



***A critical evaluation of the impact of Government
neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences
in English primary schools.***

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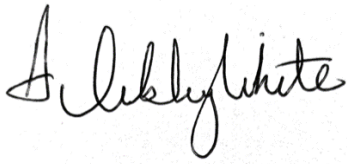
**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing, which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It has not been previously submitted, in part or whole, to any university or institution for any degree, diploma, or other qualification.

In accordance with the Department of Health and Life Science guidelines, this thesis is does not exceed **80,000 words**, and it contains less than 150 figures.



Signed:

Date: 22nd November 2023 _____

Angela Sibley-White

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ABSTRACT

The role and function of primary education are increasingly contested, with recent education policy in England reflecting a neoliberal ideology focusing on market-orientated economics. This orientation places emphasis on accountability, performativity and, in particular, the responsabilisation of individuals and families. Moreover, education is considered by the Government a means to enabling social mobility, with many reforms aimed at closing the educational attainment gap, which idealises education as a means for 'social justice'. However, whilst education policy aims to raise attainment, the UK Government's austerity measures impact the poorest in society particularly affecting disadvantaged families, which seemingly creates a paradox within education.

This research considered aspects of education policy within neoliberalism, how they are interpreted and enacted by school leaders and experienced by primary school communities. It followed an interpretivist paradigm, gathering data via in-depth and semi-structured interviews across four primary schools. The data analysis followed a thematic approach, resulting in a detailed codebook that formed the basis for the results and discussion chapters. These themes include the onus of leadership; the complexities and challenges in the school-parent relationship; context of learning; and the responsabilisation of the school for the welfare of children and families.

The research found that headteachers were integral to developing school ethos, culture, and values, which were evident in the management of the school. This resulted in various approaches to mitigating social injustices through teaching and learning opportunities and supporting the wider family. It was evident in schools in deprived areas that the headteacher's approach was instrumental in removing barriers to parental involvement despite the Government's rhetoric demonising disadvantaged parents. The research exposes an increased emotional burden for school staff, especially for the headteacher, in child welfare and safeguarding areas. The increased thresholds for social welfare intervention further responsabilised the school and staff members for wider child welfare beyond teaching and learning.

Keywords: Primary schools; Leadership; Responsibilisation; Neoliberalism; Austerity.

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GLOSSARY OF TERM, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYM

AT	Academy Trust (an independent/standalone state-funded school that is not part of a MAT)
Coalition Government	Conservative–Liberal Democrat Government 2010-2015
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAL	English as an Additional Language
Government	A capitalised G on Government refers specifically to the UK Government
government	A lower-case g on government refers to generic discussions in relation to government of a state
LA	Local Authority or Local Education Authority
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust (a group of academies in partnership with one another)
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
SATs	Standardised Attainment Tests
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator

CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

This research considers the role and function of primary education in relation to a neoliberal ideology focusing on market-orientated economics. The study is situated after a period of policy reforms introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government from 2010-2015 and the subsequent Conservative Governments over the period to 2019. These reforms include specific education policies impacting primary schools, and wider policy reforms reflecting Government austerity measures following the global financial crash of 2007/2008. This research will explore these aspects of education policy and wider Government policies within the political context of neoliberalism, a term defined later in this chapter. It will explore how these policies are interpreted, enacted or resisted by school leaders and experienced by primary schools.

In this chapter, I detail the rationale for the research, provide a background to contextualise the study and set out the course this thesis will take. This chapter will provide an understanding of the research in relation to neoliberalism, austerity and primary education in England. It will outline the research problem and the overall aim, objectives and questions guiding this investigation. I will also highlight the structure of the thesis, mapping the journey through the remaining chapters.

In setting the context for the research, it is important to note that the investigation commenced before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021, with interviews conducted in the academic year 2018 – 2019. Whilst acknowledging the time interval, I will demonstrate the relevance of the data within the current climate of primary education.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The economy is considered a key driver for education policy, with many policies focused on increasing social mobility to improve the economic potential of a future workforce. This linking of education and economics depicts a human capital theory and the investment by the government and the family within a child's education (Gillies, 2011). Gillies (ibid., p.225) affirms that 'Human Capital Theory has thus

promoted education to a key instrumental role in boosting economic growth. The better the investment made by individuals in education, the better they and the economy will do'. Therefore, UK education policies connect education to the country's economy (Gillies, 2011; Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Ball, 2017), reflecting a neoliberal discourse within education. Such discourse focuses on marketisation, commodification and privatisation of public services (Harvey, 2005; Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Ball, 2017). Education has increasingly incorporated market-orientated economics to create a marketplace with an emphasis on accountability, performativity and market ideologies. Prior to the 1980s school accountability was to parents and the LA rather than directly to the Government (Robinson, 2012). Between 1979-1997 the then Conservative Government introduced many policy changes and reforms in education, which Gilbert (2012) advised as constructing a more specific, nuanced, neoliberal mode of accountability within school policy. Policy reforms such as the introduction of the National Curriculum, Standardised Tests and Ofsted inspections created new ways to hold schools, leaders, and teachers to account. These changes, Wilkins (2014, p.8) identified, resulted in differing forms of accountability, including:

performative, contract and corporate measures of accountability that dominate school-based evaluations of worth and effectiveness today, key among them the economic necessity for schools to foster competition, cut costs, reduce risk, generate profit, evidence value for money and carry out regular tracking and testing of pupil achievement levels against set targets and long-term strategic planning.

These changes to a distinct, neoliberal focus in education are seen to have altered the nature of teachers' work, which Gewirtz (1999, p.229) argued had 'consequences for the ways in which teachers teach and for students' experiences of schooling'. This neoliberal discourse is now considered the 'norm' (Apple, 2006; Saltman, 2014; Ball, 2017; Humphreys, 2017; Rudd and Goodson, 2017).

Particularly since the financial crisis of 2007/2008 and the change in Government in 2010, policy discourse linking education to a successful economy has expanded under the differing education administrations. Gibb (2015, para.5), the then Minister of State for Schools, affirmed this connection, stating 'Education is the engine of our economy'. Furthermore, the many reforms of the education system have been justified as a means to create 'social justice' and 'to deliver a fairer society' (ibid.).

However, Coalition Government policies since 2010 have created a paradox, with austerity policies impacting the poorest in society despite education policies aiming to raise attainment and increase social mobility. Education reforms thus far have made little positive difference to social inequalities or social mobility within the UK (Social Mobility Commission, 2016). In addition, the impacts of austerity policies are becoming more apparent within schools and, consequently, children's education (Lupton and Thomson, 2015; Ball, 2017; Reay, 2017; Rudd and Goodson, 2017). This research will consider these aspects of education policy within the context of neoliberalism. It will investigate how they are interpreted, enacted, or resisted by school leaders, and how they are experienced by the primary school community.

1.3 The neoliberal context

Neoliberalism is an often-challenged and overused term, which many academics and researchers have tried to define over time. Venugopal (2015, p.165) suggests:

Neoliberalism is everywhere but at the same time, nowhere. It is held to be the dominant and pervasive economic policy agenda of our times, a powerful and expansive political agenda of class domination and exploitation, the manifestation of 'capital resurgent', an overarching dystopian zeitgeist of late-capitalist excess.

The term has been adopted and adapted in many diverse theoretical and disciplinary fields (ibid.). Wilkins (2018, pp.5-6) argues neoliberalism is considered an 'analytical tool and policy strategy' but is often used as 'a normative description denoting specific trends in the development of western economies and politics'. As a result of the continually expanding use of neoliberalism, critics have suggested that it is an 'oft-invoked but ill-defined concept' (Mudge, 2008, p.703). Clarke (2008, p.135) further advises that:

Neo-liberalism suffers from promiscuity (hanging out with various theoretical perspectives), omnipresence (treated as a universal or global phenomenon), and omnipotence (identified as the cause of a wide variety of social, political and economic changes).

Therefore, using only a single definition of neoliberalism may not be an effective tool for analysis. Ong (2007) affirms that a normative approach to neoliberalism should produce the same political results and social transformation throughout a country. However, Ong (ibid., p.2) explains:

The very conditions associated with the neoliberal – extreme dynamism, mobility of practice, responsiveness to contingencies and strategic entanglements with politics – require a nuanced approach, not the blunt instrument of broad categories and predetermined elements and outcomes.

Yet, many researchers, myself included, often use a single-statement definition of neoliberalism. Harvey's (2005, p.2) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* offers a standard and widely quoted Marxist definition of neoliberalism:

A theory of political, economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'

However, Venugopal (2015) argues that Harvey makes 'no reference to any contemporary academic work of what it considers to be neoliberal theory'. Venugopal (ibid.) suggests this is because no such theory exists, and instead argues that neoliberalism is an 'artifice willed into existence not by its theorists but by its critics and can as such be cut to shape to fit whichever conceptual variant serves their purpose' (ibid., p.181). Wilkins (2018, p.4) echoes this sentiment, suggesting that some researchers utilise neoliberalism for 'cognitive and practical reasons to define objectively that which they are against'. Thus, the danger of using neoliberalism as a tool for analysis is that it has become taken for granted and normalised as a seductive mechanism for grappling with complexity (Wilkins, ibid.). I recognise the dilemma of using the term.

There are some criticisms of how neoliberalism is used simplistically within research. However, some researchers provide a more nuanced approach to the term. Ong (2007), Wilkins (2018) and Youdell (2015) advise a model of 'assemblage', which was first defined by theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1988) in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The purpose of 'assemblages' is to consider 'the multiplicity of diverse and moving elements that combined to form complex social functions' (Youdell, 2015, p.111), intending to 'understand the forces of ever-shifting, complex, social formation of which policy is just one component' (ibid.). Ong (2007) suggests using an assemblage approach to neoliberalism, in which she denotes neoliberalism with a 'n' to refer 'to a technology of governing 'free subjects' that co-exists with other political rationalities' (ibid., p.4). This approach to governing through free subjects

suggests that responsibility is placed at a community level, with new requirements of self-responsibility by individual subjects (ibid.).

Ong's (2007) little 'n' notion of neoliberalism reflects Foucault's (2007) governmentality in which neoliberalism is considered as a means of administering populations in the absence of direct government control. However, as Lemke (2002, p.58) explains, 'Foucault's discussion of neoliberal governmentality shows that the so-called retreat of the state is in fact a prolongation of government: neoliberalism is not the end but a transformation of politics that restructures the power relations in society.' As such, Wilkins (2018, p.4) utilises the concept of 'assemblage thinking' as a means to:

conceptualise schools as fields of contestation where different interests and motives conflict, collide and sometimes converge to produce locally adapted translations and refusals of neoliberalism. Rather than assume that school organisation flows uniformly from the singular project of neoliberalism here it is conceptualised as something that is mediated and struggled over in the context of locally situated dilemmas, obligations, normative commitments, and dispositives.

This assertion is echoed by Youdell (2015, p.111), who suggests education would be best mapped by characteristics such as:

movement and productive interplays between arrangement components that include money, political orientations, policy and legislation institutional arrangements, formal and informal knowledges subjectivities, pedagogies, everyday practices and feelings.

Considering education through an assemblage approach aids in conceptualising how neoliberal policy could be experienced differently in varying localities and by differing groups of individuals. This is supported by Wilkins (2018, p.28), who summarises that this assemblage approach as a means of:

examining the tensions and struggles that arise when schools as organisations align themselves with the neoliberal work of marketisation, commodification and privatisation, rather than become subsumed by them.

This understanding and approach are pertinent to this research, as it seeks to explore and evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and

experiences in English primary schools. In so doing it highlights and understands the tensions and struggles of interpreting, enacting or resisting policies.

1.4 The context of austerity

The purpose of this research was not to analyse the effect of austerity on education per se. However, as the research was conducted following several years of austerity policies, the background is important to understanding the impact of Government neoliberal policies within the context of primary education and a school's community. The global financial crisis in 2007/2008 was considered to have significantly impacted the UK's public finances (Quilter-Pinner and Hochlaf, 2019). Consequently, the 2010 Coalition Government and subsequent Conservative Governments after 2015 followed an ideological approach reflecting austerity, which included reducing public spending on benefits and state services (Mackay, 2014). Irving (2021, p.107) argued that the period of austerity not only impacted public spending and investment but also 'left a legacy of chronic societal harm'. It is this the combination of austerity policies resulting in a reduction of public spending and the wider impacts on society that is pertinent to this research. In addition, austerity policies are reflective of the neoliberal political ideology of economics. Farnsworth and Irving (2018, p.462) argue that neoliberalism has not only survived but 'has been reinvigorated through an alliance with a new form of austerity that emboldened claims for the residualisation of state welfare and safeguarded the power of economic elites'. Atkinson et al. (2013, p.10) assert the Coalition Government 'has moved 'faster and further' toward the right-wing paradise of privatisation and self-responsibilisation in a few short years'. This austerity ideology has created a stratified impact on family life and has had the 'deleterious effects of schools policy' (ibid., p.3).

Many academics have argued that austerity policies have had a wide-ranging and detrimental effect on the most disadvantaged in society (Jenson and Tyler, 2012; Atkinson et al., 2013; Ridge, 2013; Saltman, 2014; Reay, 2017; Farnsworth and Irving, 2018). Reay (2017, p.13) highlights the resulting wage decline of the working classes has resulted in 'half a million more children now live in absolute poverty than in 2010'. Austerity measures are presented not to have impacted schools directly due to protected funding (Lupton and Thompson, 2015). However, due to austerity measures affecting disadvantaged families and children in particular, schools are

having to meet these challenges (Jenson and Tyler, 2012; Atkinson et al., 2013; Ridge, 2013; Saltman, 2014; Reay, 2017). This aspect of neoliberalism via austerity is one focus of this research.

1.5 Policy in the context of education

Education is entwined with politics and reflects the different political ideologies of any given Government. This was highlighted in relation to primary education by Alexander (2010) and *The Cambridge Primary Review*, which affirmed the shift in the aims and purposes of primary education from a child-centred approach of the 1960s to the neoliberal 'standards' version of education in years since the Education Act of 1988 (DfE, 1988). Throughout this period, primary education in England has experienced significant and ongoing policy reform, reflecting a discourse of education as 'a problem to be fixed' (Alexander, 2010, p.1). The Coalition and subsequent Conservative Governments have continued this rhetoric of education being 'a policy problem' (Ball, 2017, p.17).

The term policy in the context of this research, whilst situated within primary schools, will also refer to wider Government policies and legislation that indirectly affect schools. As Ball et al. (2012, p.4) highlight: 'understanding and documenting the myriad ways in which policy is enacted in schools is a somewhat elusive and complicated process' (it is Ball et al.s' (2012) definition of policy enactment and interpretation, in conjunction with Maguire and Braun (2019) and Braun & Maguire's (2020) definitions in relation to primary education that guide this research, see: Chapter 2.5). This may be partly due to the complicated nature of policy and its meaning in the UK. The Government's own definition of policy was supplied in a White Paper from 1999: 'policy making is the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver "outcomes", desired changes in the real world' (Cabinet Office, 1999, p.15). The notion of a political vision suggests that 'policy relates to a determined series of actions influenced by a particular set of values or an overarching ideology' (Adams, 2014, p.26). Therefore, policy is not written or produced in a value-free context.

The policy context, or the use of policies as instruments, can be classified as: advisory, statutory guidance, or legally binding. In the case of advisory and guidance documents, individual schools may have different interpretations, implementations, and enactments of policies. Alexander (2014, p.158) argues that 'policies have little meaning until they are enacted by schools, and to enact is to domesticate, reinvent or even subvert as well as comply'. This understanding of enactment may also influence how wider policies are experienced in school communities. Ball et al. (2012, p.4) also advise that 'policy texts are typically written in relation to the best possible schools, schools that exist in the fevered imaginations of politicians, civil servants and advisers and in relation to fantastical contexts'. Furthermore, Alexander (2014, p.16) argues that policy enactment of headteachers and teachers goes through various stages, 'so what is intended and prescribed by Westminster and experienced by children in schools, even only a couple of miles away, can be very different'. Considering policy in this way is important in understanding how school leadership interprets the different policies in their school. There are many different policy types or policy instruments, each generating different expectations and requirements of schools, such as advisory, guidance and handbook documents. To further complicate policy interpretation for schools in England, a policy such as the National Curriculum is statutory and, therefore, a legal requirement for state-maintained schools but not for academy schools (DfE, 2013a). The aim of this research is not to analyse any one particular education policy in relation to enactment within different schools. Rather, it aims to gain an understanding of how the policy terrain impacts the everyday experiences of primary schools.

1.6 The evolution of the research and the researcher

I have long been interested in how Government neoliberal policies impact and shape the everyday experiences in schools. On returning to higher education as a mature student, I intended to retrain as a primary school teacher. However, very early on in my undergraduate BA Education Studies degree, I was Intrigued by neoliberal ideology and how it is considered to have changed the nature of education. This concept of neoliberalism has since informed much self-study into the area. I developed an interest in how policies affect the day-to-day lives of all those within the school and how much autonomy schools have for shaping their experiences. This focus informed my undergraduate dissertation and Master's degree

assignments in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies. My Master's dissertation focused on a neoliberal ideology concerning parents, specifically the nuanced way parents were co-opted into using the same neoliberal discourse to argue against the new, more rigorous SATs in primary school, introduced in 2014. Following completion of my MA, I commenced PhD.

