what information or help parents would have liked to have received from the school to further support their understandings of content or learning methodologies.

Interestingly, school staff believed that parents' perceptions of the role of a teacher altered, and parents' appreciation of the teaching profession increased due to parents' experiences of supporting their children's learning at home during the pandemic.

> **School Staff 28:** I mean the amount of people when we have spoken to them have said I don't know how people do it, how people in schoolwork and how you actually teach 30 different children with 30 different needs and keep them all going and keep them all sane… I think some people think teachers and teaching assistants go in teach, do whatever and go home but there is much more to it than that, it is not as easy as that.

> **School Staff 25:** I think they have all said it has been an eye opener, I think the respect level for teaching is stronger by parents, they have now had that experience I think they value our role in a different way now.

Emerging research around the learning during the pandemic suggests that the communication required to facilitate learning at home forged positive connections between school and parents (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). A small-scale online quantitative survey in the USA indicated that almost half of the parents interviewed (n=23) reported understanding the demands of a teacher to a greater extent and indicating an increase in their respect for the profession, supporting the findings in this research (Stelmach, 2020). Nonetheless, the study had a low number of respondents and there is currently limited evidence within the field to show how parents' perceptions of the teaching profession may have altered. This research indicates parents' own experiences of home schooling during the pandemic could have contributed towards parents understanding the complexity of the teaching role and changed parents' perceptions on the value of the role.

In terms of the content of learning, schools highlighted how they encouraged families to partake in enrichment and learning activities as well as traditional learning activities associated to the curriculum. Two of the schools reported dedicating mornings to academic learning and afternoons to more practical learning and enrichment activities.

> **School Staff 24:** Those children who aren't actually in the hub and those that do go to the hub, they are working in the morning, they do their work set by the school and then in the afternoon they will do a more open set of tasks with wellbeing, creativity, with practical experiences and that is the system… we set timetables and again generally it will be language and numeracy in the morning, in the afternoons again they are more practical engaging in family activities, gardening, maybe stick stuff on the wall, maybe doing some chores, maybe learning to bake.

> **School Staff 27:** I have sent out to the parents… give them practical ideas and take them down to the beach, take them for a walk, learning, cooking changing a wheel all those types of things, just play a game with them you know but the reality is you know some families just don't value education you know.

One participating school encouraged learning beyond academic learning to include practical activities such as cooking, gardening, playing a game or baking. Whilst these activities are not seen as academic in their nature, nor nationally defined measurement of learning they provide learning opportunities particularly in relation to the development of key life skills such as cooking or riding a bike. Some families from lower socioeconomic areas often have highly

localised lives, and families' aspirations for their child are often associated with the needs of the local community and the development of skills which are valued in their local environment (Wheeler, 2018). As noted in Chapter 7, parents were seen to equally value academic and informal learning activities which is also evidenced here as the learning opportunities listed above are not directly in line with the curriculum but are valued in line with academic learning. Research indicates that often the values of working-class families and school may not align and therefore home and school cultures may be at odds with one another creating misunderstandings and tensions (Auerbach, 2007). However, participating schools' encouragement of these informal learning opportunities shows understanding of the values of the families they serve and could further enhance family-school relationships and support wider learning outcomes.

9.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter aimed to explore how home-school relationships were maintained and parental engagement with children's learning was supported when national lockdowns were first imposed and face-to-face learning within the school ceased (between March and June of 2020). Whilst the majority of school students were provided with educational content to complete within the home, whether this was online or through paperwork packs, the participating schools all reported collaborating with schools in their local areas to establish educational hub systems for children classified as vulnerable by The Welsh Government. The vulnerability identification process for children accessing the education hub provision raised concerns in terms of how vulnerability was defined. The guidelines were viewed as strict by two of the participating schools, and the stringent application process was viewed as a barrier to parents accessing the provision for their children.

Furthermore, the government definition of vulnerability did not encompass all children that the schools would have classified as vulnerable themselves, and therefore did not reach all children or families in need during this period. Due to the levels of deprivation at the participating schools, schools reported the number of children they considered to be vulnerable was far greater than those that were identified using the government definition. This debatably contributed to schools establishing vulnerability lists which often informed the degree to which the school would attempt to contact the family, with those families considered the most vulnerable being contacted on a more frequent basis then those considered less vulnerable. The primary method of communication between the school and home was the telephone, and phone calls between the home and school were primarily seen as an attempt at schools checking on a family's wellbeing more than checking on how the children were educationally progressing. The

pandemic saw the boundaries between the home and school, as well as the roles of school staff and parents become blurred. The home environment became one of learning whereby parents were required to adopt more of an educational role than they may have done previously, and school staff were seen to adopt more of a social care role by providing families with support in relation to their social needs and offering pastoral care.

Whilst the school staff reported supporting the social needs of their families on a daily basis, the support needed by families and children was arguably exacerbated during the pandemic with schools acting as one of the main service delivery mechanisms for families. Moreover, it is important to note that data for the chapter were collected within the first national lockdown, a period of crisis management for schools and families and this is likely to have impacted the nature of the telephone calls to parents. If the data were collected at a later timepoint it could have been likely school- parent communication would have been more educational in its nature as schools and families would have had time to digest and adjust to the implemented lockdowns and school closures.

In addition, unlike in Chapter 6 where support staff were seen to play a cultural brokerage role between families and the school, classroom teachers were involved in contacting parents which could have strengthened home-school relationships further. Whilst it was recognised that support staff often play a key role in communicating and connecting with parents in the typical academic year, the pandemic saw teaching staff communicating with parents to a greater extent. Though support staff are typically seen to have capacity in their role and greater understandings of the assets and challenges faced by families, the pandemic arguably created a sense of common ground between staff and parents as well as teachers having more capacity in their workload to connect with families. Although experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic are individual and differing greatly, it was still a commonality shared by all which arguably reduced the power and social class imbalance which can hinder teaching staff-parent communication.

In terms of parental engagement, there was limited direct discussion around parental engagement with children's learning during the pandemic which could be attributed to the school's primary focus on supporting the wellbeing and the social needs of the families at this time. However, unlike in previous chapters where school staff had negative views on the levels of parental engagement at their school, in the follow-up data schools recognised the challenges of parents supporting their children's learning within the home and even praised some parents' engagement. Interestingly, it was also reported that school staff believed parents had a greater respect for the complexity of their role as a teacher through their own experience of teaching their children at

home which could have a positive impact on parent-teacher relations moving on from the pandemic. Nonetheless, one major barrier to children's learning within the home and parents support of this learning was digital deprivation and digital exclusion. Digital exclusion was considered by all the participating schools, and despite schools' providing digital resources and paperwork packs to children, digital exclusion was recognised as having longer-term impacts on the educational attainment gap.

10. Discussion

10.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning from a multiple informant perspective. Central to this thesis has been a desire to understand further how poverty, vulnerability and stigmatisation impact families' educational experiences, families' interactions and relationships with schools and the education system more broadly as well as parents' involvement and engagement. This chapter will reflect findings presented within chapters 6-9, linking these to literature discussed within chapters 2-4. The research questions were as follows:

1) What methods are schools adopting to involve and engage parents in schooling and learning?

2) What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in children's schooling and parental engagement with children's learning in areas of deprivation?

3) How do children, parents and school staff in deprived areas describe their interactions and relationships with one another?

4) To what extent can home-school relationships, parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning reduce socioeconomic inequalities in wellbeing and educational outcomes?

5) To what extent, and via what mechanisms is an intervention focused on family engagement within the informal school environment perceived to influence parental involvement and engagement and contribute towards any longer-term educational, health or mental health improvements for children or families?

This chapter will provide an understanding of how the research questions have been explored and addressed in this thesis. Section 10.2 will provide an overview of findings and discuss how the thesis supports understandings of how parental involvement and parental engagement may impact children's education and health outcomes through a socioecological lens. Sections 10.2.1-10.2.8 will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions. This is followed by a reflection on the theoretical approach (Section 10.3), research design and methodology (Section

10.3.1) before policy and practice recommendations will be made (Section 10.4). The thesis concludes with a summary of the findings (Section 10.5).

10.2 Overview of Findings

Chapters 6 and 7 focused on understanding parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning for parents from lower SES backgrounds. Findings in these chapters highlighted the importance of schools' open-door policies, the daily social exchanges between parents and school staff and the development of effective communication between schools and families. Chapter 6 also included the mapping of involvement/ engagement events and activities onto a 'parental involvement and engagement formality typology' [Figure 5: Chapter 6]. Both chapters explored how limited involvement and engagement are often attributed to parents' individual characteristics with parents often facing 'othering' if they do not conform to what is deemed as normative by the school and middle-class ideologies. However, this thesis has attempted to illustrate how parents' involvement and engagement are constrained by wider structural conditions.

Chapter 8 provided an overview of how SHEP was implemented. The chapter presented quantitative findings outlining the socioeconomic composition of the schools recruited for the programme to show reach and representativeness of the participating schools at each wave of implementation. These were presented alongside qualitative findings which provided further understanding of how schools recruited families for the SHEP (i.e. a proportionate universal approach). Chapter 8 also discussed the benefits of attending the programme and examined the extent to which families' involvement in a summer holiday programme implemented within the informal school environment could affect parents' involvement in schooling. The final empirical chapter discussed the maintenance of school-home relationships during the pandemic, the classification of vulnerable students, and addressed the ways in which schools attempted to mitigate some of the harms of the school closures on children and young people. These discussions were not limited to educational support but considered how schools provide social and emotional support to families. Whilst both chapter 8 and 9 focused on timepoints when schools were closed, the findings are not specific to these timepoints and have broader applicability to parental involvement and parental engagement with schools and learning at any timepoint.