A researcher's journey is never easy or a linear process. Gravett (2021, p.294) notes that 'doctoral students can be understood as experiencing multiple and ongoing becomings, evolving and changing throughout a doctorate and beyond'. I feel that this quotation encapsulates my journey through the PhD. The original project was to understand the impact of neoliberal governance on the lived experience of school communities in UK primary education. The aim was to interview various stakeholders throughout the primary school community, including parents, carers and other stakeholders such as after-school club leaders and staff members. This was in part to understand how potentially we, as a community, are all co-opted into a neoliberal understanding of the purpose and role of the primary school. However, the research focus shifted due to participant access (discussed in detail in Chapter 5.4.1). I was further influenced by the deeper insights gained from my initial in-depth interviews with the participating headteachers. As Agee (2009, p.432) advises, 'good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in all stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey'. This reflexive premise guided the research and, as a result, the focus shifted from the impact of education policies on the lived experience of the primary school community. None of the four headteachers discussed education policies as such but detailed broader issues impacting their school communities and how the schools were addressing these challenges. Three of the four schools were in disadvantaged areas and had been affected by many years of austerity cuts, reducing services that supported local families. Therefore, the aim became to evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies generally, and policies within education that affect primary schools.

1.7 Research Aims and Objectives

My overall aim was to highlight the everyday experience of primary school actors, the challenges they face and how Government neoliberal policies either contribute to or alleviate these issues.

1.7.1 Research Objectives

- To discuss the enactment of education policies in English primary schools;
- To analyse how Government neoliberal policies impact school-parent relationships within the primary school context;
- To explore the impact of wider Government neoliberal policies on the leadership of English primary schools, with particular reference to issues of learning and welfare.

1.7.2 Research Questions

1. How are education policies interpreted and enacted, or resisted, in the everyday experiences of primary schools?
2. How do Government neoliberal policies impact the school-parent relationship with primary schools?
3. What is the significance of the Government's wider policies on leadership decisions in primary schools, with particular reference to issues of learning and welfare?
4. How do Government neoliberal policies impact the everyday experiences of primary school actors, with particular reference to issues of learning and welfare?

1.8 Outline of the thesis

I have commenced my thesis in this first chapter. This chapter sets out the context of this study in relation to Education policy changes and austerity measures. I have defined neoliberalism and policy context within England in reference to education

and outlined the rationale and purpose of the research. The chapters for the rest of the thesis are organised as follows.

1.8.1 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This chapter details the theoretical framework for the research, which will provide a structure for contextualising the literature (Chapters 3 and 4) and the strategies for inquiry (Chapter 5). The theoretical framework for this research is based on Foucault's (2007) notion of governmentality and the evolution of this theory into the concept of responsibilisation. The framework considers how education policies can become 'live' within the primary school setting.

1.8.2 Chapter 3: Contextualising neoliberalisation of education

In this chapter, I situate my study in relation to previous research using the theoretical framework that will be presented in Chapter 2. I clarify the potential of my research to contribute to the field of neoliberalism in education and the experiences in primary schools. I examine the influences of neoliberal education policy on the conceptualisation of primary education and teaching. I further explore Government policy discourse pertaining to the school-parent relationship and I review more recent research into the impacts of austerity measures on schools and families. The chapter critically reviews the related literature and concepts to address the research questions.

1.8.3 Chapter 4: Contextualising neoliberalisation of school leadership and management

The focus of this chapter is to contextualise the literature in relation to the neoliberal transformation of school leadership and management. As will also be shown in Chapter 3, I situate my critical evaluation within current research, utilising the theoretical framework (Chapter 2). This process will address the research questions in relation to how Government neoliberal policies have shaped primary school leadership.

1.8.4 Chapter 5: Strategies for inquiry

In Chapter 5, I detail the strategies used to conduct the research. My research intent was to explore and understand individuals' perceptions and experiences within the context of their primary school. I begin by defining the interpretivist paradigm, which supports the researcher's methodological choices. An interpretivist research design will support an interpretation of individual school actors' experiences with the primary school. I explain the use of in-depth and semi-structured interviews to gather data. I discuss the sampling methods used and the access to participants, which changed the initial focus of the research. I provide a scene-setting context for each participating school, along with the key for the aliases of the participants that are used throughout the findings chapters. To support the rationale for determining the key findings, I detail the decision to analyse the data thematically and explain my use of a codebook to ensure that the findings were clearly audited to ensure reliability and validity.

1.8.5 Chapters 6-9 Finding, analysis, and discussion

I present the findings, analysis, and discussion in four separate yet related chapters (Chapters 6 - 9). These chapters will draw upon the thematic framework in Chapter 2 and the literature from Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 6 will focus on the onus of leadership. The findings explore leadership responsibilities placed on the headteacher, along with a discussion in relation to how the headteachers' ethos and values shape the schools in many diverse ways. The values and beliefs of the headteachers were evident in the compliance or resistance to neoliberal approaches in education.

Chapter 7 addresses the complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship. The school-parent relationship is discussed with reference to parent policy discourse highlighted in Chapter 3, revealing a paradox of parental involvement and engagement. There is an exploration of the complexities of communication between the school and the parent, which can create or alleviate barriers.

Chapter 8 will focus on the context of learning, highlighting how Government policies influence teaching and learning practices. There will be an exploration of wider initiatives that support the child, particularly those in socio-economically deprived areas, and how disadvantaged children are being supported with learning through various initiatives.

Chapter 9 considers how the school has become responsabilised for the welfare of children and families. There is a focus on the Government's austerity measures, which have resulted in wider funding cuts to benefits and services that impact the school. The impact of austerity is discussed in relation to the child and their family's welfare.

1.8.6 Chapter 10 Conclusion

I interpret and analyse my notable research findings by returning to and answering the research questions from this introductory chapter. I acknowledge the limitations of the research and distil the contribution to knowledge from the findings chapters. This new knowledge informs the recommendations for policymakers and schools. Finally, I highlight areas for future research.

1.9 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have detailed the rationale for the research. Specifically, I have recognised that the neoliberal context is considered to have shaped education and, as a result, primary school experiences. I have outlined the recent austerity ideology impacting wider society, which may also be affecting schools. In addition, I have considered the notion of policy, which is not a directive but is something that is struggled over, interpreted, and enacted, which implies policy can be complied with or resisted. The research will consider the potential tension that may result between the Government and schools in the degrees of compliance and rejection in relation to Government neoliberal policies and how this impacts leadership and the experiences of the different actors, including staff, children, and parents in primary schools.

CHAPTER 2. DEFINING THE THEORETICAL APPROACH

2.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions. The theoretical framework provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review and most importantly, the methods and analysis.

(Grant and Osanloo, 2014, p.12)

As the opening quotation highlights, a theoretical framework is integral to any research project. Whilst this chapter aims to construct a theoretical framework through an analysis of the extant literature, it should be borne in-mind that the development of theory will also be integral throughout the method and the analysis of the research. Currently, no singular theoretical approach offers a solution for critically reviewing the vast literature dedicated to studying education. As such, I intend to utilise several theories to approach the literature to address my thesis question: *A critical evaluation of the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in English primary schools*. The research question has differing elements that require consideration, which will be approached using an amalgamation of theory. Foucault's works are useful for the research theoretical framework because, as Ball (2013, p.120) summarised, Foucault noted the political shift from 'welfare to neoliberalism', 'government to governmentality', 'politics to ethics' and 'discipline to subjectivity'. Firstly, I will consider Michel Foucault's governmentality and the evolution of this theory into responsabilisation to address the notion of neoliberalism and how this can affect the perception of the individual with regard to policy. Then follows a consideration of how to analyse education policy via a neoliberal perspective by exploring policy frameworks. Finally, the last part of the framework will consider policy enactment, which aims to address the experiences of education policy by both schools and the wider community.

2.2 Governmentality

Firstly, the theoretical framework will consider Michel Foucault's governmentality and how this will be used as a theoretical lens for the research, which also provides a link to responsabilisation, which will be discussed in the next section.

Michel Foucault (2007) first referred to the term 'governmentalities' within his lecture series of 1977-1978 entitled *Security, Territory, Population*. However, Foucault reflected that these lectures should have been called 'a history of "governmentality"' (ibid., p.108). Similarly, Lemke's (2002) review of the lectures advises that a key theme was concerned with the genealogy of the modern state, as the history of analysis or the genealogy of government was applied from the societies of Ancient Greece through to modern neoliberalism in western societies (Foucault, 2007). The focus of the lectures addressed the problem of government: 'how to govern oneself, how to be governed, by whom should we accept to be governed, how to be the best possible governor?' (ibid. p.88). Foucault (2007, p.108) thus defines the concept of governmentality firstly as:

the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.

Therefore, governmentality aims to shape all aspects of a population via various institutions, policies, and practices, including education (Peters et al., 2009; Ball, 2013). Secondly, Foucault (2007, p.108) further describes governmentality as a:

sovereignty, discipline, and so on—of the type of power that we can call "government" and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (appareils) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (savoirs).

The term government was considered to refer not only to the political context of governing but also to how aspects of society are constructed by the philosophical, religious, medical, and pedagogic contexts (Lemke, 2001). In addition, the term government also incorporates how governing the family is structured, as Foucault (2007, p.94) advises:

when a state is governed well, fathers will know how to govern their families, their wealth, their goods, and their property well, and individuals will also conduct themselves properly. This descending line, which means that the good government of the state affects individual conduct or family management.

Therefore, governmentality is concerned not only with the conduct of individuals, families, and groups but also with the administration of the everyday functioning of society. Foucault (ibid., p.389) notes that this form of government resulting in self-control is described as 'the conduct of conduct', which involves 'governing the self to governing others.' Thus, Lemke (2001, p.191) surmises that governmentality can create a 'reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge', whereby the government creates the circumstances in which power relations and processes of subjectification can occur (ibid.). Therefore, governmentality aims to form and reform subjects into docile bodies, whereby subjects observe and analyse their own conduct (Foucault, 1975/1995). Thus, the term government is understood as a discursive field in which the exercise of power is 'rationalized and structures specific forms of intervention' (Lemke, 2001, p.191). In summary, governments aim to produce citizens through a variety of policies.

The production of a 'good' citizen can be associated with a neoliberal form of governmentality, which is connected to broader government social policies and those specifically relating to education. Rose and Miller (2008, p.8), in their book *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social, and Personal Life*, sought to extend Foucault's (2007) works on governmentality, their academic writings, and those of others, to understand how our present-day society had been assembled, and how it might be transformed in the future. Rose and Miller (2008, p.193) describe how new political ideas circulated in the 1980s, which sought to problematise society by neglecting the values of autonomy, entrepreneurship, and individual self-motivation. The narrative within politics sought to reform the workplace by recreating the requirements for the worker to be 'an individual seeking to fulfil him- or herself through work, and work was an essential element in the path to self-fulfilment' (ibid., p.194). Thus, the change in discourse relating to the expectations for the desired worker is considered shaping the neoliberal citizen, which Rose and Miller (2008, p.195) describe as an 'enterprising individual in search of meaning, responsibility and a sense of personal achievement in life'. Rose and Miller (ibid.) further express

how individuals are required to conduct their lives as a form of 'enterprise of the self, striving to improve the "quality of life" for themselves and their families through the choices that they took within the marketplace of life' (ibid.). This reflects Foucault's (2007) notion of governmentality, as the worker needs to govern oneself and the family to ensure that individuals strive to be competitive in the workplace. The creation of the neoliberal worker or citizen via governmentality processes or creating an entrepreneurial individual is salient within education policies.

From a governmentality perspective, the education policy analysis can create a critical space to understand how the structures of education and those within the system can be managed and moulded into the required neoliberal citizen. In the research of Ball et al. (2011) *How schools do policy*, the authors describe how actors within schools become policy translators. Via this process of translation, teachers are thus considered compliant via the engagement and implementation of policy. As teachers 'engage with policy and bring their creativity to bear on its enactment, they are also captured by it. They change it, in some ways, and it changes them' (ibid., p.630). Perryman et al. (2017) highlight such policies as the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013b), directly transforming a teacher's practice with a focus on self-improvement. The same argument could apply to the Headteachers' Standards (DfE, 2020a). In addition, many other policies, such as the National Curriculum and Ofsted judgements, could be considered shaping teachers' practice. Perryman et al. (2017, p.746) advise that school leadership through the translation of policy becomes a form of governmentality, in the need to shape oneself and others. Reflecting Foucault's (2007) notion of governmentality, this translation is achieved via the conduct and technologies of the self, leading to teachers/leaders influencing themselves and each other in subtle ways (Perryman et al., 2017, p.746). Perryman et al.(ibid.) further suggest that these:

practices are complicit in the formation of and constitution of teacher subjects, and their subjection to the morality of policy and educational reform. These practices are some ways in which teachers work on themselves and others, and make themselves subjects of policy.

Of relevance to this research is the notion that school leaders and teachers can be transformed via Government neoliberal policies and that policy enactment can influence the experiences of all within the primary school setting. Whilst Government

policies are generalised within a space, it will be of interest to investigate how individual schools adapt and enact policies specific to their needs and context.

2.3 Responsibilisation

Responsibilisation is considered an evolution of Foucault's (2007) governmentality theory. This section will outline the concept of responsibilisation and its use as a theoretical framework within this research.

The term responsibilisation has been used in the analyses of various fields since the 1990s. Brown and Baker (2012, p.18) advise that responsibilisation has increased frequency in various fields such as 'accounts of management, social policy, health and welfare'. Halse et al. (2019, p.1) support the use of this theoretical approach by academics across multiple disciplines as it provides a means to:

document and account for the melange of rationalities, pressures, technologies, and practices of responsibilities and responsibilisation that act on and/or are taken up by individuals, groups and organisations, and how they work to both delimit and create possibilities for individuals and collective freedoms.

Halse et al.(2019, p.1), amongst others (Keddie, 2015, 2016; Peters, 2017; Torrance, 2017; Done and Murphy, 2018; Keddie and Mills, 2019) to name a few, use this theoretical lens to analyse various aspects of education. In Responsibilisation at the margins of welfare services, Juhila et al. (2017, p.12) provide a comprehensive summary of the origins of responsibilisation as an evolution of Foucault's (2007) governmentality, referencing academics such as Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (e.g. Rose, 1990, 1999, 2000; Rose and Miller, 1992, 2008) (ibid.). Juhila et al.'s (ibid.) research, in relation to welfare services, aligns with education as schools are services, and primary school teachers embody the notion of care in relation to the child. Pyysiäinen et al. (2017, p.216) advise that 'processes of governing, subjectification and responsibility-taking are closely interlinked' with this a 'form of remote and indirect action of the state enables the notion of 'responsibilisation', as 'an establishment of a form of subjectivity or self-hood – such as an 'enterprising self'' (ibid.). Therefore, rather than the individual being obedient, the requirements of the government would be achieved by the individual self-fulfilling the requirements,

or as Peeters (2013, p.585) argues, 'government does not make citizens 'responsible', in the sense that the state steps back and lets citizens deal with societal problems themselves, but rather aims to obligate citizens: to make them 'responsible'. This view of governmentality sees the process of responsabilisation as the 'essential building block of neoliberal, and more generally advanced liberal, rule' (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017, p.217).

2.3.1 Responsibilisation in a neoliberal context

Neoliberal ideology is considered to shape individual subjectivities. The neoliberal individual is considered entrepreneurial, self-motivated, and productive (Rose, 1999a; Ball, 2013; Dardot and Laval, 2014). Dardot and Laval (2014, p.119) suggest that neoliberalism aims to 'introduce, restore or support dimensions of rivalry in action and, more fundamentally, to shape subjects to make them entrepreneurs capable of seizing opportunities for profit and ready to engage in the constant process of competition'. Thus, the notional ideal subject is entrepreneurial, self-motivated and productive; neoliberal ideology policies create and promote market situations that produce an entrepreneurial subject through competition (ibid.). Individuals must assume responsibility for themselves and their families to ensure they are economically competitive. Therefore, a neoliberal ideology endeavours to assign power from the state to the individual.

The notion of individuals being increasingly responsible for their welfare is reflected within the theoretical term of responsabilisation. This notion is the transferring of responsibility from the state to communities and individuals, who are then required to take an active role in resolving their own problems and issues. Clarke (2005, p.451) advised that this shift from the state to individuals was introduced via the concept of 'rights and responsibilities', which became prominent in the administration of New Labour (1997–2010). Individuals were explicitly formulated to be bearers of responsibilities and rights, which included assuming 'responsibility to produce the conditions of one's own independence – ideally by becoming a "hard-working" individual or family' (ibid.). This notion of individual families being increasingly responsible is reflected within the Government's education rhetoric, whereby parents are actively encouraged to ensure that their child can compete within the education

system, from choosing the best school to ensuring that they continually support their child in school (Oria et al., 2007; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017). The education system seeks to produce a neoliberal individual, with the Government policies aiming to shape those within the system to be responsible, entrepreneurial, self-motivated and productive. However, whilst this may be the neoliberal ideal and the aim of education policies, the reality of socioeconomic pressures may exclude some children and families from being able to compete in society. Therefore, schools may experience a tension between creating an entrepreneurial spirit, whilst having to support many children and their families with basic needs, due to the impact of austerity policies funding cuts to services and support since 2010.

French philosopher Michel Foucault (2008), in the lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*, examines the 'crisis of liberalism' (or neoliberalism), which was neither an economic theory nor a political ideology but historically emerged as a result of liberal forms of social regulation and individual self-governance (Lemke et al., 2011). Hache (2007) suggests that the notion of responsibility is a specific development of the neoliberal art of government. Foucault (2008, p.94) advises that the art of governing is concerned with how to govern the individual and the family, stating:

when a state is governed well, fathers will know how to govern their families, their wealth, their goods, and their property well, and individuals will also conduct themselves properly.

This form of governance of the individual and the family is achieved via 'indirect techniques of government' based on 'a transfer of responsibility to individuals' (Foucault, 2008, pp.111-112). These indirect techniques of government can reflect the perceptions of power as a form of '*strategic games*' (Lemke, 2001, p.5), which can create structures that make possible fields of action for others. Lemke (2001, p.5) interprets Foucault by advising that power relations such as 'ideological manipulation or rational argumentation, moral advice or economic exploitation' do not function by the removal of an individual's liberty or freedom of choice. However, on the contrary, this moral and economic exploitation is achieved by the perception of offering more freedom to individuals on how they may govern their lives, which can be considered as "'empowerment" or "responsibilisation" of subjects' (ibid.); this forces individuals to be free decision-makers. Rose and Miller (2008, p.39) concur

that neoliberal governance seeks to 'shape the conduct of diverse actors without shattering the formally autonomous character'. Responsibilisation is, therefore, the desire to reduce the scope of government, or the welfare aspects of the government, to the individuals. However, within neoliberalism, the government still maintains control of individuals without being responsible for them (Foucault, 2007). Developing this point, Hache (2007, p.2) suggests that:

the transfer of responsibilities occurs through the creation of an attachment to a new way of thinking and behaving. This is achieved in two stages: firstly, by making specific types of behavior undesirable, thereby detaching us from a kind of dependence on the State, and then, though simultaneously, making another kind of behavior desirable, a behavior that is deemed responsible.

From this perspective, neoliberalism presents a paradox, which suggests the withdrawal of the state yet marks a stronger but transferred form of interventionism; Foucault (2008, p.137) advises 'active politics without direction setting.' Interventionism within neoliberal governmentality seeks to create social conditions that work to encourage the production of '*homo economicus*' or the 'entrepreneurial man' (Foucault, 2008, p.226). The construction of *homo economicus* produces strategies for the economisation of state and civil society institutions and the moralisation of the market (Lemke, 2001); this produces a shift in responsibility from the state to the individual. However, the state retains power by dictating the norms of assessment and control, in which the state expects individuals to look after themselves, modelled on an 'assumption of individuality, rationality and self-interest' (Peters, 2017, p.140). Thus, Lemke (2001, p.201) advises that the individual being responsible is transformed into a problem of 'self-care' and 'consumption'. Responsibilisation, therefore, is a form of self-governance in which individuals and families are expected to become administrators of their own lives, making the right choices reflecting the neoliberal discourse.

Neoliberalism relies on the population as a resource. Ball (2012 p.130) advises that individuals should be 'lean, fit and flexible, and indeed agile-active citizens'. Dardot and Laval (2014) argue that neoliberalism has trained our minds to think in economic ways about ourselves and others; this creates 'productive subjects' whose minds are managed by the environment (ibid., p.258). Ball (2012, p.130) suggests this to be 'insidious disciplined self-management', making citizens agentic with the needs of

capitalism and responsible for the damage that capitalism does to them. Lives become judged as meaningful (or not) about individuals' choices (Ball, 2013). Individuals' choices are linked to choices in education, which can potentially shape the individual's future human capital. Initially, this choice is with the parent in choosing the school; as the child grows, these responsibilities are passed on, with choices relating to exam subjects, whether to continue into higher education and future career. Therefore, schools and those within can be considered to reproduce the required norms and assessments, creating an environment of self-competition and self-interest.

2.3.2 Responsibilisation in the context of education

Responsibilisation has been used in relation to many aspects of education. The use of responsibilisation features in research at all levels of education, the many agents that work with the system, and children and their families. However, Halse et al. (2020) explain that many views and perspectives are currently in operation on the effects of responsibility and responsibilisation within the analysis of education and educational actors. These interpretations should 'send a salutatory caution against making universalised assumptions about responsibility and responsibilisation in education, and about generalising single case findings to the entire field of education' (Halse et al., 2020, p.1). However, these differing and diverse perspectives can provide and necessitate the need to explore:

the complex ways in which individuals, groups and contexts are differentiated from one another and resisting the temptation to reduce key concepts, such as responsibility and responsibilisation, to simplistic categorical oppositions (for example, good/bad) that are fixed in time and space.

(Halse et al., 2020, p.1)

Keddie and Mills (2019) capture the notion of neoliberal responsibilisation, in school leadership, to a form of moral agency concerning the running of a school and school improvements, via a business discourse and entrepreneurial approach to create a successful school. Moral agents, in terms of responsibilisation, will hold themselves accountable to achieve required outcomes. Ball (2017) connects moral agents to neoliberal governance of responsibilisation within education. This responsibilisation is achieved through neoliberal policy regimes via policy technologies such as

professionalism, professional identities and bureaucracy, which are replaced by technologies of managerialism, performativity and responsabilisation (Ball, 2015). Hellowell (2018, p.167) notes that managerialism reconfigures professional identities through various institutional mechanisms to meet personal and organisational performance indicators. The shift in these policy technologies has resulted in contemporary educational discourses of accountability and performativity via standardisation. Ball (2017, pp.57–58) seeks to explain that responsabilisation is the internalisation of performativity via the concept of the self, in which headteachers and teachers hold themselves to account via ‘monitoring and disciplining themselves’ (ibid.). However, McLeod (2017, p.45) highlights the need to be cautious when considering the notion of responsabilisation within education as the teaching profession historically has included ‘[n]otions of duty, obligation, service, responsibility as well as care’. Therefore, the ideas of ethics of care are still a consideration in teachers’ work and need to be deliberated within the purpose of education beyond the performativity discourse (ibid.). Hellowell (2018, p.179) concluded that within education, teachers’ professionalism in response to responsabilisation is ‘consistent with neoliberal ideals of accountability’. However, and importantly, Hellowell (ibid.) noted that ‘the notion of responsabilisation can exist in a dialogic relationship with the responsibilities arising from compassionate care within the teaching profession. Therefore, in the discourse of responsabilisation, moral agency and caring values must be considered within the teaching profession that goes beyond the measurable outputs of a neoliberal form of education.

2.4 Policy Framework

A central part of the research is the consideration of policy and the differing ways education policy can be considered. The section aims to highlight Government neoliberal policy and literature pertaining to education and the ways this can be understood and analysed.

Education policy changes have led to the changing roles and responsibilities of schools and teachers being heavily prescribed by the central Government (Day and Sachs, 2005; Maguire and Dillon, 2007; Braun et al., 2011). Ball et al. (2012, p.2) advise that much writing concerning education policy and the meaning of policy is

'frequently just taken for granted and/or defined superficially as an attempt to "solve a problem"'. The concept of policy as a means to solve problems within education is conducted 'through the production of policy texts such as legislation or other locally or nationally driven prescriptions and insertions into practice' (ibid.); this reflects a normative way in which policy is often considered and researched. This normative approach can be considered ideological via Foucault's (2008) biopolitics¹. Foucault (2008) advises that the first element of biopolitics is governments problematising economic situations; governments then seek to combine economic policies with social, cultural and educational policies as a form of investment in human capital, which provides the means for the state to construct the population as a political problem and to use policies as a form of population control (Pierce, 2012).

Education policy can be considered and researched in a variety of ways. Olssen et al. (2004, pp.2–3) suggest that in the past, 'education policy as policy was taken for granted'. However, in recent times, 'educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy and public contestation [...] Educational policymaking has become highly politicised' (ibid.). Bell and Stevenson (2006, p.2) advise that education policy studies have tended to take one of the following three forms:

1. *The development of broad analytical models through which the policy process can be understood and interpreted.*
2. *Analyses of a range of policy issues.*
3. *Critiques of specific policies.*

However, these three forms reflect a fragmented approach to research, which often fails to provide a 'cogent account of the policy process within an articulated framework for analysis' (ibid.). Education policy research often focuses on how policies are implemented within schools. Nevertheless, as Jones (2013) highlights, whilst formal schooling is generally controlled and organised by governments, policies are often immersed in values, whether those of individuals or communities, with values embedded throughout institutions. Due to the influence of values,

¹ Biopolitics is a political concept by Michel Foucault, which considers the administration of life and a locality's populations as its subject. Foucault (1976/1988, p.138) advises that biopolitics is a way 'to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, [and] to put this life in order.'

developed policies become complex and multi-faceted (ibid.). Furthermore, policies are open to interpretation via those who encounter policy, including the initial policymakers, governments, schools, teachers, students, parents, and the wider community (Ball et al., 2012; Jones, 2013). Therefore, developing a conceptual understanding of the politics that support the policymaking process is necessary to create a more theoretical and empirical understanding of conducting research within the context of education (Ozga, 2000).

Various researchers have highlighted differing approaches to try and better understand and analyse the effects of policy on schools. Datnow and Park's (2012) encapsulation of the different approaches to education policy research as technical-rational, mutual adaptation, and sense-making and co-construction are relevant to this thesis. Similarly, Jones (2013) provides differing approaches to understanding education policy via the 'Four Education Orientations' education Framework. Jones' (2013) approach incorporates an understanding of the politics that support the policy research as conservative, liberal, critical and post-modern. Differing aspects of Datnow and Park's (2012) and Jones' (2013) approaches to policy analysis will be used to construct a way of understanding how the Government's neoliberal policies are interpreted or disregarded by school leaders in everyday practice.

Datnow and Park (2012) view policy implementation from three perspectives, which I briefly outline below. The technical-rational perspective, the most traditionally used, was considered by the authors to be a top-down approach, which assumed that policy would flow from the top authority in a clear line to the lowest operative, whereby 'the causal arrow of change travels in one direction from active, thoughtful designers to passive, pragmatic implementers' (ibid., p.348). Datnow and Park (2012) criticise the top-down technical-rational perspective as the policy implementation ignores and downplays the influence of the context of where the policy is to be implemented and by whom. In contrast, the mutual adaptation approach considers the policy's local context, which acknowledges 'the importance of bottom-up interpretations and responses to policy intentions', highlighting that policy is 'made at the local level' (ibid., p.349). Datnow and Park (2012, p.350) highlight the limitation of the mutual adaptation approach by stating:

[I]t does not fully capture the differential relationships amongst multiple actors and agencies in the policy process. By focusing on the micro-level aspects of change, this branch of policy research did not examine the extent to which macro-level factors, differential access to power, and actors' positions may support, constrain, or coerce responses.

To address the limitations of both the technical-rational and mutual adaptation perspectives, Datnow and Park (2012) suggest a third approach: sense-making and co-construction. This approach considers that researchers need to acknowledge and examine the interconnections between policy design and implementation. Cohen et al. (2007, p.522) affirm 'to reconcile policy and practice means that policy is "a joint project."', which highlights 'the tension between official authority and human agency, which can be a source of conflict' (ibid.). Therefore, Datnow and Park (2012, p.350) summarise, 'policy relies on implementers to realize goals while practice depends on policy to frame action and offer resources'. This relationship between policy and practice is not static or linear, but can be contested, creative, and vary along several dimensions (Ball et al., 2012; Datnow and Park, 2012). Jones (2013, p.1) further highlights that:

Governments, schools, individual departments and teachers, students, parents and other community members all have their own interpretations of the policies that may be in line with, variant to or directly oppositional to the intentions of policymakers and policy committee members (whose views may not be entirely uniform in the first place).

Matland (1995, cited by Datnow and Park, 2012, p.350) explains the dimensions of policy to practice as encompassing 'clarity/ambiguity of goals, clarity/ambiguity of means, and conflict/cooperation'. Datnow and Park's (ibid.) work highlights how policy can be implemented and offers the third approach of sense-making and co-construction. This third approach will benefit the current research as it considers the multiple actors involved in policy within schools and the non-linear way such policy is used.

A criticism of Datnow and Park's (2012) understanding of policy within schools, is that it fails to consider the political aspects of policy construction. To address this

issue, Jones' (2013) frameworks provide an approach through which to discuss and analyse education policy. Jones (ibid.) provides frameworks aimed at addressing how research terms such as 'conservative' and 'neoliberal' are commonly discussed without adequate definition; that there is an assumption of application, with the supposition that these terms within policy are self-evident and common knowledge. Therefore, '[r]igour and the reproducibility become questionable when one policy is thus described as liberal, neoliberal, or conservative' (ibid., p.ix).

To ensure this research's understanding of neoliberalism is clear, I will utilise Jones' (2013) liberal education orientation framework. This framework charts the rise in liberalism within education policies in the global west (Olssen and Peter, 2005; Jones, 2013) and highlights the evolution and differences to neoliberalism. The importance of commencing with liberalism ideology is due to its connection between education policies and human capital theory (Jones, 2013). Human capital theory is often considered the most influential economic theory of Western education systems (Gillies, 2011). Gillies (ibid.) advises that human capital theory set the education policy frameworks of government from the early 1960s, with education policies seen as a key determiner of a country's economic performance (Olssen and Peter, 2005; Gillies, 2011; Jones, 2013). Jones (2013) connects this concept of human capital theory with the need for a "multifarious 'upskilling' of individuals to allow for a competitive, flexible, and insecure workforce", with this trend being linked to the need to raise educational standards and to the marketisation within education policy (ibid.). Education policy, therefore, is based on the development of the individual's potential to achieve²; competition is encouraged and rewarded with the goal of education promoting 'individual excellence, happiness and progress, whilst rewarding students according to their performance' (Jones, 2013, p.35). Importantly, parents and communities are considered stakeholders in the policy process and

² In considering how the notion of human capital and upskilling reflect neoliberal ideals, there is the potential to interpret these theoretically, including in relation to meritocracy. Meritocracy is defined as 'an ideology of social justice that is based on the notion of equality of opportunity' (Jin and Ball, 2020, p.65). Jin and Ball (ibid.) highlight that meritocracy is connected to the idea of neoliberalism with its emphasis on the 'global war for talent', which has seen the inclusion of meritocratic ideals within education policy. However, for the purpose of this research, the focus is on neoliberalism within education policy, analysed via a framework based on governmentality and responsabilisation.

viewed as consumers/clients of the 'education policy product' (Jones, 2013; Ball, 2017).

Neoliberal policies are considered as developing out of liberalism. Jones (2013) advises that education researchers need to ensure the distinction between liberalism and neoliberalism, with the latter supporting a 'clearer separation of the state and the autonomous individual (and insistence on the pre-availability of choice)' (ibid., p.36). Therefore, neoliberalism positions education as a product for consumers to be 'freely explored in a way that stimulates the competitiveness of autonomous schools (leading to school improvements) and maximises profits' (Jones, 2013, p.37). Furthermore, neoliberalism focuses on the decentralisation of schools, which aims for schools to self-manage and compete within a marketplace of education (Jones, 2013; Ball, 2017). Thereby, knowledge becomes a tool for individual competitiveness, forming a central function in producing human capital (Olssen et al., 2004). An important point to note within the neoliberal policy framework is that whilst neoliberalism could appear to provide a 'critical' orientation for research, Jones (2013, p.37) highlights that it:

problematizes education policy through the potential democratic interests of the individual (Marginson 2007), rather than aiming at revolutionary structural changes across all education systems, redressing broader social inequalities. Equality in the neo-liberal orientation is equality of opportunity (for the pursuit of competitive excellence in the liberal sense), not of outcome (in the critical sense).

Neoliberal education policy research reflects characteristics that apply a constructivist, social constructivist or economy-based framework that focuses on the marketisation and competitiveness of education (Ozga, 2000; Jones, 2013). Within a neoliberal policy framework, the individual students/staff/schools/parents are the focus of the research, and not the social structures, which are 'problematized rather than valorised' (Francis, 2006, p.187). As a result, broader social issues affecting achievement may be overlooked (Jones, 2013). This neoliberal framework provided by Jones (ibid.) will be utilised throughout the research to ensure that neoliberalism is not an assumed term in policy text or literature.

2.5 Policy Enactment

The aim of the research is to understand the impact of Government neoliberal policies on the experiences in primary schools. The preceding section detailed ways in which policy frameworks can be understood. This section aims to address how policies can be enacted or become lived within the context of a school.

As detailed above, a sense-making and co-construction approach to policy research could aid in understanding how policy affects the primary school community. The seminal work of Ball et al.(2012) *How Schools Do Policy*, seemingly takes Datnow and Park's (2012) perception of policy sense-making and co-construction further. Their work focuses explicitly on 'how policies become 'live' and get enacted (or not) in schools'. Ball et al. (2012, p.71) provide a comprehensive definition of policy enactment within education thus:

The enactments of policy within all of this range from interpretation to translation, to practice and performance. They take place at many moments, in various sites, in diverse forms, in many combinations and interplays. Enactments are collective, creative and constrained and are made up of unstable juggling between irreconcilable priorities, impossible workloads, satisficing moves and personal enthusiasm. Enactments are always more than just implementation they bring together contextual, historic and psychosocial dynamics into relation with text and imperatives to produce action and activities that are policy.