10.2.1 Situating the Thesis: Understanding how Socioecological Frameworks can support Understandings of Parental Involvement with Schools and Parental Engagement with Learning

This thesis has connected literature focusing on how societal structures, cultures and expectations, and parental agency interact to influence parents' involvement in their children's schooling and parents' engagement in their children's learning and subsequently how this effects their children's outcomes. Socioecological approaches are fundamental to understanding and contextualising the family unit within a wider set of influences which interact and influence one another to affect a range of children's outcomes. To analyse a child's development, it is arguably key to move beyond solely analysing the impact of a child's immediate environment (school and home) to considering how the broader social, political and cultural environments influence their outcomes as well as interact with components of their immediate environment to influence their outcomes. Bronfenbrenner (1977) posits there are five environmental layers which interact with one another; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem (Paquette and Ryan, 2001).

Consideration of the socioecological approach can also support our understandings of health in relation to broader contexts rather than understanding health as a static attribute of an individual (McLaren and Hawe, 2005; Pearce et al., 2016). As with much educational and health inequalities literature, behaviourist approaches are often presented to explain the existence and persistence of inequalities in society. For example, health risk behaviours can be attributed to negative health outcomes (Pearce et al, 2016) and poor educational outcomes have often been associated with limited parental involvement and parental engagement as a result of parent choice or parental deficiencies. This thesis has considered the context in which families live and has analysed how the broader levels of socioecological framework interact and influence one another to affect all aspect of children's and families' lives. Societal expectations, community resources, families' personal circumstances and parents' educational histories all combine to impact parents' potential to engage in their children's learning and therefore impact their children's outcomes.

The complex interactive relationship between health and education has been well documented (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Langford et al., 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2015), and the school as a setting is viewed as fundamental to education and health promotion (Langford et al, 2015). The World Health Organisations (WHO) Health Promoting Schools Framework encourages a settings approach to health promotion in schools, with the aim of strengthening individual and collective empowerment (John-Akinola and Nic Gabhainn, 2015). A positive psycho-social

school environment and the establishment of strong links between schools, families and the community can positively affect school-level and individual-level mental health and wellbeing as well as a school's overall educational attainment (Patton et al., 2000; WHO, 2003). Nevertheless, family involvement in school-based health interventions has been reported to be relatively low with studies often noting challenges in involving parents (Langford et al., 2014). This thesis has therefore examined parental involvement and parental engagement with the SHEP programme as well as in schools and learning more broadly, to understand their potential impact on educational and health outcomes.

10.2.2 Understanding Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement for Parents from Lower-Socioeconomic Status Backgrounds

Understanding how parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds involve and engage themselves in their children's schooling and learning, as well as understanding the facilitators and barriers to this involvement and engagement were fundamental to this research. For this reason, schools were specifically recruited from areas of deprivation in Wales [See section 8.2 for further details of school-level socioeconomic composition], which was made possible through the use of SHEP as a case study in this research. The research highlighted that parental involvement in the SHEP holiday programme and in schooling more generally had perceived benefits for both children and parents, with these positives including increased psycho-social outcomes for children and increased opportunities for families to make memories through partaking in enrichment activities. Nonetheless, the research indicated there can be unintended consequences of parental involvement events for children as limited participation by families who face challenges with involvement in schools can contribute towards increasing inequalities, as the intended benefits are not being experienced universally. Therefore, arguably these events and activities have the potential to exacerbate rather than reduce socioeconomic inequalities in wellbeing and education outcomes.

All participants within the research indicated a range of different ways in which parents were involved in their children's schooling or engaged in their children's learning [see Table 9, Chapter 6]. However, the extent to which parents noted being involved and engaging in their children's learning did not align with school-level perceptions indicating a mismatch in findings. Whilst school staff recognised that some parents did try to involve or engage themselves in their children's schooling or learning, some school staff attributed a lack of involvement or engagement to parents' personal characteristics ignoring the broader structural and societal factors which can act as barriers to involvement and engagement. In the baseline interview data,

when engagement in learning within the home was discuss by school staff, parents limited engagement in learning was attributed to parents' decisions or characteristics in 3 out of the 6 school staff interviews.

This mismatch in claims of involvement and engagement by parents and school staff will be discussed further below.

Although schools were seen to put on a range of activities for families to attend, often these school-led activities or events would provide limited or no opportunities for meaningful parental involvement. For example, events such as parents' evenings or meetings with school staff involved educational information being distributed to parents by schools on a child's educational position or deficiencies, with limited or no input from the parent requested. In line with previous literature, the parental involvement activities reported in this research were often tokenistic in their nature and required limited or no opportunities for parental engagement or involvement in decision-making processes (Hingle et al., 2010; Inchley et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2015; Torres and Simovska, 2017).

Moreover, when school events were put on solely for parents and were intended to engage parents in the school or provide learning opportunities for parents, there was similarly no discussion with parents around what events could be beneficial or enjoyable for them. This lack of communication and failure to consider parental input was not only seen to contribute towards low participation levels but could be seen to be stigmatising towards parents and damaging to existing relationships as schools were seen to assume parents required some form of training within a certain area. On the other hand, events at school which were viewed as 'fun' and non-threatening in their nature typically yielded higher participation levels (i.e. sports day). Whilst these events may not have educational elements they can promote family-school relationships and contribute to parents becoming comfortable within the schooling environment.

As presented by Goodall and Montgomery (2014), the model for the progression from parental involvement in school to parental engagement with learning can be understood as a continuum which is related to changes in relational agency between schools and parents. The pandemic saw parents' roles in their children's education arguably become heightened with parents becoming integral to their child's learning process (Spear et al, 2022). This increase in parental responsibility saw a need for greater parental engagement with learning, and debatably saw parents move from supporting their children's learning within the home to parents becoming a key part of the learning process in a term which was conceptualised as "parental participation in schooling" (Spear et al 2022; 14). Whilst socioeconomic differences in parental engagement with learning

during the pandemic were evident, schools adopted less of a deficit approach to socioeconomic differences in parental engagement and recognised the challenges parents faced at this difficult time. Moreover, school staff believed parents had a greater respect for the complexity of their role as a teacher from their experiences of supporting their child's learning at home during the pandemic, which could have a positive impact on parent-teacher relations moving forward.

In addition, schools tended to place a greater emphasis on supporting parents and families with their social and wellbeing needs rather than pressuring parents to support children's learning, which could be attributed to schools' concerns of families' vulnerability during the difficult pandemic period. Whilst literature has suggested that schools can be resistant to engage in health promotion due to perceptions of a "zero-sum game", and schools' core mission of increasing educational attainment (Bonell et al., 2014; Littlecott et al., 2018a), it was evident in the pandemic that schools' primary focus was on supporting the social and wellbeing needs of families.

Nonetheless, schools recognised there were challenges to parents supporting their children's learning including digital deprivation, changes in learning techniques since they have been at school or parents having complex relationships with schools and the education system in general. Whilst schools were seen to communicate with parents and reinforce positive engagement, as with much parental involvement and engagement literature there was limited parental input on how best supporting their child's learning could be achieved.

10.2.3 Understanding Parental Involvement with Schools as a means of Providing Enrichment Opportunities and Memory Making

One of the key findings from this research was the importance of parental involvement opportunities in schools providing families with enrichment opportunities and the opportunity to make memories. School staff recognised the importance of parental involvement events at schools, particularly for families from more deprived backgrounds, as research shows there is often unequal access to and limited participation in enrichment activities for families from more deprived backgrounds (Stewart et al., 2018). Events that were regarded as having parental engagement opportunities and that were less formal in their nature were typically well attended by families in comparison with more formal school events. As Campbell (2011) noted in their research, informal schooling events such as sports days are typically well attended by families as they are not threatening in their nature and require limited or no involvement in formal learning.

The SHEP is an example of a parental involvement and parental engagement event which provided an opportunity for children and parents to partake in enrichment activities and create

memories. Enrichment activities are understood as activities which pose an opportunity for children to engage in learning in real-world settings (Miller and Gentry, 2010; Washington-Nortey, 2017). Engagement in enrichment activities have been seen to be socioeconomically differentiated and therefore the SHEP arguably provided children from lower SES backgrounds greater opportunities to partake in enrichment opportunities. Whilst the participants in this thesis did not see the enrichment activities as educational in their nature, events including visiting local police stations and having talks from local organisation such as the RNLI on water safety have educational elements. Children experiencing poverty can often experience poverty shaming at school, and these learning opportunities were also seen as opportunities for children and families to make memories and have positive summer holiday experiences which have the potential to be shared with peers upon returning to school. The holiday club arguably provided children with something to do, whether this was something new, something they had done before, or something educational and this was seen as positive in itself.

The SHEP programme shows a unique opportunity whereby the school building and school staff are used outside of term time and in a less formal manner. The less formal environment and the provision of enrichment activities supported children and families to experience new things and create memories, with parents recognising how these events produced both memories as well as physical keepsakes for themselves and their families. Fun family events such as SHEP were viewed positively by all participants and were seen to create positive experiences for parents within the formal school building which could strengthen home-school relationships and parents' comfort levels within the school building and environment. However, it is key to consider the cost of additional schooling events for children and families. Whilst some events are free, some cost money to attend and some have hidden costs such as having to purchase an outfit or purchasing a food item at school which reduces the potential for children from poorer families to participate in the event or activity.

10.2.4 The Cultivation of Positive Home-School Relationships

The cultivation of positive home-school relationships were highlighted as key to supporting parental involvement in schooling and parental engagement in learning, and one of the overarching perceived benefits of parental involvement events was the development of home-school relationships. The importance of the presence of school staff at the beginning and end of the school day, and these opportunities for informal daily-social exchanges were seen as key to the development of trust and positive home-school relationships in line with previous literature (Bryk and Schneider, 2003). Whilst an Estyn (2009) report highlighted open-door policies in

schools in Wales varied, which was also evident within this research, these findings indicated schools valued open-door policies. The informal daily-social exchanges within the playground or at reception alongside more formal meetings or events at schools were seen to act as an opportunity for the exchanging of key information as well as opportunities for parents and school staff to become familiar with one another. Moreover, the daily social exchanges and the parental engagement activities offered at the SHEP offered parents an opportunity to communicate with school staff within a less formal schooling environment and in a less formal manner which was seen to be positive for relationship building. Nonetheless, a consistent finding across the research was that whilst the informal daily exchanges offered informal communication opportunities and saw parents often offload key pieces of information to schools, formal events in the academic term tended to be school-led and provided limited opportunities for parental input but rather just required parent attendance.

The removal of the day-to-day, face-to-face contact between parents and schools raised initial concerns for school staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all participating schools altered their communication methods with parents, and primarily used telephone calls to communicate with parents and maintain relationships. The removal of daily social exchanges where parents offload key information to schools could have posed challenges however phone calls offered opportunities for school staff to conduct wellbeing checks and check families were coping mentally, socially and educationally. The findings indicated that the frequency of contact between schools and families was often dependent upon the extent to which the school viewed the child or family as vulnerable, with those being viewed as most vulnerable being contacted on a more frequent basis. Phone calls were a different form of communication to what is typically used in the academic year, however schools believed that parents appreciated this form of communication when schools were closed. Boundaries between the school and home arguably became blurred during the pandemic and the rules which typically operate within these spaces also became blurred (Fontichiaro and Stephens, 2021). Whilst this arguably added additional pressure on families, school communication with families tended not to focus on ensuring educational work had been completed but checking on families' wellbeing during that difficult period.

Whilst the data collected around the pandemic only included the voices of school staff, these participants perceived the phone calls to not be overbearing but rather saw the phone calls as creating dialogue between the home and school, building a level of trust and support between schools and parents (Spear, 2022). The home environment also became one of learning whereby parents were required to adopt more of an educational role than they may have done previously,

and school staff were seen to adopt more of a social care role by providing families with support in relation to their social needs. Nonetheless, in terms of communication methods adopted, as with parent-school communication in the term time, there was limited evidence of parental input in what communication methods and tools would be most effective to communicate with families during this period. Whilst some parents requested hard paper copies of work rather than online provision for their children during the pandemic these conversations tended to be a response to how the schools decided to provide distant learning, rather than an example of a more two-way and inclusive conversation around how parents and schools could work together to support children's learning through a distanced manner.

10.2.5 Importance of Support Staff in De-coding the Dominant School Culture

Often educational research which has focused on the relationship between child wellbeing and child-school relationships has tended to see 'school staff' as solely teachers ignoring the importance of support roles within the school (Littlecott et al, 2018). However, findings from this research showed that support staff played a fundamental role in supporting children and parents with pastoral support. Moreover, support staff played a key cultural brokerage role, bridging the gap between the school and families (McCann and Neville, 2013). Previous research suggests that support staff are often viewed to be best equipped to deal with problematic situations that arise within the school building as they have the capacity within their workload and established rapport with students (Littlecott et al, 2018). These findings further supported this view as parents noted that support staff often had the capacity to provide one-to-one support whether this was related to wellbeing or behaviour (Littlecott et al, 2018).

However, the findings showed that support staff also played a key role in the decoding of schools' messages to parents (Littlecott et al, 2018). Support staff were seen to use their knowledge of the assets and challenges parents faced to support parents and were seen to use alternative communication techniques to connect with parents. For example, support staff were seen to implement individualised strategies to communicate key information with parents including transmitting formal written school knowledge verbally to ensure parental understanding. Support staff arguably are also more likely to live in closer proximity to the school, and therefore are likely to have a greater knowledge or have a good level of understanding of the needs of the local community and the families the school serves. This level of understanding as well as a sense of relatability and similarity between support staff and parents could break down power imbalances which typically exist within the schooling arena.

Within society, individuals have a place within a social space and are located within a number of hierarchised fields or institutional arenas (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Within the education system, schoolteachers hold a form of symbolic capital and power placing them in a prestigious position within the field which can be intimating for some parents, perhaps particularly those from lower SES backgrounds who may not be familiar with the arena or the habitus (Durand and Secakusuma, 2019). Whilst support staff still hold some form of symbolic power within the field, their position within the educational arena and the community arena enables support staff to transcend the cultural boundaries that exist between home and school. Support staff can contribute to the creation of an environment whereby families feel comfortable and safe and they can attempt to decode the dominant school culture to families within their local area (Ishimaru et al, 2016; Martinez-Cosio and Iannacne, 2007). The role of support staff as cultural brokers and their role in the development of home-school relationships in areas of deprivation could be explored further.

Interestingly, findings from this research which focused on the COVID-19 pandemic found that teachers played a greater communication role during this period as it was reported that it was primarily teachers that ensured regular contact with the students within their own class. This communication with families was arguably seen to increase teachers' understandings of the communities and the families that they serve. Whilst in the typical academic year, findings suggested that support staff were seen to play more of a cultural brokerage role than teaching staff, throughout the pandemic teaching staff were the main communicators with children and families. Whilst experiences of the pandemic varied greatly, the pandemic was a commonality shared by all and perhaps there was a greater sense of similarity of experiences between teaching staff and parents which could have reduced the power imbalances which typically hinder school-parent communications.

10.2.6 Understanding the Deficit Lens and Negative Perceptions of Parents from Lower-Socioeconomic Status Backgrounds

Research often supports the view that parents are one of the most significant contributing factors in a child's education outcomes. Parenting and parental involvement are influenced by the interplay between parents genes and families social environments (Horwitz and Neiderhiser, 2011). However, often recognition of this interplay is ignored in favour of blame being placed on parent's and their deficiencies if their child is not academically 'achieving' (Thompson et al., 2004). For example, there is evidence in this research of blame placed on parents if their child was at a lower academic level then the national average for the age of their child. Across the

empirical chapters there was an unjust stigmatisation of parents who do not participate in schooling events or engage in their children's learning, with school staff and parents attributing limited involvement and engagement to parents' personal characteristics. Findings highlighted that whilst parents and children discussed parental involvement and engagement in their children's learning, school staff reported lower levels of involvement and engagement highlighting a clear distinction between perspectives.

Moreover, the research highlighted there was clear distinction established between what was deemed a legitimate reason and a non-legitimate reason to not attend a school event, with work commitments primarily being viewed as the only legitimate reason for non-attendance. The idea that work commitments are primarily the only legitimate reason to not attend school events is shaped by and perpetuates middle-class ideologies as well as reinforces individualist ideals (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019). Negative language was used to discuss parents' limited involvement and engagement throughout the findings with statements such as "they just aren't interested" being made in relation to parents.

In addition, parents tended to have negative perceptions of 'other' parents and discussed 'other' parents not involving or engaging, or 'other' parents facing certain challenges or difficulties. Nonetheless, prior research has found often 'othering' by parents is used to deflect from parents own personal experiences due to emotional difficulties discussing direct experiences. Third person talk can provide individuals with psychological distance from direct experiences but allows them to discuss experiences or challenges they may be personally facing (Moser et al., 2017). Therefore, when parents discussed the challenges 'other' parents faced in their day-to-day lives or with schooling and the educational system they may have been referencing their own personal experiences.

As discussed in the literature review, neo-liberalist thought and political rhetoric often turn the victims of poverty into being responsible agents of their own injury and position in society (Jones and McCormack, 2016). Limited parental involvement with schools or engagement in learning was sometimes attributed to parental choice, and parents choosing not to involve or engage themselves. Although parents often cannot involve or engage themselves for multiple reasons, they subsequently face another barrier to involvement or engagement which is stigmatisation by school staff and other parents. Whilst this research found that the COVID-19 pandemic enlightened many teachers and school staff to the challenges faced by children and families on a daily basis through the home-school communication and the media, there is still a need for further training and education for teachers on understanding the impacts of poverty on

families as well as the on the importance of schools in supporting families experiencing poverty and vulnerability in their lives.

10.2. 7 Schools as Community Hubs

The SHEP is an example of how the school setting can be used for additional purposes, which pose benefits for children and families in their communities. The secondary data analysis in Chapter 8 [see Table 10, Figures 1 and 2] provides an understanding of the socioeconomic composition of the schools participating in the programme. This analysis was key to understanding the levels of deprivation within the participating schools and understanding the school-level recruitment processes which are fundamental to supporting understandings on what grounds schools identified a family as needing support during the summer holidays.