It is appropriate to include a section devoted to the framework of Ball et al. (ibid.) as this best represents how policy is understood and experienced in the everyday classroom by the multiple actors involved within schools. Although the research of Ball et al. (2012) focused on policy enactment in secondary schools, the work provided an interesting and valuable starting point for my research by also considering the effects of neoliberal policy within the primary school community. The premise of the research was to conduct a long-term qualitative study based in four mainstream secondary schools within England, to explore how schools enact, rather than implement, policy. The research takes a Foucauldian approach by considering 'Policy as done by and done to teachers; they are actors and subjects, subject to and objects of policy. Policy is written onto bodies and produces particular subject positions' (ibid., p.3). This quotation alludes to the concept of governmentality, whereby a government can create circumstances in which power relations, and

processes of subjectification, are further produced via policies. These power relations are maintained in the everyday experiences of the school. Therefore, policy can have differing interpretations from one individual to another, how these interpretations are recontextualised, how policy text becomes actions and the 'relation to the apparatuses of power within which they are set' (ibid.). In thinking about how policy is enacted, Ball et al.(2012, p.144) have created a visual account to aid in their thinking, fieldwork, analysis, and writing, represented in Figure 1.

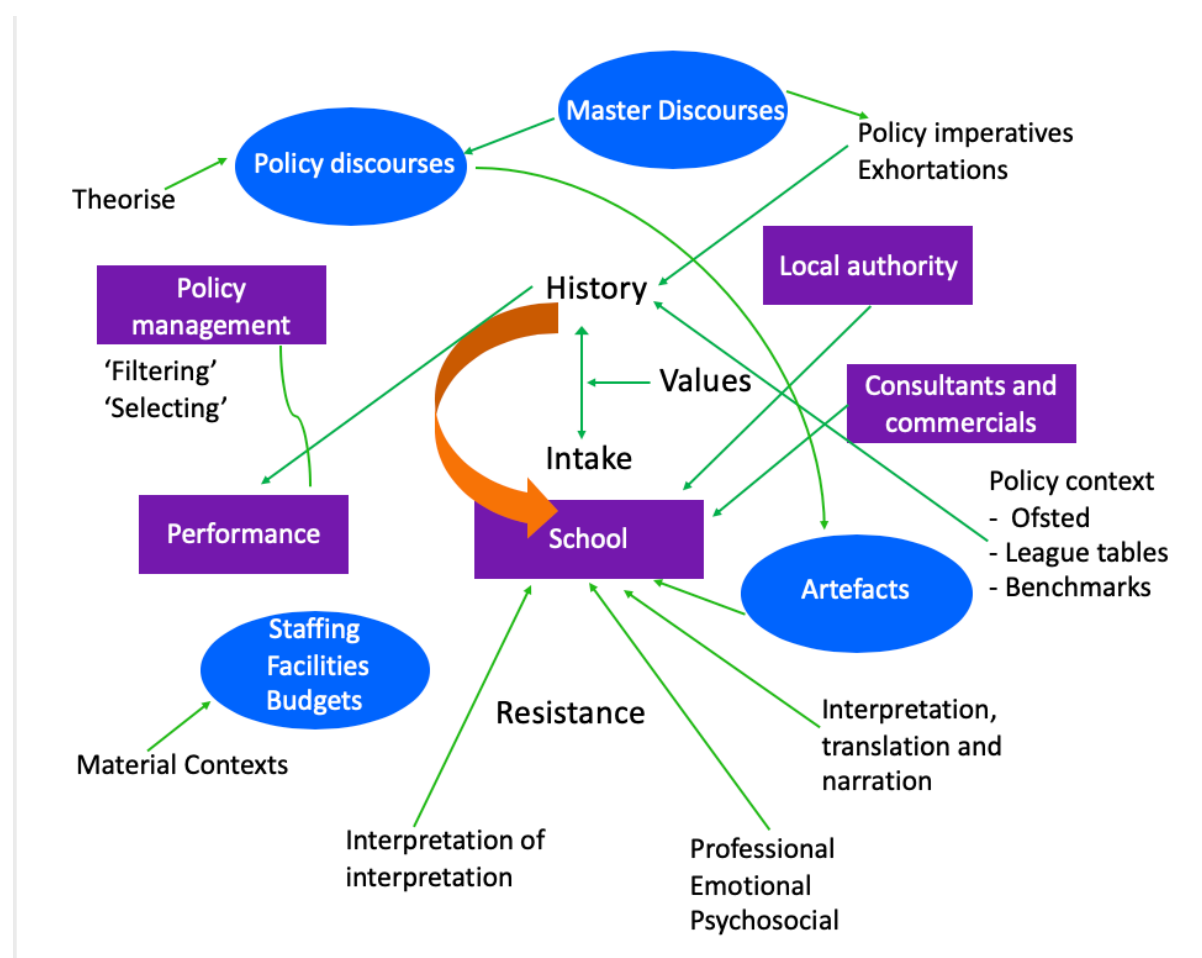


Figure 2-1 Policy Enactment

The above diagram details the complex way in which policy within a school can be considered beyond the management of the school, including local authorities, consultants, and commercials. However, what is not clear from the diagrams is how the children, families, and the wider school community are included in the enactment or resistance of policy.

As part of the research for *How schools do policy*, several research papers were published by the three authors highlighting differing areas of the longitudinal research. One such paper (Braun et al., 2012) considers the nature of the school and teachers in policy is enacted. Braun et al.(2012, p.547-548) advise:

[S]chools and teachers are expected to be familiar with, and able to implement, multiple (and sometimes contradictory) policies that are planned for them by others, while they are held accountable for this task. However, individual policies and policy-makers do not normally take account of the complexity of policy enactment environments and the need for schools to simultaneously respond to multiple policy (and other) demands and expectations.

Within this concept of who implements and enacts various policies could also be considered the wider school community, that both engages with and supports, or not, how policy is enacted: what is the role of school administrators, school governors, parents and others that make up the complex web of a school community? Ball et al. (2012) aim to address this by emphasising the importance of the contexts of any given school to considerations of policy enactment. Ball and colleagues advise:

Policies enter different resource environments; schools have particular histories, buildings and infrastructures, staffing profiles, leadership experiences, budgetary situations and teaching and learning challenges (e.g. proportions of children with special educational needs (SEN), English as an additional language (EAL), behavioural difficulties, 'disabilities' and social and economic 'deprivations') and the demands of context interact.

(Ball et al., 2012, p.19)

Mulcahy (2015), considering the research of Ball et al. (2012), also takes the concept of enactment to consider how policy actors can be diverse; they can comprise many people via meetings, texts, discussion, technology, and material objects. In addition, Mulcahy (2015) highlights the critical role that material objects, including school facilities, play in policy work. Therefore, all these differing aspects need to be considered when analysing and understanding the effects of policies on the structuring of the primary school, how the school functions, and how it is experienced in the everyday.

To clarify, policy enactment is not the realisation of policy as a one-directional process of implementation. For this research, I adapt the understanding of policy enactment as defined by Ball et al. (2012) and Maguire et al. (2015) as a dynamic,

multi-layered process that requires key actors to interpret and recontextualise policy, which then becomes lived in new ways within their communities. Therefore, within the enactment of policy, actors implement creative processes of sense-making and interpretation relevant to their situation and context. As a result, policy interpretation is a part of the enactment process, with interpretation here taken to mean the way in which actors initially 'read' and respond to policy.

Whilst this research is influenced by Ball et al. (2012) and Maguire et al.'s (2015) notion of policy enactment and interpretation, the definitions of these have been adapted to reflect the context of the research being conducted in primary schools. In further work, Maguire and Braun (2019, pp.103-104) consider the context of primary schools, in which they advise that different actors are:

involved in processes of interpretation, translation and various technologies of policy enactment at different times and in respect of different types of policies. [They argue] that the 'filtering out and selective focussing done by heads...is a crucial aspect of policy interpretation' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 50) and of constructing an institutional narrative for the school.

Maguire and Braun (ibid.) position headteachers as policy narrators as who 'explain' policy and construct an account of their school, to themselves, their staff and the outside world of parents, inspectors and other stakeholders'. Of interest to this research is the notion of headteachers as policy narrators linked to a 'form of social and emotional cohesion' (ibid.). Here, Braun and Maguire (2020, p.436) identified that there are key differences between primary and secondary schooling:

Primary schools are smaller, and head teachers are more visible within everyday school life and closer to the classroom; there is a more truncated management structure and relations with staff and children may be more personal. All these cultural and practical factors may be called up in the responses to, and interpretations of, policies and they position primary schools, primary teachers and primary head teachers in unique ways with regards to policy enactment.

In addition, Braun and Maguire (ibid.) highlight that policy enactment by primary school teachers also differs due to their stronger connection with the children in their classrooms, which may cause a personal tension between policy emphasis on testing to raise attainment and 'a longstanding emphasis on developmentally appropriate

and child-centred learning'. These differences in policy enactment specifically within primary education will be considered as an extension of the policy enactment and interpretation framework of Ball et al. (2012).

2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to define a theoretical framework for this project. The overarching theory that guides this research is Foucault's (2007) governmentality and the evolution of this theory, by many researchers, into the notion of responsabilisation. The concept of governmentality is useful within education policy analysis as it creates a critical space to understand how structures in education and actors within the system can be managed and moulded, reflecting a neoliberal ideal. The notion of responsabilisation describes how the Government's neoliberal policies seek to reduce the scope of Government intervention via aspects of welfare. Here, the Government aims to maintain control of individuals without being responsible for them. This is relevant to education as the reduction of direct state intervention can cause the school actors to become responsabilised. This theoretical framework has detailed an understanding of how policy frameworks can be utilised to understand Government neoliberal policies. The policy framework provides a lens through which to understand the policy terrain that impacts leadership and experiences in primary schools. Furthermore, the policy framework is required as this supports an understanding of how policies are interpreted and enacted within schools. I have commenced the research with a theoretical framework, which informs the contextualisation of the selection and review of the literature in Chapters 3 and 4 and supports the strategies for inquiry detailed in Chapter 5.

In the next two chapters, I examine a body of literature using this theoretical framework to explore the conceptualisation of neoliberalism in education. This will include in Chapter 3 an exploration of parents in relation to education and the current context of education in relation to austerity measures. This will be followed in Chapter 4 by a conceptualisation of the literature in relation to leadership.

CHAPTER 3. CONTEXTUALISING NEOLIBERALISM IN EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the theoretical framework for the research, which will provide a structure for contextualising the literature in this chapter and the strategies for inquiry (Chapter 5). The theoretical framework for the research is based on Foucault's (2007) governmentality and the evolution of this theory into the notion of responsibilisation. The framework also considers how education policies can become 'live' within the context of the primary school. The theoretical framework has informed the literature choices for Chapters 3 and 4.

The field of education is an essential part of any successful society. It has attracted substantial attention and warranted extensive research highlighting the complexities of schooling and education. Research is constantly evolving, reflecting the changing needs and pressures in schools. Therefore, the literature is extensive at a local, international, and global level, resulting in a myriad of theoretical and methodological approaches. I have selected the literature pertinent to my research and the theoretical framework detailed in Chapter 2. However, it is useful to acknowledge the scope and depth of education literature.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate the imperative for research about primary schools in relation to the UK Government's neoliberal policies. I will draw upon a body of literature that explores the changing nature of primary schools and their communities in relation to policies. This will be followed by an exploration of parental discourse in policy and the expectation of the involvement of parents in their child's education. The final section will explore education in relation to wider austerity measures and the impacts on schools. The chapter will selectively review the considerable body of theoretical and empirical knowledge relating to neoliberal policy in education and illustrate the ways this impacts primary education. Specifically, the literature review will explore the relationship between policy and primary school governance to address the research question: *A critical evaluation of the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in English primary schools.*

3.2 Neoliberalisation of primary education

This theme explores how neoliberal policies construct the current mode of primary education. The following section reviews perspectives on the Government's education policies to identify the extent to which a neoliberal ideology has shaped education within England, specifically within primary education.

Neoliberalism has been salient within English education policies since the Education Act 1988. The neoliberal discourse is considered significant within the understanding of contemporary education (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2013, 2017; Saltman, 2014; Humphreys, 2017; Rudd and Goodson, 2017). Neoliberalism, which describes the relationship between the market and the state, has been explicitly applied to education, creating a marketplace within education (ibid.). Ball (2017) has often argued that the drive for an ever-improving education system, based on competition, has created technologies of governance via accountability and performativity measures. Harvey (2005) proposed that neoliberalism should reduce state control within institutions such as schools. However, Foucault foresaw that this would not be the case:

Neoliberal governmentality shows that the so-called retreat of the state is in fact a prolongation of government: neoliberalism is not the end but a transformation of politics that restructures the power relations in society.
(Lemke, 2002, p.58)

This view is reflected in the assertion that the Government needs to ensure that education can produce a workforce that can compete globally (Alexander, 2016). The Minister for State Education, Nick Gibb (2015, para.10-11), stated:

Education is the engine of our economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it's an essential preparation for adult life [...] education is also about the practical business of ensuring that young people receive the preparation they need to secure a good job and a fulfilling career.

Gibb (ibid.) further equates education as producing informed citizens with 'resilience and moral character to overcome challenges and succeed'. This economic framework has influenced education policy throughout the differing stages of

schooling. Lupton and Thompson (2015) reported on the policy changes by the then Coalition Government in their *Record on Schools: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 2010-2015*, highlighting several changes had been made in four areas of education: school system reform; teaching profession reforms; measures to tackle educational inequality; and curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Lupton and Thompson (2015, p.23) further argued that changes in volume, pace, and complexity reflected a 'remarkable period which had altered the landscape' for schools.

A neoliberal approach in education is considered one that primarily serves a government's political and socio-economic aims and thus involves centralisation and an emphasis on standards (Shuayb and O'Donnell, 2012). However, in contrast, Shuayb and O'Donnell (ibid.) also noted a second, contrasting influence within primary education: a progressive and child-centred approach. These two contrasting positions, Braun and Maguire (2020, p.2) state that there are several questions concerning primary schooling:

What primary education is for: what is its purpose and whose needs should it serve? What are its core values or principles? These questions, posed by successive reviews into primary education'. (Alexander, 2010; Rose, 2009) and fiercely debated by UK politicians (e.g. Gove, 2013; Greening, 2016) take us into an arena of ideological and moral dilemmas.

In addition to the debates by theorists and politicians are schools' and teachers' personalised teaching and learning philosophies. Shuayb and O'Donnell (2012, p.309) suggest these contrasting views create a 'hybrid' of an economically driven, learner-centred, society-influenced form of education, which can sometimes appear contradictory. However, Shuayb and O'Donnell (ibid., p.333) conclude that this contradictory hybrid version of education may reflect a child-centred approach whilst also seeking to 'prepare children for economic future in society with a need to identify the individual strengths and weaknesses to provide [...] support to achieve targets'. This hybrid approach was also evident in policies such as Pupil Premium, which targets disadvantaged children with additional school funding to raise achievement and improve outcomes (Ofsted, 2014; DfE, 2016a), with the aim that improving attainment will improve social mobility (DfE, 2016a). This understanding of primary education aligns with Foucault's (2008, p.229) notion of producing human capital via educational investment that forms an 'abilities-machine which will produce income'.

The economic focus appears to be the prevailing discourse in policy for primary education. Policies within education hold schools to account for their teaching practices and outputs. A mechanism of accountability is national test results, which are deemed a power shift from teachers to central Government (Ball, 2013). The test results are used to create accountability measures to shape the required outcomes, thus resulting in a vertical top-down form of control from the Government to schools. However, the shift in education to one based on accountability via performativity is considered, most notably by Ball (2003; 2017), to restrict the teaching profession.

Governments rely on key actors to implement the policy for any political project to succeed. Success or failure in education will be partly due to how schools, headteachers, and teachers interpret and enact policies. Schools and those within may have become part of political projects to change education, reflecting the neoliberal discourse of accountability and performativity. Carr (2016, p.28) states:

Under this regime of governance, teachers are increasingly required to set aside personal values and commitment to education to fabricate a veneer of professional competence for which they are held accountable.

Therefore, management strategies can often influence teaching practices. Several researchers have highlighted how schools have become progressively more accountable for teaching practices and the resulting quantifiable outputs (Apple, 2006; Buchanan, 2015; Hutchings, 2015; Ball, 2017; Fuller, 2019; Bradbury et al., 2021). The Government employ a classification system to judge and label schools via test data in conjunction with Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections. The judgement of schools intimates Foucault's (1995/1975, p.184) notion that 'the examination' provides the means of 'surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, classify and punish' or, in the case of schools, to make them accountable for their practice.