The findings indicated that when the clusters of SHEP schools were compared with matched clusters of non-SHEP schools, SHEP schools a had higher percentage of school-level FSM entitled and 3 of the 4 SHEP clusters had considerably lower KS2 educational outcomes at the point of programme implementation suggesting reasons why schools may have opted to participate in the programme. At the school recruitment-level, schools tended to adopt proportionate universal recruitment approaches whereby schools would invite certain families to participate in the programme as schools believed the programme would be beneficial for a child or family but all children in the school or a cohort of children (i.e. set year groups) were invited to attend to avoid stigmatisation. Consideration of the socioeconomic composition of the schools and the family recruitment processes adopted by the schools were fundamental to this research, as this showed how the research supports the unearthing of the voices of families from lower socio-economic status backgrounds and aims to provide greater evidence of their experiences with the education system.

The pandemic saw schools act as one of the main service delivery mechanisms at the community level, with schools in deprived areas stepping in to support children and families experiencing poverty and hardship (Moss et al, 2020). Whilst schools do usually provide this support during a typical academic year, due to the reduction of other services, school staff noted supporting families' social and welfare needs further, providing parents with someone to reach out to for reassurance or someone to have a conversation with if they felt alone during the pandemic. Existing state safety nets were not seen to be sufficient and as one of the only public services accessible to children and families, schools stepped in to fill the void and support families' basic needs. Findings show that schools played a key role in supporting families in many aspects of their lives, whether this was schools providing children and parents with social and wellbeing

support or supporting families with accessing material resources or services within their local area. This extension of the role of teachers and schools was noted by school staff and parents in the first round of data collection, however during the COVID-19 pandemic teachers' roles were seen to be further extended.

In terms of school hub provision during the pandemic, vulnerable students were identified by criteria set by the Welsh Government [Section 8.2]. However, one school noted operating with a bit of leeway in terms of sticking to the government set criteria to support parents that may have needed their child to attend school to remain in employment. The school hub provision was seen to not reach all children or families in need and schools created school-level vulnerability lists, which showed that vulnerability in the schools' eyes was much broader than the Welsh Government's definition. Due to the levels of deprivation at the participating schools, schools reported the number of children they considered to be vulnerable was far greater than those that were identified through the government definition. Schools used pre-pandemic knowledge of families' circumstances including understandings of family relationships and understandings of families' financial circumstances to compile their vulnerability lists.

Moreover, the closure of the school building and the invisibility of children raised concerns over child welfare. The school-level vulnerability lists acted as a way of checking on children and families' welfare and wellbeing during the pandemic. However, a one service seen approach was adopted and if there was limited contact between the school and a family a child's welfare would be checked upon by the school, child services or the police. At the school-level there were general concerns around the impact of the pandemic on children, and in particular the impact on the wellbeing of children who were viewed as vulnerable. These concerns were echoed in pandemic related research, whereby emerging ideas suggest that the pandemic is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) in itself, and a traumatic event that is likely to have longer-term implications on the accumulation of risk or harm (Duncan, 2021; Sanders, 2020).

In terms of learning, one of the key challenges for parents experiencing poverty in relation to supporting their children's learning at home was digital deprivation within the home. Digital exclusion was considered by all the participating schools, and although schools provided digital resources and paperwork packs to children, often schools had to make school-level decisions about which students were deemed as vulnerable enough to receive priority access to materials as resources were finite and could not be offered to all. Therefore, whilst schools attempted to support families that may not have had access to a device within the home, or a home that may have had multiple children using one device, it is likely that the issue of digital exclusion is not

only experienced in periods of school closures, but throughout the academic year and therefore has longer-term impacts on the educational attainment gap.

10.2.8 Understanding the Roles of Parental Involvement and Engagement in Educational and Health Inequalities

Throughout the empirical chapters the barriers to parents' involvement in schooling, engagement in learning and the development of home-school relationships were raised. Whilst parental involvement and engagement are socioeconomically differentiated and arguably contribute towards inequalities in education and health outcomes, this research has considered wider influences than solely parents' personal characteristics. The conditions in which children are born and the conditions where early child development occurs dramatically affect educational, employment and social relationship opportunities and outcomes (Marmot, 2017). This research showed that poverty and vulnerability affect all aspects of a child's life and factors such as their access to basic resources, the area in which they live, their interactions with social institutions (i.e schools) and overall family functioning all interact to impact a child's outcomes and life chances (Banovcinova et al., 2014; Johnson, 2010; Wheeler, 2018). Therefore, the consideration of the interaction between all levels of socioecological system on families and their relationships with the education system were central to this research, as factors such as macro-level policies, societal values and expectations of parents, school as an institution and family dynamics all interact to influence children's development and outcomes.

Parent involvement events such as sports days, school assemblies and school plays are universal and therefore all parents are regarded as having an 'equal' opportunity to attend. Research has shown that similar to these events, interventions which are viewed as universal interventions can provide a range of support for families and address inequalities throughout the socio-economic distribution as they are not solely targeting the very poorest (Marmot et al., 2010). However, these events have the potential to exacerbate inequalities, as if parents from lower-SES backgrounds are unable to attend/engage in the events this can contribute towards increasing inequalities, as the intended benefits of the event are not being experienced universally and only experienced by the parents from higher- SES backgrounds. Moreover, findings suggested limited involvement by parents was seen to be psychologically harmful for those children whose parents or family members do not attend school involvement events as children reported experiencing negative feelings if their families were unable to attend.

This research has further highlighted that often children faced inequalities in access to opportunities. Research on inequalities of opportunities in the summer holidays indicate that

children from lower-socioeconomic families can miss out on opportunities to participate in enrichment activities due to families being unable to afford meeting the costs of activities (CPAG, 2017). Findings from this research further supported these claims and highlighted that more generally children from lower SES backgrounds experienced inequalities in opportunities to participate in enrichment activities which is likely to further contribute to the educational inequalities gap. Not only were some families seen to be struggling to find the finances to participate in enrichment activities, but school staff reported that some families had limited access to basic learning resources and materials within the home.

Moreover, school staff suggested that parental engagement with learning within the home during the pandemic could have contributed towards growing inequalities between students within the participating schools and between students from the participating schools and more affluent schools. School staff perceptions of limited engagement from parents within their schools and belief that parents in more affluent schools would engage to a greater extent shows the presence of deficit discourses towards parents from lower-SES backgrounds. Parental responsibility and parental determinism have been reoccurring themes in political rhetoric and have arguably contributed towards societal expectations of the extent to which parents should be involved in their children's learning. The pandemic placed further pressure on parents to conform to these societal expectations imposed on them, as parents were viewed as key facilitators to learning during the pandemic due to children being confined to the home due to national level restrictions.

10.3 Reflections on Theoretical Approach

A key strength of this thesis is the consideration of socioecological frameworks to support understandings of how children's outcomes are shaped and influenced by a wide set of interconnected influences (Bronfenbrenner 1977; Auerbach, 2007; Campbell, 2011). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory has been used to conceptualise children and families within a wider set of influences which include, societal attitudes towards and expectations of parents, availability of health services, the mass media and policy which affect families' everyday lives. The use of this framework has allowed for systematic and multilevel analysis of the context by which children's outcomes are shaped. This is of particular importance when analysing and understanding parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning, as factors which facilitate or impede involvement and engagement are often reported in literature to be related to parents' individual characteristics with limited consideration of wider influences.

Another key feature of the thesis is the use of Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) model for the progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with learning. The model posits that parental involvement and parental engagement run along a continuum meaning that schools may find themselves at several points along the continuum at one single timepoint, as schools may organise a range of activities or events which could be viewed as either involving or engaging parents. This model has supported the conceptualisation of parental involvement and parental engagement, shaped the questions asked in the child, parent and school staff interviews and supported the development of the parental involvement and engagement formality typology in Chapter 6.

The use of the critical realism and a mixed-methods approach have also supported the understanding of multiple realities. The mixed methods approach has allowed for the linking of stories and statistics, and the exploration of multiple perspectives on a phenomenon (Bernhard, 2019). The analysis of school-level FSM entitlement data has provided insight into the socioeconomic composition of the schools participating in the research and the qualitative elements of the study have supported understandings of the complexities of children and family's relationship with the education system (O'Cathain et al., 2007). A central point of critical realism is epistemological realism which argues that reality is not observable but dependent upon perspective. Thus, by exploring multiple perspectives within this research a more in depth understanding of parental involvement with schools, parental engagement with learning and their impact on children's outcomes can be obtained, although the research accepts a direct insight into reality is unattainable.

Moreover, critical realism is interested in understanding the interactions between the structures, agency and mechanisms that exist in society (McEvoy and Richards, 2006; Sayer, 2007) arguably supporting the consideration of socioecological frameworks throughout this thesis. Context and time are considered fundamental components of critical realism as mechanism+ context= outcomes. Therefore, outcomes are viewed as dependent upon the interplay between the mechanisms at work within a specific context (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Houston, 2010). The critical realist stance adopted has supported understandings of how human agency interacts with casual mechanisms and how this is shaped by social, political, educational and economic contexts and structures (Fletcher, 2017).

10.3.1 Reflections on Research Design and Methodology

The Food and Fun: School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) was used as case study for this thesis, although this thesis did not aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the SHEP. The case

study was an infrastructure which could be used to access schools, particularly from areas of disadvantage, as the programme is targeted at schools in areas of deprivation in Wales. The WLGA eligibility denotes that schools must have an FSM eligibility population of over 16% to be included in the programme (WLGA, 2020), and the mean school-level FSM entitlement of the 26 new schools implementing the programme in 2019 was 33.7% although the standard deviation was 15.5% showing variation in the school-level FSM entitlement of the participating school. Nonetheless, as this thesis is interested in understanding socioeconomic differences in parental involvement, parental engagement, children's outcomes and everyday experiences within the education system, SHEP was arguably an effective infrastructure in which schools in areas of deprivation could be accessed.

Through consultation with the WLGA, schools were pragmatically sampled due to the research wanting to include schools from differing geographical areas, with differing school-level FSM entitlement and schools with varying degrees of prior involvement in the programme. Four schools were invited to participate in this research however, a school implementing the programme for the first time in 2019 declined the invitation declaring the school wanted to focus on the implementation of the programme. An additional school was invited to participate in the research however a decision was made not to include a school implementing the programme for the first time in 2019, to avoid the school opting to also decline. Therefore, the case study schools included 1 school from the 2016 implementation stage, 1 school from the 2017 implementation stage and 2 schools from the 2018 implementation stage. The demographics of the schools are outlined and discussed further in Table 3 [Section 5.4.3.1].

The recruitment approach had some limitations as the WLGA initiated contact with the schools, and schools may have felt an obligation to participate in the research. Moreover, although schools were reminded the data were not being collected on behalf of the WLGA and data would remain anonymous and confidential, there was an underlying impression that schools still felt the research was associated with the WLGA which could have biased their responses. The schools participating in the programme are also arguably schools which are motivated to implement new programmes or practices to improve the outcomes for their children in their schools. Although geographical area, SHEP implementation year and school-level FSM entitlement were considered in the recruitment processes, the research arguably did not reach schools that could be viewed as less motivated to seek out alternative ways to help improve the outcomes for their children, as all recruited schools were participating in the SHEP programme.

Moreover, there are potential family-level biases amongst the sample as it can be argued the parents attending the SHEP are parents involved in the school and engaged in supporting their children's development. Whilst the research intends to reach the most vulnerable children and families it is likely these families are the least likely to engage and may not have attended the SHEP and therefore not have been invited to participate in this research. Nonetheless, as the research is primarily qualitative in its nature, representativeness of the sample is not of primary concern as importance is placed on gaining in-depth understandings of the relationships and interactions between the participant groups.

Once schools had agreed to participate in the research, schools provided a timetable of the dates and times they were running their SHEP over the 6-week summer holiday. Three of the schools participating in the research opted to run the programme on the same weeks raising challenges for data collection. The researcher spent 2 days at each school collecting the observational and interview data, with one of these days being the family involvement day. Whilst SHEP was used effectively as a means to access schools it meant there was limited time to collect the data due to the programme running over such a short period of time. Whilst in an academic year repeat visits to a school could have been organised, the programme ran for a limited time period and therefore these time constraints meant all data in the first round of the data collection had to be collected within the 2 days at each school. A total of 30 interviews with 39 participants were conducted across the school visits. The number of interviews conducted at each school ranged from 6-9, and the number of participants partaking in the research at each school ranged from 7-12 indicating little variance in engagement levels across the schools.

In terms of the interviews, amendments were made to the data collection methods to support children, parents and school staff to feel comfortable and at ease during the interview process. Whilst the initial data collection plan was to interview participants individually, in practice parents and children in particular wanted to be interviewed with other parents or children. For the child interviews, children sometimes requested to be interviewed with their friends and for the parents' interviews, some parents requested to be interviewed with their partners or with another parent friend. Whilst this altered the dynamics of the interview, allowing two participants to be interviewed together supported some of the participants to feel more comfortable within the environment and arguably reduced the power imbalance between the researchers and participants (Adler et al., 2019). Although this was not commonplace, this inclusion supported participants to open up and share their experiences.

In addition, the majority of the data presented was from the perspectives of parents and school staff. Whilst the data collection tools were effective in gathering data from children and the voices of children are heard in the research, it is not to the same extent. The research methods used to collect the perspectives of children were useful in relation to gathering data on some of the research's interests; such as what the children enjoyed about SHEP, parent involvement activities at the school, and what learning activities children did with their parents at home. However, there was limited data around other themes that came out of the parent and school staff data. As discussed in Section 5.10 Reflexivity there were challenges in relation to the generation of child data. A combination of children discussing topic not related to the research in the interviews and children wanting to return to the holiday club activities, and the researcher not wanting children to miss out on the activities at the holiday club meant that the interviews were shorter than first planned. Nonetheless, the data from the child interviews when applicable supported or contrasted the perspectives of parent and school staff, and arguably this research highlights there that is scope for further research examining children's perspectives of their parents' involvement in their schooling and learning at home, focusing on children from lower SES backgrounds. As discussed in earlier chapters accessing children in a different setting may have supported the data generation process with children and supported the child's voice to be heard to a greater extent in this research.

There were also arguably missed opportunities to gather parent perspectives on parent experiences of parental involvement and parental engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst parents were invited to partake in the follow-up interviews, no parents responded to the invitations. Unlike at the holiday club where there were opportunities for the researcher to engage with parents face-to-face, the constraints of collecting data during the pandemic meant attempting to contact and recruit parents for a follow-up interview by email. Nonetheless, 5 interviews were conducted with school staff from 3 of the participating schools. Throughout the empirical chapters and discussion chapter when discussing findings in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research has highlighted that these findings are solely the perspectives of school staff and do not echo the voices of parents or children. Moreover, whilst the data are cross-sectional there was an initial intention to analyse how family-school relationships had developed from the first to the second time point. However, due to the pandemic and the changes to families' everyday ways of living as well as changes with families' interactions with schools due to school closures and nationally imposed restrictions, this comparison was limited.

Future research may wish to access schools in a different manner, not using the SHEP as a means to access schools. Whilst this allowed for the targeting of schools with lower FSM and

with varying geographical locations this meant all schools were already engaged in a form of family involvement programme and therefore saw its benefits. If a random sampling technique was to be used, although there may be greater challenges with accessing schools, this could have meant a truer reflection of school-level parental involvement and parental engagement with Wales could have been found. Moreover, the small number of participating schools did not allow for firm conclusions to be drawn, which may have been possible if a greater number of schools were included in the sample.

10.4 Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

Whilst the ultimate policy goal is to eliminate child poverty, the wider structural conditions which cause poverty and inequalities need to be addressed. Nevertheless, in the meantime smaller interventions (such as SHEP) to support children and families can act as a stopgap and provide short-term relief to families experiencing poverty or address poverty for a small sub-group of the population. The implications this research has on research, policy and practice will be discussed below.

10.4.1 Implications for Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement with Policy and Practice

Parental involvement and parental engagement are socioeconomically differentiated, and this should not be ignored at the policy or practice level. Policymakers must strive towards a national model where the expectations for all parents are not equal and whereby expectations for more disadvantaged students are taken into consideration (Lowthian, 2021). Multiple levels of deprivation impact their daily lives and their home learning environments and therefore the environment in which they live, learn and grow are not equivalent to their more advantaged peers (Lowthian, 2022). The playing field for more advantaged and less advantaged students is not equal and therefore the expectations of them should not be the same. The findings in this thesis show wider understandings of how all levels of the socioecological framework interact to influence children's development and outcomes. Therefore, policies which alleviate some of the strain of poverty on families, and practices which meaningfully engage families in their children's schooling and learning could support children and families from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Targeted programmes such as Flying Start which support families in the early stages of a child's life course could be extended throughout a child's educational journey to continue the support for families who may face challenges with parenting and involvement with the education system.

Moreover, whilst school staff were seen to have some basic understanding of impacts of poverty on children and families and the circumstances of the families their school serves this knowledge and understanding was limited. The pandemic highlighted further the fundamental role schools plays in supporting the social and wellbeing needs of families and further training is arguably required. Greater knowledge of the impacts of poverty on families as well as how schools as a social institutions can effectively communicate with and support families experiencing poverty, could be provided further in teacher training. Moreover, support staff were viewed as fundamental in the brokerage of knowledge from schools to families and key in the development of school-home relationships. The fundamental role support staff play in bridging the gap between families and schools is not fully recognised and further research into non- teaching staff's role in supporting families particularly from lower SES backgrounds is key. Greater understandings of the role of support staff in children's education as well in supporting their social and wellbeing needs could be key to improving the educational experiences and outcomes of children from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Although the Welsh Government has guidance in the form of the Family and Community Engagement Toolkit for Schools in Wales, which endorses a whole-school approach to family and community engagement this is arguably outdated, particularly in light of the pandemic (Welsh Government, 2021b). Throughout the findings the toolkit was not mentioned or discussed by any school staff member and therefore the framework could require dissemination and embedding within schools to a greater extent. In addition, there is a need for parents to be a part of the conversation. Parents can be assets to schools in terms of supporting children's learning, as learning begins at home and parents hold knowledge which could be utilised by schools. Whilst schools provide a range of events and activities to attend and participate in, there are limited opportunities for parents to meaningfully engage or be part of decision-making processes. Further opportunities for parents to engage in schooling events in a non-threatening and informal manner could enhance home-school relationships and strengthen parent-school relationships which could support greater involvement and engagement.