Subsequent Governments have continued using the combination of Ofsted inspections and national test results as targets, with the rhetoric that higher test scores show improved standards. Bradbury et al. (2021) advise that the many changes to Ofsted inspections and national targets have increased expectations and higher demands of schools and pupils. This creates a relationship whereby the

Government have power over the school (Ball, 2013). The power relationship within education has resulted in a standardised form of education. Standard assessment tests (SATs) are used in conjunction with the National Curriculum in primary education. The National Curriculum comprises subjects and standards to ensure that all children learn the same knowledge (DfE, 2013b), which can be measured via the SATs. As a result, this version of a standardised curriculum has increasingly narrowed what is taught and limits teachers' pedagogical approaches to a teacher-centred classroom (Au, 2011; Atkinson, 2015; Hutchings, 2015; Carr, 2016). These accountability measures have been further extended in recent years. Bradbury (2019) advises that headteachers acknowledge and accept some form of accountability regarding SATs but equally fear the results and implication of poor grades, which can trigger Ofsted inspections. Furthermore, Bradbury (2019) highlighted that this narrow approach to measurement fails to consider the context of the school or the learners, placing further pressure on headteachers and teachers. Atkinson (2015, p.35) advises that accountability via testing operates as a form of 'distributive nature of governmentality'. Therefore, the neoliberal discourse of accountability via performativity changes how teachers think about work and accept the situation 'as it is' (Hayler, 2017, p.16).

The ever-increasing accountability measures work as continued forms of technologies of governmentality, in which the schools and those within implicate themselves to achieve the prescribed targets. Further metrics shape education practices, such as attendance and behaviour policies (Taylor, 2012; DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2014b; DfE, 2015; DfE, 2016b; Ofsted, 2021). Using data measures and attainment figures amounts to 'sanctions within hierarchical accountability systems' (West et al., 2011, p.49), in which schools can be identified by Ofsted and judged (ibid.). Sanctions are also used against parents who fail to ensure their child's attendance, who may incur a financial penalty of £60 per child for each period of absence (DfE, 2014b) at the time of writing. Accountability becomes internalised and enacted by individuals within schools, aligning with Foucault's (2008) notion of a political project of the government.

There has been much research into the idea of the Government's policies impacting schools and teachers (Alexander, 2010; Ball, 2017; Hayler, 2017; Besley, 2019). The

authors (ibid.) suggest that hierarchical models of authority and metrics have worked to de-professionalise the teachers' work. Besley (2019) advises that de-professionalisation operates via a shift from democratic governance to dictate management and job performance in chains of command. Besley (ibid., p.191) argues that:

Neoliberalism systematically deconstructs and destroys the space in terms of which professional autonomy is exercised. In effect, these systems are a direct attack on professionalism that de-professionalizes teachers and professors and are a move towards centralized standardization and control.

Teachers' professionalism is shaped through policies, implying a form of occupational control via a dominant discourse, which has become the norm (Taubman, 2009; Evans, 2011; Ball, 2017). The norm in policy has shaped primary school teaching via a discourse of professionalism (ibid.). This professional culture contrasts with the historical notion of primary teaching based on wider values of ethics, altruism, and reward rather than measurable outputs (McLeod, 2017; Braun and Maguire, 2020). Ball (2003) and Moore and Clarke (2016) argue that policies and the discourse of professionalism directed at teachers require them to devote entirely to educational reforms. This may require teachers to set aside personal beliefs and commitments, as the enactment of policies may conflict with personal pedagogical beliefs and values (ibid.). As a result, schools and teachers participate and invest in management strategies to implement accountability measures (Atkinson, 2015).

Changes to teachers' sense of professionalism have evolved with policy discourse. Ball (2015) suggests that managerialism, performativity and responsibilisation technologies have replaced neoliberal policy regimes. The notion of responsibilisation within a teacher's practice goes beyond metrics, as McLeod (2017, p.48) explains:

[A] teachers' work is defined by an almost overwhelming repertoire of responsibilities. Key attributes of a good teacher encompass responsibility for the learning of children, their well-being and future success, effective classroom management and good results on tests.

Sturrock (2021, p.1,233) highlights that these differing policy requirements create a juxtaposition for teachers 'between altruistic aspirations and the extent of negative perceptions and experiences' in the survival of neoliberal policies. Furthermore, Sturrock (ibid. p.1,234) argues that whilst teachers have succumbed to neoliberal education of raising standards, there was evidence of 'persistent commitment to child-centred primary education which acts to dislocate the discourse of the neo-liberal teacher'. This is supported by Hellowell (2018, p.179), who argues that teachers can mitigate neoliberal policy discourse by:

distinguish between performativity as a terror and as a form of agency and distinguishing between responsabilisation as an oppressive form of self-conduct or a chosen ethics of care may lead to an act of resistance or else become a considered and compassionate response to the particularly challenging pupil.

Jeffrey and Troman (2010, p.5) further argue that teachers are not passive but actively negotiate 'the extremely dilemmatic terrain of contemporary educational practice'. This is supported by Gooch (2008), who advises that teachers define alternative pedagogies and employ a human approach to create engaging education in their teaching practice. Similarly, Helsby (1999) affirms that human agency can mediate and moderate systems and structures. McLeod (2017) considers this notion via the differing constructs that frame teaching; historically, teaching was framed as a vocation profession, tied to 'notions of duty, obligation, service, [and] responsibility' (ibid., p.45). Many researchers, including McLeod (2017), Hellowell (2018), and Braun and Maguire (2021), affirm that traditional values still drive teachers in their profession. These arguments suggest many challenges within the teaching profession between compliance with Government policy and maintaining a caring approach to pupils, which may be an area of resistance to neoliberal policies.

A neoliberal school system reflects a complex performative apparatus, which has influenced how schools are governed and held accountable. This apparatus is considered to have reframed the nature of teachers' work including their professional autonomy (Keddie, 2017). Often within primary education there appear competing narratives between accountability, performativity and a child-centred pedagogy, which could suggest a binary discussion within primary education. However, Braun and Maguire (2020, p.436) advise that research with primary schools needs to be mindful

‘not to create an image of primary teaching as conforming to a binary of either dedicated child-centred teachers or hard-edged performative-invested practitioners’. This is due to policy discourse focused on attainment and test regimes have now been part of teachers’ practice for several years. Braun and Maguire (ibid., p.444) conclude that primary school education ‘[i]n a performative, neoliberal education context, caring for students has become redefined as ensuring that children achieve academically’.

Similarly, Pratt’s (2016, p.896) findings highlight how primary schooling demands ‘teachers engagement in a doxa of performativity in which they must do accountability work; that is, they must act in particular ways that are valued within the school system and make these visible to others’. Pratt (2018) later highlights some of the complexities within the notion of performativity within a primary teacher’s role for some it is a cause of stress and worry, and for others a positive affirming part of their professionalism. However, Keddie (2017, p1,255) when considering the newer generation of teachers were ‘more accepting of, and compliant with, the demands of performativity – as ‘post-performative’ professionals’. Wilkins et al. (2021, p.41) research also highlighted that the post-performative generation of teachers were:

navigating a complex terrain in which schools maintain a relentlessly data-driven approach to improving outcomes and closing ‘achievement gaps’, which has the potential to impact fundamental aspects of social justice and equity, such as the need to support students to develop as critically engaged citizens.

Furthermore, the performativity culture in education has increasingly led to the datafication of primary education to continually demonstrate pupil achievement (Jarke, and Breiter, 2019; Wilkins et al., 2021). Keddie (2016) argues that performativity can also influence pupils’ behaviour to mimic that of adults to be competitive, or as in Manolev et al. (2020), research highlights that primary pupils’ behaviour is also monitored via technology-based performance systems These arguments in relation to performativity suggest that this is not a static concept, but one that shifts and is renegotiated over time and experienced differently between leaders, teachers and pupils. This fluid understanding of performativity is ongoing at this time of writing due to the impact of post-COVID policies in school in relation to the discourse of ‘catching up on lost learning’ (DfE, 2022). Moreau and Roberts

(2023) highlight how the discourse places further emphasis on performativity requirements for leaders and teachers to address the loss of learning. There are further implications in the post-COVID discourse linking pupil performance with disadvantage, as the children most affected have been identified as being from lower socio-economic backgrounds (DfE, 2022). Connecting a pupil's social class with expected achievement, as Bradbury (2021) argues, has implications which could negatively affect how a child's ability is perceived, based on family income. This highlights the complicated nature of accountability and performativity discourse in primary education.

3.2.1 Summary

The neoliberalisation of primary education is one aspect of the wider Government focus on education reforms, which aim to ensure a future workforce that can compete globally. Policies within education have become increasingly focused on accountability measures, resulting in a vertical, top-down process of control of schools and teachers. Accountability works as a technology of governmentality through the managerial organisation, in which the schools and those within implicate themselves in their governance to achieve the prescribed targets. Further intensification of policies has sought to ensure teachers meet prescribed targets, whilst also becoming responsibilised for maintaining the traditional caring approach. However, this juxtaposition between neoliberal technologies and an altruistic approach to education can create a space to resist some aspects of neoliberal policies.

3.3 Neoliberalisation of parenting and its impact on school involvement

The preceding section highlighted the many changes and pressures in school leadership. The changes were in response to the neoliberalisation of education with increasing accountability and performativity measures placed on leadership teams. It also discussed the reduction of support from Local Authorities, increasing headteachers' autonomy in the running of their school and the potential to respond to the local context of the school community. This section will consider how neoliberal ideology has shaped parenting in relation to Government expectations of parents and their involvement in their child's education.

The neoliberalisation of education is deemed to incorporate the role of the parent within their child's education (Reay et al., 2008). Before the Education Act of 1988, the home and the school were considered separate spaces (ibid.). However, the shift in education policy based on neoliberal ideals, which has become entrenched over the past 35 years, consistently incorporates the role of the parent. This commenced by establishing school choice via a marketplace within education, which repositioned parents as consumers (Reay et al., 2008; Whitty, 2008; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Ball, 2013; Gunter, 2018). The aim of education policy has become entwined with improving human capital to enable a future workforce for a successful economy. Foucault (2008, p.225) advises this as creating the "homo economicus", an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself, which parents and children should embody to enable successful participation in the global knowledge economy via the notion of competition. Foucault (ibid.) suggests these key principles represent the 'new liberal art of government', i.e., a neoliberal approach. Parental care and education are essential tools to ensure one's child attains the required successful social participation (Rose, 1999b; Ule et al., 2015).

Parents were initially incorporated into their child's education via the notion of school choice. Prior to the Education Act of 1988, children attended a local school. However, policy changes encouraged parents to be consumers by 'shopping around' for the 'best school' for their child, based on schools' published league tables of test scores and Ofsted reports (Reay et al., 2008; Whitty, 2008; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Ball, 2013; Gunter, 2018). Thus, parents were made responsible for making the right choices for their child's education. Furthermore, the notion of parental choice was intended by the Government to create competition between schools for pupils, which would be a mechanism for improving standards (DfE, 2014c). However, findings from the National Foundation for Educational Research (Wespieser, 2015), which considered parental views of school choice, reported that typically parents chose schools based on the "school that suits my child" and "location" of the school (ibid., p.13). Wespieser (2015, p.13) argued that school choice was not based on a school's examination results. This was supported by Sibley-White (2019) whose research highlighted that parents did not see the merit in the testing regime in education. Encouraging parents to internalise active choice can empower parents as agents

within education, thereby holding schools to account for their child's education. However, this autonomous choice appears to benefit middle-class families who can mobilise the choices on offer (Reay, 2017). Therefore, the impacts of neoliberalism within education are experienced differently between families.

3.3.1 Policy discourse and parenting

School-parent partnerships were officially introduced via the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The framework introduced the home-school agreements that outline parents' responsibilities concerning their child's schooling (School Standards and Framework Act 1998). The agreement specified that schools provide a document of their aims and values to parents, which parents are required to sign, to 'acknowledge and accept the parental responsibilities and the school's expectations of its pupils' (School Standards and Framework Act, 1998, para 2). The need to include parents as partners in their child's education reflects the notion that parental involvement facilitates academic achievement, which is supported by much research and meta-analyses of literature (Topor et al., 2010; Hornby and Lafaele 2011; Wilder, 2014).

The Government's own review states, 'Parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning. This was the single most important finding' (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011, p.2). As a result, many Government policies concern parental responsibility and the importance of school attendance (Taylor, 2012; DfE, 2015). Failure in children attending school can incur penalty notices and fines of £60/£120 imposed on parents (DfE, 2015, p.9). Attendance is synonymous with high attainment throughout much Government policy literature, and often, the discourse relates to children with the lowest attendance who are also from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds (Taylor, 2012). Furthermore, Wilder (2014, p.26) highlights that 'the most consistent relation between parental involvement and academic achievement was found for parents holding high expectations'. This notion of a child's attainment and parental expectation further complicates the school, student parent relationship, 'school achievement becomes a measure of parents' competence, care, and love, and, at the same time, proof of the child's love for

her/his parents' (Ule et al., 2015, p.330). The need for parental involvement, as stated in policies, also shapes the perception of what it means to be a good parent.

Government reports, such as the Field Review (2010, p.5), commissioned by the then Prime Minister David Cameron, highlighted the negative impact of poor parenting on children's outcomes in the Foundation Years, with 'family background, parental education and good parenting' seen as the key resource for children to realise their potential. This rhetoric has the potential to position parents within a binary discourse, either demonstrating the desired good parental ideas, or being demonised and labelled within a deficit model of economic disadvantage, disengagement, and having low expectations (De Benedictis, 2012; Jensen and Taylor, 2012; Humphreys, 2017). This idea, reproduced over time, was further reflected in 2017, in the Government policy paper 'Improving lives: Helping workless families', which describes worklessness as the source of many problems for families and negatively affecting children's outcomes (DfWP, 2017).

Government policy in relation to education as a means of creating a workforce for the global economy has become entwined with the shaping of parental aspirations for their children. The desire for a perceived good education connects to the discourse of aspiration. Raco (2009, p.443) states that there has been a 'shift to aspirational politics', which has been normalised, with this notion reflecting 'a narrow form of [middle] class-infused consciousness' (ibid.). Aspirational policy discourse has been incorporated into education policy to raise a child's aspiration (Spohrer, 2016). The idea of a lack of aspirations is often negatively connected to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds linked to a deficiency within the family and the wider community. A House of Commons report (2014, p.27) into the underachievement of white working-class children emphasised this and stated:

Many of the problems with low attainment in school are due to factors outside the school gate: parental support, or lack of it; parental aspirations; poverty in the home environment; poor housing; and lack of experience of life.

Further Government policies and reports, such as 'Listening to Troubled Families' (DoCLG, 2012), targeted family intervention seen as 'troubled' across various issues, including poor school attendance. Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) and

De Benedictis (2012) argue that Government policy discourses often associate societal problems with a lack of parental discipline, which suggests these so-called 'failing' parents are not engaged with their child's education and thus have low aspirations. This rhetoric of raising aspirations has featured in many subsequent Government reports, policies, and proposals for future legislation over the past 20 years.

- *Higher standards, better schools for all - White Paper* (DfES, 2005a)
- *Education and Skills - White Paper* (DfES, 2005b)
- *The importance of teaching - White Paper* (DfE, 2010)
- *The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances - The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults – Report* (Field, 2010)
- *Improving school attendance* (Taylor, 2012)
- *Department for Education Freedom to lead, a study of outstanding primary school leadership in England –* (Matthews et al., 2014)
- *Underachievement in education by white working-class children. First Report* (House of Commons, 2014)
- *School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation* (DfE, 2014c)
- *School Performance and Parental Choice of School: Secondary data analysis* (DfE, 2014d)
- *School attendance parental responsibility measures* (DfE, 2015)
- *Education Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016a)
- *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential* (DfE, 2017a)
 - *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families* (DfWP, 2017)
 - *Helping Parents to Parent* (Social Mobility Commission, 2017)

The so-called need to raise aspirations or, as it has more recently been reframed, to have high expectations, has been used by the Government to improve social mobility. However, in contrast, Reay (2017) argues that socio-economically disadvantaged parents can have high aspirations, yet these do not always translate into high attainment for their children. This focus can create a complex relationship

between the Government, school, family, and the local community. As previously quoted, The Department for Education (2017a) highlights the importance of the wider community to schools and education, shaping life chances and educational outcomes based on the school attended. There is a long history of research connecting pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds who can find it difficult to succeed within the school system and, therefore, later in life (most notably Bourdieu, 1977). Government research suggests that families from lower socio-economic backgrounds 'select themselves out of high performing schools either by prioritising school aspects other than academic performance, or to avoid possible rejection or failure' (DfE, 2014b, p.6). Many Government policy documents appear to blame parents from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds for any lack of aspiration and their children's failures (see, for example, DfE, 2014b; 2014c; 2016a; 2017a; DfWP, 2017; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). The policy discourse reinforces Clarke's (2005, p.451) assertion that policies are explicitly formulated to place responsibility on the individual to create conditions of independence to be a "hard working" individual or family' (ibid.). If families fail to realise their rights and responsibilities, this creates the space for blame and demonisation of the family (De Benedictis, 2012; Jensen and Tyler, 2012).