In addition, whilst the research has provided understandings of families' educational experiences during the pandemic, and parental engagement in learning during this period, there is room for future research in this area. As noted in Chapter 9, data were only collected between March and June of 2020 and therefore does not reflect the entire pandemic. Later into the pandemic, school approaches to communication and learning likely shifted as schools and parents adapted to the context. Therefore, ongoing learning in relation to how school and families interacted, as well as

the challenges to learning from home and the facilitators to this learning could be of particular importance as we enter a period of 'recovery' from the pandemic.

10.4.2 Implications for Broader Education Supra-Systems

Within previous literature, there was an apparent tension between schools as an institution whose core aim is to provide education and school as institutions which can promote children and young people's health and wellbeing, as this aim is often viewed as diverting attention away from the core business of schools (Bonnell et al, 2014; Littlecott et al, 2018). However, the implementation of the new curriculum for Wales offers an opportunity for greater inclusion and consideration of health and wellbeing within the curriculum. The introduction of health and wellbeing as one of the key Areas of Learning and Experience encourages a whole school approach and a holistic structure for understanding and promoting children and young people's health and wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2020e). Several policy documents including the Education in Wales: Our national mission (Welsh Government, 2020b) highlight the importance of wellbeing in the New Curriculum and the development of an all-Wales framework for a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Whilst the schools in this research often reported supporting the daily social and wellbeing needs of families, which could be attributed to the socioeconomic composition of their schools, the continual pressures of performative targets can supersede school-level attempts to support families daily social and emotional challenges. To support schools to whole-heartedly promote health and emotional wellbeing there needs to be a step away from the academic target driven nature of education and the performative pressures that align with the need for children and schools to meet the demands of targets.

The SHEP programme is an example of how schools can promote health and wellbeing alongside an educational agenda. The SHEP provision of free school meals in the summer holidays, alongside physical activity, enrichment opportunities and educational support arguably support children from areas of deprivation to remain active and attempt to reduce summer holiday learning less (Welsh Government, 2020). Moreover, the proportionate universalist recruitment approach adopted by schools allows for the targeting of families without opening up families to stigmatisation by only inviting families that were considered vulnerable.

10.5 Concluding Remarks

This thesis has developed a higher level of understanding of the importance and appreciation of how children's outcomes are shaped at a multitude of interacting levels. Central to this thesis was

understanding parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning amongst parents from lower SES backgrounds. This thesis has contributed to understandings of how poverty, vulnerability and stigmatisation all confound with individual and wider social factors to effect involvement and engagement. Whilst there is evidence to show that parents from lower SES backgrounds are involved and engaged in their children's schooling and learning, schools still perpetuate middle-class ideologies and deficit discourses towards parents from lower SES backgrounds. As noted in the policy and practice recommendations, schools should tailor approaches to involvement and engagement to consider the needs and assets of the communities they are situated within, as a one-size fits all approach to involvement and engagement is arguably not effective.

There is also a common perception that parental involvement events or opportunities at schools are equal for all parents. However, opportunities for parents to be involved or engage with their children's schooling or learning are not equal as parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face structural and practical barriers as well as often experience fear of involvement or engagement due events or activities being guided by middle-class ideologies and expectations. Therefore, whilst universal schooling events intend to engage all parents there is the potential for such events to increase inequalities if the benefits of the events are not equally experienced. Nonetheless, these findings suggested that there was greater engagement in events which are informal in their nature as they pose less of a threat to parents, therefore suggesting that universal informal school events do engage parents in their children's school. Family engagement in these events can be positive for children and parents in terms of participation in enrichment activities and the creation of memories, as children are provided with opportunities to participate in activities which may otherwise be out of reach due to inequalities in access to enrichment or educational opportunities.

Moreover, this thesis has contributed to understanding the fundamental role that support staff play in supporting children and families from lower SES backgrounds. Support staff are seen as key in supporting the social and wellbeing needs of children and parents as well as fundamental in school-home communication and the de-coding of school messages. Support staff are key assets to schools, and further research into their role as cultural brokers between the school and home, particularly in areas of deprivation could provide key insight into how the school and parents from lower SES backgrounds could work more effectively together to improve children's outcomes.

This thesis has made an important contribution to the field by using socioecological frameworks to support further understandings of how the different levels of the ecological system influence and interact to impact children's outcomes. This has provided a frame for understanding how poverty and chronosystem level decisions and policies alongside other levels of the system, in particular families and schools (mesosystem), interact to influence parental involvement with schools, parental engagement with learning and children's overall outcomes. The research has situated the family unit within a wider set of influences as well as considered the two- directional and complex relationship between education and health. The research has also provided further understandings of the structural barriers which impact families on a day-to-day basis, and with their involvement and engagement in schooling and learning within the Welsh context. The research has evidenced how children and families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face stigmatisation from multiple levels of the socioecological framework and whilst this research has advocated the voices of those experiencing harsh realities, understandings of the structural causes of poverty and inequalities, and the impact on macro-level decisions on children and families are fundamental if child poverty is going to be fully addressed.

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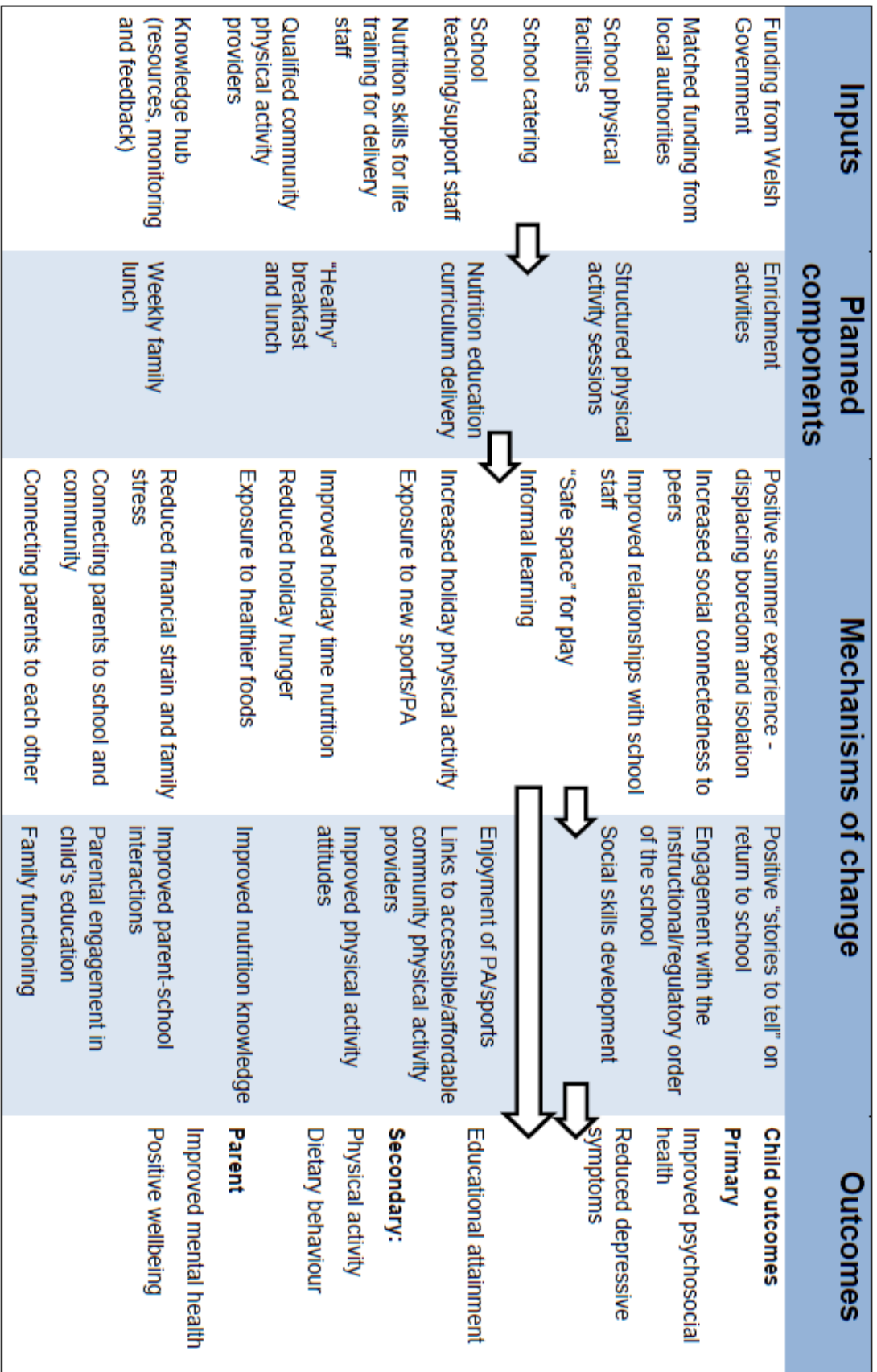
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Appendix 1: SHEP Logic Model

Inputs	Planned components	Mechanisms of change	Outcomes
Funding from Welsh Government	Enrichment activities	Positive summer experience - displacing boredom and isolation	Positive "stories to tell" on return to school	
Matched funding from local authorities	Structured physical activity sessions	Increased social connectedness to peers	Engagement with the instructional/regulatory order of the school	**Child outcomes**
School physical facilities		Improved relationships with school staff		**Primary**
School catering	Nutrition education curriculum delivery	"Safe space" for play	Social skills development	Improved psychosocial health
Nutrition skills for life training for delivery staff		Informal learning		Reduced depressive symptoms
School teaching/support staff	"Healthy" breakfast and lunch	Exposure to new sports/PA	Enjoyment of PA/sports	Educational attainment
Qualified community physical activity providers		Increased holiday physical activity	Links to accessible/affordable community physical activity providers	
Knowledge hub (resources, monitoring and feedback)	Weekly family lunch	Improved holiday time nutrition	Improved physical activity attitudes	**Secondary:**
		Reduced holiday hunger		Physical activity
		Exposure to healthier foods	Improved nutrition knowledge	Dietary behaviour
		Reduced financial strain and family stress	Improved parent-school interactions	**Parent**
		Connecting parents to school and community	Parental engagement in child's education	Improved mental health
		Connecting parents to each other	Family functioning	Positive wellbeing

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Amy Simpson PhD Contract Agreement

Research Outline

This PhD research, funded by the European Social Research Council, is using the 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) as a case study to examine parental engagement in the informal school setting. The research will explore parental engagement in SHEP and schooling more generally, analysing whether parental engagement in the programme can affect longer-term school-parent relationships as well as child wellbeing and educational outcomes. The research will involve conducting observations and interviews during the delivery of the Food and Fun club. Data will be collected from children, parents and SHEP staff who volunteer to take part in the study, with the aim of gathering the perspectives of those involved in the programme. All study participants will be given information about the study and will have the chance to ask questions before taking part, if they are happy to do so. I will explain that participation in the study is voluntary and that participants are not required to answer all questions if they do not wish to. Children, parents and SHEP staff who agree to take part will be interviewed individually and asked a range of questions related to general school parental engagement policies and practices, school-parent relationships, home learning and the impact of SHEP on parental engagement in schooling and children's learning. This research has received ethical approval from Cardiff University and is separate to the Welsh Local Government Association's evaluation of the 2019 programme.

Contract Agreement

Amy Simpson

AND

SCHOOL NAME

The agreement is as followed. ***SCHOOL NAME*** consent for the school to participate in this PhD research.

1.   Commitment from the researcher

The researcher will

- Provide evidence of current Disclosure and Barring Certificate and comply with Cardiff University safeguarding procedures;
- Attend sessions of the 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme at Christchurch County Primary School, conducting observations and conducting interviews with SHEP staff, children and parents who provide informed consent to take part in the study;
- Manage and process all study data in compliance with General Data Protection Regulations;
- Anonymise all data collected from the school, so that no schools or individuals involved in the study can be identified in any findings.

2. Commitment from the school

SCHOOL NAME will

- Provide a contact in the school to liaise with the researcher;
- Provide the name and contact details of the school safeguarding officer;
- Provide an outline of the schools individual 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment timeline
- Distribute information sheets and child consent forms to families participating in the 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme at least two weeks prior to the start date of the programme;
- Assist with the recruitment of school SHEP staff, parents and children for interviews.

For and on behalf of ***SCHOOL NAME***,

Name:

Position:

Signature:

Date:

SHEP Parent Day

Observation Record

Name of school   **Date**

School Demographics (Year groups, Gender split, Ethnicity)

Schedule (Describe the general structure of the parent day, play times, activities, dining times, free time)

School Community Characteristics (Rural/Urban, Condition of school, school facilities, outdoor facilities, general layout of the club, access to equipment and/or technology)

Family Lunch (Canteen set up, food available, seating i.e with children in parent groups)

Family engagement opportunities (parent activities, engagement i.e children- sport or activity related, any opportunities for parents to be involved in promoting positive health and education outcomes)

Staff and Parents or Parent and Parent - What types of relationships and dynamics have you noticed between the parents and the club staff?

Parents and children - What types of relationships and dynamics have you noticed between the children and the parents?

Other field notes: Ask staff whether they have found engaging parents difficult, whether the school has a typically good relationship with parents?

Appendix 4: Parent Interview Schedule (1ˢᵗ Data Collection)

Parent Interview Schedule

Opener:

Thank them for agreeing to take part in the research.

Little bit about themselves: Name, children and age

Parental Involvement in Schooling and Parental Engagement in Learning (Cards)- Explain that these terms are typically used in the literature, and place down on table.

What are parents understanding of the term's parental involvement in school and and parental engagement in learning?

What do they think of the terms? And have they ever heard of the terms before?

SHEP (before talking about parenting and home)

- How were your children/ child recruited to take part in SHEP?
- What benefits do you think there are for the children attending the food and fun clubs? How about yourself and parents generally, are there any benefits to your children attending the holiday clubs?
- Thinking about yourself, how were you informed about the opportunities for parents to participate in the programme?
- What were your motivations for attending the club?
- Do you think feel there are any barriers/challenges to parents attending the food and fun school club?
- Do you think any changes could be made to programme that might increase parental engagement in the programme?

1. **Communicating**
    - During the school term, what methods of communication has the school set up between the school and families, whether this is informal chats or formal methods?
    - Do you feel these methods are effective? Or are there any challenges faced by parents when trying to communicate with the school or teachers?
    - Do you seen this engagement as being positive? How does it affect your child?
    - Tell me about your relationship with your child's teacher?
    - When visiting your child's school or speaking to your child's teacher or the head teacher how do you feel?

- Do you think your participation in SHEP will change your relationship with the school, or do you think the relationship will stay the same?
- Do you feel that you know how well your child is doing out school?

2. Volunteering
- What activities or events does [School Name] organise for parents and families throughout the school year?
- You have mentioned [School Name] organises events for parents throughout the school year, why do you think the school lays on these events?
- Would you say there are any barriers/challenges to why parents in general or yourself may not be able to volunteer or attend school activities or events?

3. Decision- Making
- At [School Name], what opportunities are there for parents' voices to be heard (speak to teachers, parent governors, board meetings)?
- At [School Name], what opportunities are there for parents' to speak to teachers about their child's learning and emotional wellbeing?

4. Collaborating with the Community
- Within the local area, what community programmes or groups are there for young people? Do you or your child attend any of these community programmes?
- What benefits are there to attending these problems?
- Are there any challenges to attending or participating in these programmes?
- How do you view the relationship between the community and the school?

5. Parenting (School Parenting Style Cards- Permissive, Authoritative, Authoritarian)
- From looking at the characteristics of the 3 listed parenting styles (authoritarian, permissive and authoritative), which parenting style would you say is your own parenting suit is most suited too?
- Discipline and rewards?
- How do you view your role in your child's learning? And do you feel this role has changed or changes over time?

6. Learning at Home
- Within the home, in what ways do you facilitate your child's learning?
- What impact do you think your involvement has on your child's learning?
- In relation to learning in the home, are there any challenges to helping your child learn within the home?
- What learning activities do you and your child/children participate in within the home? Whether this is after school or in the school holidays (reading, educational trips, homework)?

SHEP Staff Interview

As you know I am interested in parental involvement in schooling and parental engagement in education...

What is your position at the school? And within SHEP?

SHEP

What is the purpose of the programme? How has it been sold to the school?

How long has the club been running? Personal length of involvement?

Why have you chosen to run the holiday club on the weeks you've have selected? How about the parent days? What were your thoughts behind running these on the Thursday?

What do you see are the main benefits of SHEP? Are there any down falls?

What do the parent days at the club involve? Lunches or activities?

What impact does that engagement have on these parents? And their children?

To what extent, do parents engage in the programme?

School engagement strategies

Parental engagement and Parental involvement Cards- What are your thoughts on these definitions? What do they mean to you?

In relation to the school year, in which ways do the school as a whole involve families within the school? What about events solely for parents? What do you feel parents take away from these events or activities?

Why do you think the school invites parents to attend events?

What impact do you think engagement has on families and the children?

In which ways does the school communicate with parents or families? How does the school inform parents about events and activities?

What are your thoughts on parental involvement in schooling?

What are opportunities for there for parents voice to be heard?

What are the challenges of engaging parents and families in their children's schooling?

Also thinking about learning outside of the school, how do you see parents engagement with the children's learning outside of school in generally?

How do you view parental involvement in this school?

What role do parents have in their children's learning and education?

Thinking about the teacher-pupil relationship, how do you view these relationships within your school? And whose responsibility is it to establish a relationship?

How do you personally involve parents in their children's education or learning?

'Parental Engagement in Children's School Life Using the Food and Fun School Enrichment Programme as an Example'

SHEP Staff Interview Consent Form

Please initial

I confirm that the research has been fully explained and am willing to take part in the interview.	
I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that the interview will be audio recorded.	
I understand that no one will have access to the recording beyond the researcher and their supervisors.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, I am free to not participate in the interview and can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
This consent form will be stored securely. I understand that any information that could identify myself, any individual or a school will be kept strictly confidential and that no personal information will be included in the study report or other publications.	
I understand that the data from this research will be used for a PhD thesis, research report and presentations.	