The policy discourse over the past 20 years aligns with Torre and Murphy's (2016, p.203) notion that the school-parent relationship has been constructed based on 'institutional ideology principles of hierarchy, bureaucracy and institutionalism as opposed to strong family and community relationships'. Moreover, Humphreys (2017) informs that there is a potential contradiction in the need to involve parents, suggesting that neoliberal education policies have positioned the majority of parents within a deficit paradigm, which has consigned them to the school gate. The Government policy discourse implies parents can be deemed allies or enemies of education policies.

3.3.2 The idealisation of middle-class parenting

The previous section highlighted how Government policy frames parents concerning their child's education. The role of the parent is considered vital to ensure that children achieve their full potential and ultimately will form a productive workforce for

the future. The role of parent is linked to having high aspirations for their children, which is perceived as a reflection of middle-class values. In contrast, parents often from lower socio-economic groups are discussed within a deficit model of parenting. This section will discuss how middle-class parenting has become idealised within policy.

Neoliberal education policies that create parental choice legitimise the self-interest of individual families seeking to gain a competitive advantage for their child (Oria et al., 2007). Educational choice generates new forms of governmentality for parents and increased responsabilisation to ensure their child gains the best advantages via their education to compete in the future workforce. Neoliberally driven policies have obliged parents to assume a more active role in their child's learning and development. Ule et al. (2015, p.343) highlight:

Parents are generally ready to invest a great amount of emotional, social, and economic resources to support their children over the course of their education, as many believe that education is the most promising and secure path towards the prosperous future of their children in the risky and unpredictable circumstances of contemporary life.

However, this active role shifts responsibility from the state to the parent for their child to receive and attain a good education. Vincent and Maxwell (2016) argue the increased responsabilisation due to neoliberal imperatives has created multifaceted choices within education, resulting in heightened anxiety for parents and the notion of 'intensive' parenting. These choices go beyond choosing the best school and include attending extra-curricular activities for their children to underpin future success (ibid.). However, parents that can embody the active chooser as anticipated by Government policy 'are disproportionately, though by no means exclusively, middle-class' (Francis and Hutchings, 2013, p.5).

The idea of positioning parents from differing social classes in relation to child attainment and educational engagement has been a longstanding strand of academic research (Gerwitz, 2001; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Gillies, 2008; Reay et al., 2008; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Ule et al., 2015; Creasy and Corby, 2019). Many of these researchers have examined policy discourse of this period concerning parenting practices, which Government documents class as parents being 'good' in

relation to social class and child educational outcomes (Vincent and Ball, 2007; Gillies, 2008). This discourse in relation to the notion of good parenting and social class has been the focus of various Government research and policy guidance (Field, 2010; DfE, 2014d; DfWP,2017; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Government discourse promotes the notion of good parenting via the middle-class parent discourse within reports such as School performance and parental choice of school (Allen et al, 2014, p.28) which, concluded that ‘middle classes tend to have access to higher quality information on schools and be more adept at using it’. In addition, rhetoric by the then Prime Minister David Cameron (2016) aimed to promote the idea of parenting classes as ‘normal’ and even ‘aspirational’ for all parents. The idea of good parenting was also supported by Helping Parents to Parent (Social Mobility Commission, 2017), which highlighted the difference in parenting skills between middle-class parents, leading to an increase in educational outcomes. The Government discourse of linking families on low income in policies such as Helping Parents to Parent (Social Mobility Commission, 2017), Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families (DfWP,2017) and initiatives such as the Troubled Families programmes (DfCLG, 2017), suggest a binary or a deficit discourse in relation to family incomes, parenting, and their children’s outcomes in education.

Government policies often have a declared desire to promote good parenting. Creasy and Corby (2019) argued that the early twenty-first century saw the development and introduction of policies incorporating parenting advice being established in an interventionist manner. However, the values presented within policies are not class-neutral. Many researchers (Reay et al., 2008; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Ule et al., 2015; Creasy and Corby, 2019) argue that policies are shaped by middle-class values and ideals, with working-class parents being encouraged to behave in middle-class ways. Reay et al. (2008, p.238) assert this idealised version of the parent thus:

Historically white middle class identity in the UK has been an idealised one held up for others (namely, the working-class masses) to aspire to (Carey, 1992). Currently, in the 2000s the white middle classes, and particularly as they are inscribed in policy discourses, best fit this ideal of the democratic citizen – individualistic, responsible, participatory, the active chooser.

This middle-class identity based on individualism reflects neoliberal values and Foucault's (2008) notion of the entrepreneurial self. Ule et al. (2015, p.30) suggest the assumption of middle-class values has also created an idealised version of parenting, which may be difficult for many parents to aspire to.

3.3.3 Parent involvement and engagement

The preceding section highlighted how the middle-class parent has become prized within education policy. The section will expand on the notion of the middle-class parent and how this is perceived within the involvement and engagement in their child's education.

Education policy discourse is constructed based on middle-class values in the UK and globally. The education discourse relates to the notions of *parental involvement* and *parental engagement*. The two terms are characterised differently by many researchers (Baker et al., 2016). Roy and Giraldo-García (2018) define parental involvement as behaviour traits by the parents to support the all-round development of their child to facilitate their educational success. In contrast, parental engagement is the relationship between the parent and the school (Baker et al., 2016). However, these two terms are often used together in the wording of policies between the school and the family.

The most influential source within policy globally is Joyce Epstein's (2001) seminal *Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement*, which developed throughout the 1990s and is currently in a fourth edition (Epstein, 2018). Epstein's (2001; 2018) six Types for parents and schools to follow are summarised below:

- *Type 1: PARENTING - Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.*
- *Type 2: COMMUNICATING - Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.*
- *Type 3: VOLUNTEERING - Recruit and organize parental help and support.*

- *Type 4: LEARNING AT HOME - Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.*
- *Type 5: DECISION MAKING - Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.*
- *Type 6: COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY - Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.*

Epstein's (ibid.) framework is based on different types of parental awareness in educational decision-making and being active within the school community and incorporates parental involvement and engagement. Epstein (ibid.) emphasised that each type of parental involvement was a two-way partnership between the school and the family. However, research has suggested that this framework, based on middle-class ideals, was inappropriate for lower socio-economic groups or minority families (Bower and Griffin, 2011).

The framework is used throughout many policies and is explicitly quoted by the Department for Education, including the *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement* (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). Yet policies based on the middle-class version of parenting can lead to issues relating to families' social, economic, ethnicity, and political obstacles being overlooked (Bower and Griffin, 2011; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017). Ule et al. (2015, p.343) explain thus:

As parental support and resources become increasingly important in children's educational paths and achievements, this is again more advantageous for middle and upper class families as disadvantaged groups of the population can dispose of less social, cultural, and economic capital to support their children.

Reay (2017, p.72) concurs and explains further that parental support is not only material resources but also 'the educational knowledge, parents' own educational experiences and support that parents can access'. This difference in parental experiences can further impact class differences concerning their children's education and 'the texture of their involvement in schooling' (ibid.). Jensen and Tyler (2012) explore the demonisation of parents, which they describe as a moral narrative that has emerged from the dominant public culture. The discourse of failing parents is attributed to New Labour policies that limit welfare support by making benefit

recipients take responsibility and be more aspirational for their children (ibid.). This placing blame on individual parents emphasises a neoliberal mode of governance within policy discourse. Thus, policies based on middle-class values perpetuate the reproduction of educational inequalities (OECD, 2018), and the education system continues to give advantage to children from middle-class backgrounds.

3.3.4 Barriers to parental involvement and engagement

The above sections have highlighted the prized middle-class parenting values with education policy discourse. The assumption is that middle-class parents have higher aspirations and are more involved with their child's education, which should result in higher attainment and educational outcomes. Parents who do not demonstrate the required involvement and engagement are perceived with a deficit model. This section aims to identify barriers to parental involvement and engagement.

There is much research in relation to the barriers to parental involvement and engagement with their child's education (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). The research suggests that parents want to be involved in their child's education but lack confidence in supporting them (ibid.). A further barrier for many parents is the engagement with their child's school. Hornby and Lafaele (2011, p.40) noted that 'parents with a low level of belief in their ability to help their children are likely to avoid contact with schools'. This was supported by Rodriguez et al. (2014) advising that parents with low self-efficacy may also be less likely to be involved with their child's school, and to overcome this, the schools need to make a concerted effort to involve the parents.

Baker et al. (2014, p.164) highlighted further barriers based on 'parents' negative experiences in schools, either as a child themselves or previously with older children [...] which may cause parents to feel inferior to school personnel'. Goodall and Montgomery (2014, p.4) further argued that parents from ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged backgrounds 'find engagement with schools difficult, but still have a strong desire to be involved in their children's learning and education'. The

literature, therefore, reveals the complex nature of the school-parent relationship, with some parents experiencing multiple barriers to involvement and engagement.

Poor communication is considered a key barrier to meaningful engagement between schools and parents. Baker (2014) advises that communication and the type of communication needed were perceived differently between parents and schools. Parents perceived school communication to be poor in relation to the timing and usefulness of the content, whereas the schools' concept of good communication was based on the parents' availability to be contacted (ibid.). These differing communication requirements created a mismatch between parents and the school. Schneider and Arnot's (2018) research on school-home communication with migrant parents also highlighted a mismatch between parents and teachers. The study revealed 'substantial discrepancies between parents' and teachers' perceptions of parental knowledge, parents' engagement and barriers to engagement' (ibid., p.18). Poor communication resulted in barriers to parents' engagement and a lack of understanding by the teachers, as Schneider and Arnot (ibid., p.18) advise:

In contrast, teachers were not aware of significant gaps in parental knowledge, nor did they seem to be aware of the high levels of parents' engagement in their child's learning, or had details of the specific barriers that parents of EAL pupils faced.

Schneider and Arnot (ibid.) argue that this was partly due to a linear or one-sided communication process, which places responsibility on the parents to adapt to the 'schools' values, learning strategies and knowledge'. In contrast, Torre and Murphy (2016) place the responsibility on the school to facilitate and set up communication systems as a means of forging trusting relationships. Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) research suggests that communication has shifted due to changes in technology, particularly via social media and text messaging, which was perceived as more accessible for parents. These more varied and multiple approaches to communication offer an opportunity to lessen communication barriers between school and home.

Research has highlighted many ways to improve relationships between schools and parents. Boutte and Johnson (2014) advise that barriers can be removed by

welcoming parents into the school community as partners and that school staff members should consider parents as assets. Similarly, Torre and Murphy (2016, p.208) argue that school staff need to demonstrate respect through their interactions with parents, 'treating parents as citizens of the school community, not mere tourists'. More recently, Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) updated research based on Blackwell's and Lafaele's (2011) original study into barriers to parental involvement noted changes in the relationship between schools and families in the intervening years. Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) findings suggested that training and research into parental involvement and engagement had positively influenced school practices. Whilst many barriers still existed, these presented less of an obstruction (ibid.). Of particular note were Hornby and Blackwell's (2018, p.117) finding regarding austerity measures affecting families:

There was widespread recognition among the schools of the difficulties parents experience today and of the reduction in support from government and other agencies on which they have relied in the past. This has led to schools realising that they have to compensate for this by providing more targeted and specialist support to parents and families so that children can gain the most out of their education.

Finally, Hornby and Blackwell (ibid.) concluded that schools' perceptions of parental involvement had changed over time. It was noted that the schools considered that a central part of their job of educating children needed to be the development of broader roles to support the parents (ibid.). The change in perception of parental involvement and engagement may not reflect the notion of neoliberal ideology in education. In some schools, there appears to be a shift from parents as consumers, with relationships between schools and parents being more complex, depending on parents' circumstances.

3.3.5 Summary

The aim of this section of the analysis of relevant literature is to consider how neoliberal ideology has shaped parenting concerning their child's education. Parents are deemed by the Government to be an integral part of their child's education, with rhetoric, supported by research, highlighting that the more involved and engaged a parent is, the more successful their child will be in later life. In this, Government policy (DfE, 2014b) discourse positions parents as active choosers within education,

which aids in constructing mechanisms to improve school outputs. The policy focus on parental involvement, and engagement has shaped the perception in wider society of what it means to be a good parent. This notion of a good parent reflects middle-class values and parents who can mobilise their social and cultural capital, material resources, and prior education.

Whilst the education system appears to prize middle-class families, there is also the notion that parents are responsabilised for ensuring their children succeed. In contrast, those parents who do not have the required material, social, cultural capital or prior educational advantage are positioned within a deficit model. This deficit model, often used in policies concerning families failing to engage with their child's education, overlooks issues of disadvantage and language barriers. Research suggests that, regardless of background, the vast majority of parent do hold high aspirations for their children. The discourse within policy structures parents in a binary position between having the desired middle-class values and ideals versus a deficit model of being economically disadvantaged and disengaged, with low expectations.

Research has highlighted that there are multiple barriers in school-parent relationships. Communication, which often has mismatched expectations by parents and the school, is key here. Often, there is a one-way flow of information between the school and the parents, which compounds barriers for some families. Poor communication further impacts the parent-teacher relationship. Teachers are not sufficiently informed of parents' knowledge and any other potential factors. Much research attests that it is the school's responsibility to remove barriers to parental engagement and facilitate an inclusive approach. Recent research by Hornby and Blackwell (2018) advise the reduction in wider services has created space for a more supportive role of the school regarding the family.

3.4 Schooling in times of austerity

The section above discussed the neoliberalisation of parenting and its impact on school involvement. This highlighted the relevant literature considering how neoliberal ideology has shaped the view of parenting concerning their child's

education. The policy discourse creates a binary between middle-class parenting being idealised and lower-income families being demonised. Lower-income families and those from minority ethnic groups were positioned as having lower aspirations and being less engaged in their child's education. However, much research attests that schools with strong leadership based on social justice can mitigate the perceived barriers faced by families from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This final section of the literature review will focus on more recent research and the impact of Government funding cuts on schools.

Government funding cuts are the result of the global financial crisis of 2007/2008, which has had a significant impact on the UK's public finances (Quilter-Pinner and Hochlaf, 2019). Since the Coalition Government of 2010 came to power, expenditures have been reduced by imposing a programme of austerity (ibid.). However, Lupton and Thompson (2015, p.50) report that the Government had 'protected spending on schools in real terms. This meant that system resources had remained broadly stable'. However, several reports have shown that schools cut budgets, resulting in the loss of teaching assistants (Webster, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2021). Yet, whilst spending in schools was stable, Ball (2017, p.175) highlights the impacts of broader spending reforms:

LAs experience budget cuts of around 1/3 and various analysis suggested that the overall effect of the welfare and tax reforms meant losses to family income from many low income families and projected increases in child poverty in effect education came to bear an even greater equity burden.

Hanley et al. (2020) further explain that cuts to LA budgets impacted social care, children's centres (such as Sure Start), the closure of local libraries, and some health services. Sure Start centres were a vital resource targeted at low-income families 'providing childcare, early education, health and family support' (Ridge, 2013, p.415). Ridge (ibid., p.410) also noted that libraries were among 'the few free, warm and covered public spaces where children are welcomed' and that leisure facilities could 'reduce children's opportunities for shared affordable leisure and participation' (ibid.). Furthermore, low-income families with children are considered the most affected by the changes to the benefits system and the taxes introduced between 2010 and 2014 (Ridge, 2013; Ball, 2017; Reay, 2017; Hanley et al., 2020). Reay (2017) concludes that austerity policies have not affected the upper and most middle classes.

However, working-class families and those who are already poor have borne the brunt of the cuts in funding, with their children ‘increasingly experiencing ‘austerity education’”(ibid., p.179). Reflecting on the neoliberal parental discourse (see Chapter 3.3.1), these families, being the most severely affected by Government austerity measures, will also be the most harshly judged by Government policy discourse. Austerity policies are deemed to have increased the number of children living in poverty, ‘reaching 4 million or 30 per cent of children 2015/16’ with projections of levels of child poverty continuing to rise (CPAG, 2017, p.6). Lupton and Thompson (2015, p.20) argue that the austerity policies and reduction in support to low-income families had shifted responsibility for ensuring more equal outcomes ‘firmly in the direction of schools’. Ball (2017, p.175) concurs by stating, ‘in effect education came to bear an even greater equity burden’ due to austerity measures. The findings suggest increased pressures for schools with budgets remaining the same.

There is a long association between disadvantaged children performing least well in school (Field, 2010; Ridge, 2013; CPAG, 2017; Ball, 2017; Reay, 2017; OECD, 2018; Hanley et al., 2020). The Coalition Government introduced the Pupil Premium policy in 2011 to close the attainment gap of disadvantaged children, with schools deciding how best to use the funding to support the attainment of disadvantaged pupils (Ofsted, 2014). Much Government rhetoric attests to the link that closing the attainment gap will increase social mobility and lift families out of the cycle of poverty (Field, 2010; DfE, 2016a). However, the burden for schools appears to have shifted from just closing the attainment to the wider welfare of the child. Lambie-Mumford and Sims’ (2018) research investigates the rise of Breakfast Clubs and Holiday Hunger Projects in the UK due to rising food poverty in low-income families, which reports of child feeding initiatives in schools due to austerity measures impacting families. Lambie-Mumford and Sims (ibid., p.246) argue that these child feeding initiatives are ‘plugging gaps in increasingly lean state provision’. Furthermore, schools may need to ensure children are well fed as research attests to children growing up in households with food insecurity experience poor development and lower education outcomes (Cook and Frank, 2008; Harvey, 2016; Loopstra et al., 2019). Schools are responsible for keeping children safe in education (DfE, 2018a). The DfE (ibid., p.5) states:

*Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is **everyone's** responsibility. **Everyone** who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child-centred.*

The DfE (ibid.) further advise that the welfare of children includes:

- *protecting children from maltreatment*
- *preventing impairment of children's health or development*
- *ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care*
- *taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes*

Schools are the places to keep children safe, and teachers are best placed to know their pupils. However, within the DfE (2018a) document, schools are being placed to address wider inequalities, such as food poverty, as a result of wider Government cuts. As a result of structural inequalities, Done and Murphy (2018, p.148) advise that '[t]eachers are effectively charged with enacting discourses of social justice within a context of diminished funding and against a wider discursive backdrop of national economic priorities'. Therefore, schools become spaces that mitigate the social disadvantages of their pupils, which could be considered as creating circumstances for schools and staff to responsabilise themselves. As Done and Murphy (2018, p.146) assert:

The phrase 'responsibilising teachers', consequently, conveys a two-fold process. It denotes an increasing level of demands made on teachers as the state's role is transformed by marketisation and, more recently, within a politics of austerity.