Your name

………………………………………………

Name of School

………………………………………………………

Signature   Date

………………………………   …………………

If you would be happy to be contacted about participating in a follow-up interview in the 2019/20 academic year. Please leave a contact number and/ or email address:

……

Amy Simpson
DECIPHer
Cardiff University
1-3 Museum Place
Cardiff

Dear Parent / Guardian,

'Parental Engagement in Children's School Life Using the Food and Fun School Enrichment Programme as an Example'

My name is Amy Simpson and I am a PhD researcher at Cardiff University. My PhD research focuses on understanding how schools engage parents in their children's education. I am also interested in understanding the impacts that interactions between school and family have for children and families. I will be carrying out research at your child's school during the summer holidays while the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) is running. The research will gather the perspectives of parents, children and holiday club staff through short informal interviews at the holiday clubs. My PhD is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and is independent from the Welsh Local Government Authority, and their evaluation of the 2019 SHEP programme.

Participation is voluntary and should you or your child choose not to participate, this will not affect your place at the holiday club. If you agree to participate, you can change your mind at any time without giving a reason, and may withdraw any data collected from you or your child at any time up to publication of the study findings, by emailing me on the address below. All data collected will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, on a secure password protected university server. Any quotations from interviews included within my PhD thesis and academic publications will be fully anonymised. The identity of schools, pupils or their parents will not be shared beyond the research team. The only exception to this would be if information was disclosed which raised serious concerns about a child's welfare. Data will be retained for a minimum of 5 years, or 2 years from the date of publication, whichever is longest.

If you would be happy for your child to participate in the research, please complete and return the enclosed consent form to the holiday club co-ordinator before Friday 19th of July. I will also be inviting parents to take part in an interview at the school holiday family lunches. If you would be interested in taking part in an interview yourself then please feel free to contact me.

If you have any further questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email BondA3@Cardiff.ac.uk, or one of my supervisors (Dr Graham Moore: MooreG@cardiff.ac.uk; Dr Jemma Hawkins HawkinsJ10@Cardiff.ac.uk)

Yours Sincerely,
Amy Simpson

Appendix 8: Parent Consent Form for Parent Interviews

'Parental Engagement in Children's School Life Using the Food and Fun School Enrichment Programme as an Example'

Parent or Guardian Interview Consent Form

Please initial

I confirm that the research has been fully explained and am willing to take part in the interview.	
I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that the interview will be audio recorded.	
I understand that no one will have access to the recording beyond the researcher and their supervisors.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, I am free to not participate in the interview and can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
This consent form will be stored securely. I understand that any information that could identify myself or my child will be kept strictly confidential and that no personal information will be included in the study report or other publications.	
I understand that the data from this research will be used for a PhD thesis, research report and presentations.	

Your name

....

Name of School

....

Signature   Date

....   …………………

If you would be happy to be contacted about participating in a follow-up interview in the 2019/20 academic year. Please leave a contact number and/ or email address:

....
....

Appendix 9: Parent Consent for Child Interviews

'Parental Engagement in Children's School Life Using the 'Food and Fun' School Enrichment Programme as an Example'

Parent/ Guardian Consent for Child Interview

Please initial

I am willing for my child to take part in an interview for this research and for the interview to be audio recorded.	
I understand that no one will have access to the recording beyond the researcher and their supervisors.	
I confirm that I have read Parent Invite Letter and understand the purpose of the study and my child's contribution to the study.	
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they are free to not participate in the interview and can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
This consent form will be stored securely. I understand that any information that could identify myself or my child will be kept strictly confidential and that no personal information will be included in the study report or other publications.	
I understand that the data from this research will be used for a PhD thesis, research report and presentations.	

Name of Child (Participant)

……………………………………………………

Name of Parent or Guardian Giving Consent

……………………………………………………………

Name of School

……………………………………………………………

Signature   Date

Hi! My name is Amy and I am a student at Cardiff University. University is a place where people can go to study after they have left school.

At school, your teacher may have asked you to do a project, to learn about a new subject. I also have a project and I think you might be able to help me. I want to find out about:

- The things that are important to you in your world;
- Your typical school day;
- The events and activities your school invites your family to attend.

Your school has said it is OK for me to visit the holiday club and ask you some questions. I will record what you say and maybe write down some notes, this will help me remember all the information when I go back to University. I will also ask you to draw some pictures and write down some answers to a few questions.

With your help, we can find out more about children's view of their world and their schooling life.

‘Parental Engagement in Children's School Life: The Food and Fun School Enrichment Programme a Case Study’

Pupil Permission Slip

Please tick YES or NO for each line

	YES	NO
Has the project been explained to you?		
Do you understand what the project is about?		
If you have wanted to, have you had the chance to ask questions about the research?		
Do you know it's okay if you change your mind about taking part?		
Do you know you don't have to answer any questions that you don't like?		
Are you happy to take part?		

If you have answered 'no' to any of these statements, you will be unable to participate in an interview.

Your full name

……………………………………………………………

Your school

……………………………………………………………

Appendix 12: Follow-Up School Staff Interview Schedule

Staff Follow Up Interview Schedule

1. Parental Involvement in Schooling/ Engagement and Relationships

A lot had happened since the last time we and before we speak about the coronavirus in particular, I want you to think about parental involvement and engagement in learning and schooling since the school holiday programme…

Has the school implemented any different parental involvement activities or events since the holiday club?

Has there been any changes to parents overall involvement in schooling since the holiday club?

How do you view relationships with families? Have there any been any noticeable changes in this since the summer?

Have the school been in contact with any of the organisations involved in the holiday club since the summer?

Would you say you have noticed any positive changes in those families that have attended the school holiday club?

In our previous interviews you provided a list of benefits for families attending the programme, looking back over the past academic year what would you say are the longer-term benefits for those that attended the holiday programme?

1. Coronavirus Pandemic- Opening of Schools

During the pandemic schools remain open to provide provision for those children who are vital workers, is this the case at [School Name]?

Is there are certain criteria for which children can and cannot attend school? How has the school gone about contacting these families?

Do you think that the provision allows all those pupils in need to access to formal schooling?

What is the purpose of continuing to open schools? Why is it needed?

Logistically, how has the school organised the timetable? And set up a safe learning environment within the school?

What was your view on the school remaining open?

What has your role been at the school during the pandemic?

What were the views of staff members in relation to the school remaining open? And themselves continuing to facilitate learning?

Has there been support or concerns raised by staff members or families in relation to the opening of school?

2. Coronavirus- Supporting Families at Home

How important are family school communication/ relationships during this time? Ties between parents and schools- disruptions or strengthen ties?

How would you say school family connectedness has been during this time? Has this been maintained electronically? Or suspended?

How do you think that families are dealing with the challenges of the coronavirus? What additional challenges do they face?

In what ways has the school and schooling staff been supporting children's learning at home?

In what ways are schools communicating with parents at this difficult time?

Changes to parental practice (learning)? How do you academically learn at home?

What guidance and support have the government and and LA given? Are decision made at a local level or at a government level?

How do you think the coronavirus have impacted how families function and families mental health and wellbeing? in relation to crisis, family pressures, family functioning, financial pressures (Family relationships)

How do you think that the pandemic will affect child development and educational outcomes in the longer-term?

Are there any things that the school have learnt during the pandemic which can be transferred to when schools return to normal? (Lessons learnt).

Moving forward, schools in England have started the process of reopening schools how do you feel about the prospect of schools reopening?

Appendix 13: Qualitative Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative Data Analysis Plan: Framework Analysis

(Readings: Ritchie and Lewis, 2005; Furber, 2010; Gale et al, 2013)

1. **Anonymisation**
   - Remove any identifiable data (i.e names, school names, places)

2. **The Familiarisation Process**
   - Print off all anonymised interviews
   - Immersion into the data (highlight and scribble ideas on paper)
   - Become familiar with the data- develop an overview of main ideas

3. **Importing of Transcripts into NVivo**
   - Import all anonymised transcripts into NVivo
   - Creating Case Nodes: Once each transcript has been important, a case node must be assigned. Once a case node is assigned, case attributed can be assigned (i.e school, type of interview, gender etc).

4. **Developing a working analytical framework**
   - Themes have been pre-defined from research questions and the familiarisation stage and will be turned into nodes (categories), which form the working analytical framework.
   - The process of hierarchy is key in framework analysis and therefore it is important to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the difference between 'parent nodes', and 'child nodes'.

5. **Indexing/ Coding**
   - Apply paraphrases/labels (i.e nodes/ child nodes/ grandparent nodes) to certain sections or lines of data to describe what has been interpreted.
   - Although, codes have been pre-defined, nodes or sub nodes may emerge throughout the process.
   - This process should be repeated several times as new themes and sub themes emerge in the data.
   - The framework may have to be amended or refined at this stage.

6. **Charting**
   - The data are summarised into thematic charts.

- This stage involves reducing the data into manageable sections (striking the balance between reducing data and keeping the feel of the of the interviewees words).

- NVivo will produce the framework matrix, however new rows/columns may need to be added and data will have to be reduced.

- The framework matrix can be used to look at the different sub-populations (i.e parents/child/staff) data individually and then within the context of all the data.

7. **Synthesizing The Data (Interpretation and Writing Up Findings)**

- This process involves mapping and interpretation in order to synthesis the data, the summaries on the charts must be checked against the original data to ensure context has not been lost.

- If the data is rich, connections and relationships between the categories can be explored and data can provide explanations for the emergence of phenomena.