Consequently, schools are complicated spaces in which neoliberal ideas of attainment become intertwined with alleviating disadvantage so a child can succeed.

3.4.1 Discourse of resilience

The first section highlighted the issues in relation to wider Government austerity policies and the emerging impact on schools. This section addresses Government education policies and guidance that, whilst not directly responding to austerity

measures, can be considered as attributing to schools being required to support children as a result of the impact of austerity.

The policy terrain within education is ever evolving, with many policies aimed at differing aspects of education. More recent policy initiatives by the Government are for schools to address well-being, mental health, and behaviour to ensure children are 'resilient and knowing how to persevere, how to bounce back if faced with failure' (DfE, 2016a, p.94). DfE (2018b) further noted that children from deprived backgrounds were more at risk of poor mental health and behaviour. This appears to place increasing responsibility on the school to address wider societal issues and their impacts on children. Saltman (2014) and Reay (2017) suggest that these types of education policies, seemingly aimed at disadvantaged children, reflect that of austerity education. Saltman (2014, p.43) explains, 'austerity education is both a continuation and an intensification of long-standing neoliberal structuring of public schooling'. Saltman (2014) further asserts that austerity education has resulted in the idea of 'Grit' as a pedagogy as a form of control aimed at disadvantaged children to 'learn the tools of self-control and learn to endure drudgery, [so] they can compete with rich children' (ibid. p.43). The understanding of 'Grit' is illustrated in the Character education non-statutory guidance document (DfE, 2019) and the further discourse on the need for resilience (DfE, 2016a; 2018b; 2019). The DfE (2018b, p.18) places this responsibility on the schools by stating:

Schools are in a unique position, as they are able to help prevent mental health problems by promoting resilience as part of an integrated, whole school approach that is tailored to the needs of their pupils.

Schools have become sites that are frequently tasked to proactively support the emotional well-being of their pupils (Humphrey, 2013). Humphrey (ibid.) connects the increased expectations of the Government on schools due to cuts to mental health services. Hanley et al. (2020) note the Government's focus on schools to ensure early prevention and intervention via DfE (2018b) mental health and behaviour in schools' guidance. However, Hanley et al. (2020, p.4) noted that increased mental health needs were a result of the following:

increased poverty and new challenges related to hunger within schools, [in which] schools respond to challenges such as these by allocating school

resources to extend breakfast club provision, provide short-term loans to families, and increase pastoral care services, interventions that fall quite far out of the stereotypical roles and responsibilities associated with schools.

Therefore, the schools and staff are increasingly responsible for supporting the families and children's well-being and mental health due to austerity measures that have increased poverty. Furthermore, Harrison (2012, p.97) attests the resilience discourse makes individuals responsible to 'bounce back', regardless of circumstances, while simultaneously shifting responsibility away from the Government policy cuts. Davidson and Carlin, (2019, p.486) conclude that resilience obscures 'material determinants of inequalities and potentially penalising individuals who are most in need by making them responsible not only for their own well-being'. However, in the case of primary schools, it could be argued that Government discourse makes the schools responsible for creating neoliberal subjects that will be entrepreneurial and self-sufficient (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017). Yet, whilst school leaders aim to maintain a child-centred approach and seek to mitigate social disadvantage and material deprivation, this can place an increased burden of responsabilisation on headteachers to be moral agents beyond attainment (Keddie and Mills, 2019). The Government discourse of resilience works as a mechanism of neoliberal governmentality through schools to create an economically aware workforce of the future.

3.4.2 The continuation of school welfare work in the 2020s

The extent of schools supporting families has increased since the collection of the original data for the research in the academic year 2018/2019. Since this time, there was the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21, followed by a cost-of-living crisis. The cost-of-living crisis resulted in high levels of inflation, peaking at 11.1% in October 2022 (Harari et al., 2024), which increased food and energy costs and continues to affect families across the UK. The House of Common Library statistics inform that there were 4.3 million children, 30% of the child population, living in poverty in 2022/23 (Francis-Devine, 2024), with an increased number of families relying on food banks (ibid.). These figures were supported by findings from The Trussell Trust³ (2023, p.2),

³ The Trussell Trust is a third-sector organisation that supports a nationwide network of food banks to provide emergency food and support to people facing hardship.

which advises that since 2017/2018, there has been significant growth in the need to support children, 'with the number of parcels provided for them increasing by 132% over the five-year period between 2017/18 and 2022/23'. The increased number of families experiencing ongoing hardships implies that schools are facing further challenges to support the welfare of their children.

Bradbury and Vince (2023) highlight that since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in research detailing the further and increased welfare work that schools have been undertaking. Such research offers further insight into how schools support an increased number of families who are experiencing food insecurities by providing a foodbank service. Extending this, Bradbury and Vince (ibid., p.55) summarised how schools were filling in the gaps missing from wider welfare services, which resulted in 'a feeling of resignation among many school leaders to have to fill the gap left by other services'. Further research by Baker (2023, p1,399) notes the rising number of ways schools are supporting those facing food insecurity via a 'patchwork of food banks, food pantries and similar initiatives', which are needed due to a combination of factors reducing the 'welfare safety net for families' (ibid.). The absence of welfare support from the Government has resulted in what Baker (ibid.) describes as 'conditions where schools feel compelled to introduce charitable food aid initiatives'. These findings were further supported by Bradbury et al. (2022, p.773) who argue that policy enactment in primary schools at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic was significantly based on the 'prioritisation of welfare', which included supporting school staff, and children but also their parents too. These wider societal issues have implications for further responsabilising schools and staff to provide increased welfare support.

Further research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (Lucas et al., 2023) highlights the increased recent pressure on schools to provide a variety of support to children and families. The key findings regarding the impact on schools of cost-of-living pressures were identified to include higher numbers of pupils requiring additional support, with an increase in pupils requiring significant support (ibid.). In addition, Lucas et al. (ibid., p.4) highlighted that teachers reported 'increases in the numbers of pupils requiring welfare and financial support [...], increases in safeguarding concerns [...], concerns about meeting the needs of pupils with SEND

[... and an increase in] challenging behaviours among their pupils'. In addition, the report suggested that schools felt obligated to provide urgent support for children and families, which was perceived to go beyond a school's statutory duty, due to the concern that children's basic needs were not being met (ibid.). In addition, research by Sutton Trust (Montacute, 2023) with 6,700 participating teachers, raised concerns that the wider impact of the cost-of-living crisis was affecting the attainment levels of the most deprived students, which may result in long-term issues for children in the most deprived areas (ibid.). Wider societal issues are therefore impacting schools in multiple ways, with pressure to provide wider welfare support whilst simultaneously being held accountable for pupil attainment, driven by neoliberal accountability measures.

3.4.3 Summary

In summary, this section aimed to consider the impact of wider Government austerity policies and the impact on schools and families. While the Government funding for schools was not cut due to austerity measures, the school has been made increasingly responsible for supporting children and families due to benefit cuts. Schools are responsible for supporting children beyond teaching and learning within areas such as food poverty and poor mental health. Yet the impacts on schools still need to be addressed. Government discourse of resilience aims to ensure that schools equip children with skills of self-control, learn to persevere and bounce back, regardless of the deprivation experienced. Schools and those within are held further accountable to ensure student equity and outcomes irrespective of the circumstances of the children.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has evidenced through the literature how a neoliberal education policy discourse has shaped various aspects of schooling. This understanding was explored by a consideration of neoliberal policies that have constructed the current primary education system within England. Neoliberal Government policies created a binary discourse in relation to aspects of parenting and the expectations of involvement with their child's education. Middle-class parenting values were consistently upheld as an ideal. Prior research has revealed multiple barriers in

school-parent relationships, which are often associated with families from low socioeconomic groups and with English not as a first language. Much research highlighted that it should be a school's responsibility to remove barriers to parental engagement and facilitate a positive school-parent relationship. The final section of the chapter has explored education in relation to wider Government austerity measures and the impacts on schools. Whilst school budgets were protected from austerity measures, the wider cuts to benefits and support services disproportionately affected disadvantaged families.

The next chapter will focus on the conceptualisation of the neoliberalisation of school leadership and management. This will provide a critique of school leadership, highlighting the complexities of the position and the pivotal role in the interpretation and enactment of policies.

CHAPTER 4. CONTEXTUALISING NEOLIBERALISATION OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Introduction

Following Chapter 3 on the contextualisation of the neoliberalisation of education, this section of the literature review will focus on the neoliberal transformation of school leadership and management. School leadership is considered a vital part of schooling, with leadership teams instrumental in the day-to-day management and running of schools. Leaders are responsible for the interpretation and enactment of policies. There is much research that charts the transformations in school leadership over past decades, in line with the many changes in education as a response to the wider political agenda in the UK (Davies, 2002; Gunter, 2004, 2016; Sugrue, 2014; O'Brien, 2016; Ball, 2017; Male, 2017). Niesche and Thomson (2017, p.194) note that 'neoliberal reforms and movements in education have affected not only discourses of school leadership but also educational leaders' day-to-day practices. School leadership has been repositioned within a neoliberal discourse of managerialism.

Yet schools are still spaces which need to support children and families within their community. This suggests a tension between the requirements of fulfilling Government targets to continually raise standards via competition, with leaders being increasingly responsible and accountable for measurable outputs. At the same time, schools frequently provide social care for families following the austerity cuts in wider social services. The school leadership's response to these conflicting demands will be explored in this section.

4.2 Background to school leadership changes since 1988

Traditionally, school leadership was deemed the realm of the headteacher. The roles and responsibilities of headteachers and how schools are administered, managed and run have changed over time, reflecting the shifting ideologies of successive Governments. The traditional role of a primary school headteacher from 1944 to the end of the 1970s was to lead their school in partnership with Local Education Authorities (LAs) and the Government, which Chitty (2002, p.261) described as a 'national system, locally administered'. Headteachers were central to the

organisation of the schools they led, setting the direction of the school along with the development of the curriculum, pedagogy, and school organisation (Robinson, 2012, p.13), with Glatter (2014) suggesting that the focus was on running schools from an administrative purpose. Furthermore, Robinson (2012, p.14) highlights that headteachers 'often had a teaching role, which was deemed essential in terms of their credibility with parents and other professionals'. However, headteachers' scope for decision-making was viewed within a 'fairly narrow defined parameters' (ibid.). Accountability was mainly to parents and the LA rather than directly to the Government (ibid.).

Since the 1980s, policy changes and the 1988 Education Act have introduced market-based ideologies into schools (Southworth, 2008; Whitty, 2008; Glatter, 2012; Ball, 2017; Robinson, 2017). These policy changes are considered to have transformed how schools were administered and run compared to the previous partnership between the headteacher and the LA. Glatter (2014) informs that the position of headteacher was transformed into a management role in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting the rise of neoliberalism. Finally, the headteacher's role has become more focused on strategic leadership since 2000 (ibid.). As a result, power was devolved from the LA to the school (Male, 2017). These changes align with the neoliberal ideology of the time, which was underpinned by a market-led philosophy, which enabled governing boards and individual headteachers to take direct control of their schools (ibid.). Yet, whilst there may have been freedom from the LA, many centrally driven reforms took place, such as the introduction of The Office for Standards in Education inspections (Ofsted) and the publication of school league tables based on the Standardised Test (SATs) results from 1992, and then literacy and numeracy strategies from 1997. Therefore, whilst headteachers had greater autonomy in the finance and management of their schools, there was much less decision-making capacity regarding what was taught (Southworth, 2008). This resulted in greater scrutiny of the quality of education and an increased emphasis on the externally imposed standards schools needed to achieve.

Headteachers faced ever-changing agendas and the need to implement changes, which continued at pace and with increasing intensity imposed from outside. These changes reflected an increase in centralised control, greater emphasis on

accountability, and a focus on the performativity of the school. Southworth (2008, p.416) argues that these developments brought ‘a belief in the importance of leadership’ in primary schools, rather than just stable management. Gunter (2004, p.21) summarises how the field changed its labels over this period ‘from “educational administration” to “educational management”, and [then to] “educational leadership”’. Following this period, there was a greater interest in school leadership and leadership theory applied from the private business world (Gunter, 2004). Thus, headteachers were required by Government policy and guidance documentation to have clear strategies to improve their schools.

4.3 Defining school leadership, management, and administration

There has been a shift in how schools are run, reflecting policy changes, but there has been an increased focus on school leadership. The term school leadership has gained prominence among many researchers (Bush and Glover, 2003, 2014; Bush, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008, 2020; Robinson, 2007; Southworth, 2008; Day and Sammons, 2014, 2020; Robinson, 2012; Sugrue, 2014; Gage and Smith, 2016; Gunter, 2016; Hitt and Tucker, 2016). Craig (2021, p.52) highlights that ‘leadership has now become one of the most over-used terms in school organisation, so much so that it is now difficult to find mentions of “management” and “administration” in school organisation literature’. Craig (2021, p.52) argues that there is a significant overlap between these three areas and distinct differences that should be recognised when considering school organisations. The Department for Education defined roles and responsibilities within a school’s structures in 2016 (which has not been updated at the time of writing):

- *‘school leaders’ to mean headteachers, leadership teams, and heads of subjects or phases. This includes those working across more than one school or group of schools, with relevance to advisers in multi-academy trusts, local authorities or other school improvement organisations;*
 - *‘providers of professional development’ is a general term to include all those individuals or organisations (including schools) who directly provide expertise or facilitate professional development.*
- (DfE, 2016e, p.4)

Whilst the DfE defines the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and leadership teams, Day and Sammons' (2014, p.7) *Successful School Leadership* describes school leaders' role as to set the 'direction and creating a positive school culture including the proactive school mindset and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools in challenging circumstances. Day and Sammons (2014, p.7) further identify key aspects of successful school leadership as:

- *defining the vision, values and direction*
- *improving conditions for teaching and learning*
- *redesigning the organisation: aligning roles and responsibilities*
- *enhancing teaching and learning*
- *redesigning and enriching the curriculum*
- *enhancing teacher quality (including succession planning)*
- *building relationships inside the school community*
- *building relationships outside the school community*
- *placing an emphasis on common values.*

These key aspects of successful leadership are reflective of neoliberal discourse, with the emphasis on leaders ever-increasingly being held responsible for continually raising standards of achievement, leading school improvement and enhancing the quality of teaching in schools (Ball, 2017; Day and Sammons, 2014; Jerrim and Sims, 2021). School leadership is not just a headteacher but can include many differing stakeholders depending on the size and structure. The DfE (2018c, p.12) provides the following structure for school leadership roles:

Table 4-1 Leadership roles

Leadership	Post
Classroom Teacher	Classroom Teacher
Middle leader	Classroom Teacher

	Advisory teacher Leading practitioner
Senior leader	Assistant headteacher Deputy headteacher
Headteacher	Headteacher Executive headteacher

However, whilst the school leadership team is responsible for running the school, other roles can impact the decision-making. Schools may have a school governing board, which includes staff, parents', and external stakeholders (to be discussed in the next section), all of whom have differing responsibilities and have the remit to hold school leaders to account.

Over time, school administration appears to have been lost in the discussion, as Gosling and Mintzberg's (2003, p.1) paper reflecting on managers states that most 'have become so enamoured of 'leadership' that 'management' and 'administration' have been pushed into the background' in the pursuit of becoming a great leader. Furthermore, Craig's (2021, p.52) analysis of sixty-one educational leadership articles in 2018 noted that 'the content of many is at least in part 'management' focused and not just about 'leadership' in the strict meaning of the term'. As such, I believe it is worth defining all three terms to understand how the Government expect primary schools to operate as an organisation and the individual roles that the headteacher and leadership team members may need to fulfil.

A school requires leadership, management, and administration to function. Dimmock (1999, p.442) differentiates between these concepts while also acknowledging that there are competing definitions:

School leaders [experience] tensions between competing elements of leadership, management and administration. Irrespective of how these terms are defined, school leaders experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher-order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower-order duties (administration).

Yet, whilst Dimmock's (ibid.) definition is still quoted, more recently, Connolly et al. (2019, p.504) concluded the difference between educational management and educational leadership as central concepts and their value in educational organisation remains the subject of debate. In addition, educational discourse also makes a conceptual distinction between leadership and management (Gunter, 2004; Bush, 2007; Glatter, 2014; Gage and Smith, 2016). Bush and Glover's (2003, p.5) original definition of leadership remains current and widely accepted:

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision.

This definition reflects the importance of the role of the school leaders and their own personal and professional values in shaping their school's vision. Bush (2008, p.276) further highlights that leadership has three key elements – influence, values, and vision. This version of leadership could cause potential tensions for a headteacher between, first, Government accountability measures designed to improve school standards continuously, and second, their personal values (this tension will be explored later in this section). Grunes (2011, p.11) highlights a leader's potential to influence others, a situation, or a task, which is linked to schools' success through their achievements. This is supported by much research, including Robinson's (2007) meta-analysis and Hitt and Tucker's (2016) systematic review, both of which illustrate that the nature of the school leader's role significantly impacts the students' learning outcomes via leadership of the teachers.

Therefore, school leadership responsibilities could be defined by understanding the practices required to continually improve teaching and learning. This confirms the importance of the leadership role of the headteacher, which is reflected in the current Department for Education (2020) definition. The DfE Headteachers' Standards, 2020 considers the headteacher as the school leader by stating:

Headteachers are leading professionals and role models for the communities they serve. Their leadership is a significant factor in ensuring high-quality teaching and achievement in schools and a positive and enriching education

experience for pupils. Together with those responsible for governance, they are custodians of the nation's schools.

(DfE, 2020a, para.1)

The term custodians implies that headteachers have responsibility and accountability for the nation's communities, teachers, and children, which goes beyond a day-to-day job role within the primary school. This wider-reaching expectation leads to the notion of the responsabilisation of a headteacher as the Government could be perceived as taking a step back, ensuring that school leaders become 'obligated citizens' (Peeters, 2013, p.585).

Ofsted inspects and reports on school management and leadership under several areas⁴. However, Ofsted failed to define or mention school management in the list of inspection criteria. *While being considered co-opted into leadership, school management* still forms a significant part of running a school. Craig (2021, p.55) states that headship is 80% management and only 20% leadership. Similarly, Gage and Smith (2016, p.1) suggest that the 'distinction involves the degree to which one is accountable to an organisation, team or group'. Connolly et al. (2019, p.2) describe educational management as the practice which requires delegation; this 'involves being assigned, accepting and carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in which others participate in an educational institution, and implies an organisational hierarchy'. Therefore, management can be defined as taking care of the day-to-day running of the school (Gage and Smith, 2016, p.1); this suggests an overlap between management and administration.

Leadership and management are key in running a school, and as with any institution, administration is needed. Connolly et al. (2019, p.3) highlight the distinction between management and administration in the hierarchical structure of schools 'with positions in the upper levels of an organisational hierarchy viewed as management positions, with administration positions featuring lower down'. Administration being considered in this way also reflects the notion of lower-order duties (Dimmock, 1999,

⁴ Ofsted inspection framework provides judgement on the quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, and personal development. See DfE (2020) Guidance Education inspection framework for full details)

p.450; Connolly et al., 2019, p.3). Therefore, research is focused on leadership and management, which are key roles to initiate changes and increase school standards.

4.4 The impact of neoliberal governance on school leadership

4.4.1 Defining governance

The research aims to evaluate the impact of neoliberal policies on leadership and the resulting experiences in English primary schools. Governance is entwined with leadership in the context of schools. Therefore, it is important to define what is meant by the term governance and how this is influenced by neoliberalism, leading to neoliberal governance, which in turn influences the running of schools. Jessop (2016, p.164) defines governance as a 'more or less distinctive set of political practices', which emerged from the late 1960s and 1970s. The growth of research interest in the field of governance, Jessop (2016) advises, was due to the growing perception of problems within advanced capitalist society, caused by a 'combination of the state and market failure and the decline of social cohesion' (ibid., p.164). Thus, the hierarchical model of government was considered to be in decline (Ball and Junemann, 2012).

Ball and Junemann's (2012) book *Networks, New Governance and Education*, suggest that due to the need for the government to solve more complex problems. There was a requirement for innovation, which created 'a new government model, in which executives' core responsibilities no longer centre on managing people and programs but on organising resources - often belonging to others - to produce public value' (ibid., p.2). This new form of organising was a coordination of 'self-organising networks, partnerships and other forms of reflexive collaboration' (Jessop, p.164), thus, resulting in 'an alleged shift from government to governance' (ibid.). However, Wilkins and Gobby (2021, p.311) advise governance as formally and informally being a means 'to shape the way organisations and individuals conduct themselves', which they argue could limit the possibilities for change, therefore maintaining the status quo (ibid.). Governance thus still aligns political, economic, and environmental aims (ibid.), regardless of the shift away from direct government.

The shift or displacement from government to governance Davies (2011) considers a reflection of academic discourse embedded within the notion of networks. Jessop (2003, p.101-102) advises these networks are a means to overcoming 'the limitations of an anarchic market exchange and top-down planning in an increasingly complex and global world'. Davies (2011) further postulates that governing via networks can create a space 'between state and market, extending the public sphere, empowering communities and cultivating inclusive policy-making' (ibid., p.2). However, Davies (2011) highlights contrasting viewpoints on networks and governance, arguing that 'network governance' is the ideal position, which claims to be based on fostering ethical virtues such as trust and empowered reflexivity and a break from the past. In contrast, a governance network refers to the 'recurring and/or institutionalised formal and informal resource exchanges between governmental and non-governmental actors' (ibid., p.3). Davies (ibid.) argues that governance networks prevail within any institution in practice, perpetuating hierarchies, inequalities, and exclusions, which they were meant to replace.

Governance within education in the form of school governing boards aims to include several diverse critical stakeholders, including staff, parents, local community members and representatives from the private sector. These critical stakeholders contribute voluntarily (DfE, 2020c). Wilkins (2016, p.2) defines schools' governors as:

a band of volunteers who are expected to provide 'appropriate' challenge and support to senior school leaders (the head teacher, associate head teacher, deputy head teacher and heads of departments, for example) on issues relating to the financial and educational performance of the school.

The involvement of differing stakeholders provides opportunities for a range of individuals to participate in management decision-making in the running of the school and contribute to learning processes. The aim is that the governing board should ensure that the local community's interests and the developments and changes proposed by the school are aligned with community aspirations and needs (Barton et al., 2006).

However, Fung and Wright (2001) identified the individuals participating in collaborative governance partnerships are often wealthy and otherwise powerfully dominant, having great resources to participate and can control the agenda and disarm activists. The choosing of school governors could cause difficulties for some school communities as the Government advises that all ‘Governors **must** [original emphasis] “*have the skills required to contribute to effective governance and the success of the school*” (DfE, 2020c, p.13). Hence, this could perpetuate the notion of the powerfully dominant having more control over the running of the school. The DfE aligns with Wilkins’ (2016, p.4) notion of a shift from the traditional ‘schools governance (often described as comfortable, casual, informal, and shaped by lay administration) towards a ‘professionally driven culture of school governance’. As Davies (2011) observes, this reflects Bourdieu’s notion of class cultural capital, which suggests that ‘unequal society mechanisms intended to enhance inclusion and equality, [...] are liable to reproduce the inequalities they seek to overcome’ (ibid., p.64). This could be a pertinent point when one considers the aims and values of individual schools.

In addition, with the Government advising that school governors should have specific skills, this can again reinforce the shift to a business focus for schools. This was stated by the then Secretary for Education, Michael Gove (2012, Q55):

Governors should be chosen based on their skills rather than the organisation or interest that they represent, and we can learn a lot from shining a light on the practice of the best schools. I have been really encouraged by the response of the business community, who are trying to encourage more and more people with a background in business to use some of their skills to enhance what governing bodies provide.

In response, Young (2015) highlights some issues concerning the notion of recruiting governors based on the need for skills; as lacking in clarity tending to imply a business rationality; and suggests an ‘apolitical technical process which merely requires skills to ensure effectiveness’ (ibid., p.167). Young (ibid., p.174) further summarises that the focus on skills could mean that:

some voices are not heard; there is little creative dialogue which might lead to the emergence and collective exploration of alternative ideas that individuals did not come to the meeting with; and the productive power of national policy discourse and of actors such as headteachers is masked.

Gobby and Niesche (2019) also highlight that elected parent governors are repositioned 'as individuals and employers rather than representatives of the parent community' (ibid., p.573). The shift towards a skills-based model reflects a corporate managerialist approach (Ranson, 2011; James et al., 2013; Keddie, 2015; Wilkins, 2016; Young, 2016; Gobby and Niesche, 2019). Integrating the skilled know-how of community members supports the entrepreneurial management of schools while depoliticising educational decision-making by submitting decision-making to the technical logic of management (Wilkins, 2016).

Therefore, whilst the Government sought to devolve many powers and decision-making to governance networks, there has still been a 'strong centralised and controlling approach to governing' (Davies, 2011, p.4), which can be hidden via the many policies that shape education and the stakeholders within the system. As a result, governance within education can be perceived in differing ways, as Wilkins and Olmedo (2018, p.4) highlight:

Education governance is experienced by some as a part of the dangerous and mischievous practices of the 'hidden hand' of the market or neoliberalism more generally, while those who fear the tyranny of hierarchies and are distrustful of top-down systems celebrate it as an empowering tool for democratic change, innovation and improved effectiveness or transparency.

This prescribed notion of good governance is considered a critical factor in creating a country's education system, via policies and practices that seek to shape education in specific ways. This reinforces Foucault's (2007) aforementioned notion of governmentality, in which the government's power does not reduce due to market forces but persists, whether the perception is positive or negative. The accountability measures ensure centralised conformity. This further evokes Foucault⁵ via the notion of good governance as a form of a new modality of state power (Sharmir, 2008; Ball and Junemann, 2012; Wilkins, 2016; Keddie and Mills, 2019).

⁵ Foucault considers 'Modality' in relation to particular kinds of power, from a historicising and characterising position, which includes sovereign or judicial power, disciplinary power, pastoral power and biopower or biopolitics (Foucault 1975/1995; 1976/1988; 2007; 2008).

Since the Education Act of 1988, school governing boards have been given an increasingly more significant role and responsibilities, as schools gained greater autonomy, the National College of Leadership for Schools (2013, section 2) defines the remit of school governors:

as a corporate body, governors have significant responsibilities in law for the strategic direction of schools, and specific legal responsibilities for aspects of the school's safe running, curriculum, leadership appointments and financial health.

In addition, school governors have been highlighted as integral to holding school leaders accountable for financial and educational performance (Wilkins, 2016). This greater autonomy has also increased school accountability to central Government via Ofsted and a range of other stakeholders with a sharp focus on pupil attainment. James et al. (2013, p.87) note that 'not only is the accountability pressure strong, but the requirements have also been intensified and the stakes are higher'. Wilkins and Gobby (2021, p.10) also highlight the increased pressure due to the so-called reduction of Government involvement:

Decreased government involvement in the running and monitoring of education provision means that public servants, be they school leaders or school governors, are called upon to make themselves accountable to stakeholders and evaluation and funding bodies, typically through horizontal and vertical relations of accountability that rely on performance benchmarking, external inspection and high-stakes testing.

These mechanisms of accountability align with the notion of responsabilisation, whereby the individuals are accountable for the success of the schools. Not only does the mode of governance make individuals increasingly responsible, but it encourages individuals to do this via mechanisms that support a neoliberal discourse via accountability, focusing on measurable outputs. Wilkins and Gobby (ibid., p.10) further advise that governance thus becomes concerned with how relations and structures of accountability function successfully within a narrow definition of rational self-management.

Wilkins and Gobby (2021, p.311) emphasise leadership as a form of discourse, which can be dynamic, cultural, and historical, comprising '[a] specific body of knowledge and practices that are concerned with influencing the conduct of others

and self to specific ends'. Within education, this can mean that practices 'are shaped by social and political interests and power, and therefore the field and exercise of leadership are both sites of contest and struggle' (ibid.). School leaders, thus, can often have to interpret the differing political interests of the Government's notions of the requirements of education and the needs of the school within the local context. School leaders face complex issues of building positive relationships and developing school values, whilst also being required to meet Government demands of continually raising standards.

4.4.2 Governance via policies

As highlighted in the introduction, policies, including in education, are only sometimes a clear directive or a set of rules laid out by governments to be followed by its institutions. Therefore, school leaders are required to interpret, implement, and enact education policies. The Government provide policy documents such as the following for schools to guide governance and leadership.

- **Governance handbook Academy trusts and maintained schools -** *Guidance on the roles and duties of governing boards, and advice on the skills, knowledge, and behaviours they need to be effective* (DfE, 2020b)
- **A Competency Framework for Governance:** *The knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance in maintained schools, academies, and multi-academy trusts* (DfE, 2017b)
- **Clerking Competency Framework:** *The knowledge, skills and behaviours required to provide professional clerking to the governing boards of maintained schools, academies, and multi-academy trusts* (DfE, 2017c)
- **Maintained School Governance: Structures and Role Descriptors** (DfE, 2020c)
- **Academy Trust Governance- Structures and Role Descriptors** (DfE, 2020d)

- ***The constitution of governing bodies of maintained schools' Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and local authorities in England*** (DfE, 2017d)

These documents help form a framework for school leadership teams to run and maintain schools. Throughout these policies, a neoliberal discourse of education via business terminology is perpetuated, in which the Government describes effective governance in many of the documents as:

- *Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;*
 - *Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff;*
 - *Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.*
- (DfE, 2020b, p.13; DfE, 2020c, p.9; DfE, 2020d, p.13)

The *Governance handbook and competency framework* document further explain that effective school governance is based on six key features:

- ***Strategic leadership*** that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.
 - ***Accountability*** that drives up educational standards and financial performance.
 - ***People*** with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.
 - ***Structures*** that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
 - ***Compliance*** with statutory and contractual requirements.
Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance
- (DfE, 2020b, pp.13-14)

The discourse of the above six key features is based on the language used within business management models. It does not include or acknowledge any language that relates to pedagogy, or the child in any specific way. Whilst the *Governance*

handbook (DfE, 2020b) does include a description that relates to a school, it is only in terms of a measurable output of pupils and ‘the effective and efficient performance management of staff’ (ibid., p.13). Much research attests that the focus on accountabilities via test data normalises the neoliberal discourse within education policy (Gobby and Niesche, 2019; Verger et al., 2019; Wilkins, 2016; Young, 2015). This reflects Foucault’s (1972) notion: ‘[e]very educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it’ (ibid., p.227). Furthermore, shaping schools via governance policies provides a means of normalisation through ‘the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth forms an apparatus (*dispositif*) of knowledge-power’ (Foucault, 2008, p.19). In this instance, knowledge is established by particular forms of discourse, for example, the requirement to achieve certain levels of performance in standardised tests to be judged a good school. These policy discourses intersect with government power, thus creating systems of control in education. Bailey (2013) asserts as the *dispositifs* of policy, with ‘the capacity to produce, regulate and govern educational practices’ (ibid., p.809). These policies, therefore, seek to influence the formation of governing boards, the requirements of school leadership teams and, ultimately, the school’s requirements, through their own interpretation, implementation, and enactment.

4.5 School leadership and accountability

As stated above, the shift from government to governance within schools has made school leaders increasingly accountable for the school’s operations. The notion of neoliberal discourse in education, a consistent theme over decades, reflects strong external accountability pressures, which have made school leaders increasingly responsible for raising standards of achievement, leading school improvement initiatives, and enhancing the quality of teaching (Ball, 2017; Day and Sammons, 2014; Jerrim and Sims, 2021). Niesche and Thomson (2017, p.199) noted that the shift in Government policy for schools to become self-managing created a different work environment whereby headteachers ‘are expected to run schools as businesses, negotiate the uneasy tensions between forms of de-centralization and re-centralization’. Therefore, school leadership has become entwined with

accountability measures, in which schools must continually demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency to improve learning outputs (Ball, 2017).

Webb (2011, p.736) advises that these accountability pressures are '[n]eoliberal technologies [which] amount to different practices of government that attempt to regulate society through a variety of strategies, techniques, and procedures'. This includes all educational institutions. Ball (2017) concludes that a decentralised form of accountability, which should free schools from Government control, ensures institutions, schools, and those within the systems adhere to the power of the Government through their own self-government. The headteacher is considered the prominent leader of the school and is encouraged to accept full responsibility for its running. This is outlined by the DfE (2020a) in the Headteachers' Standards, 2020.

10. Governance and accountability

Headteachers:

- *understand and welcome the role of effective governance, upholding their obligation to give account and accept responsibility*
- *establish and sustain professional working relationships with those responsible for governance*
- *ensure that staff know and understand their professional responsibilities and are held to account*
- *ensure the school effectively and efficiently operates within the required regulatory frameworks and meets all statutory duties*

(DfE, 2020a, section 10)

This guidance for headteachers can be deemed as a form of neoliberal governmentality, by shaping the required conduct and the responsibilities of the everyday running of the school, of which headteachers are held accountable by measurable output. However, it is not only headteachers but also governors that form part of the leadership team and can be considered compliant with the prescribed accountability measures, as Ball (2016, p.xiii) attests:

Put starkly, governors are now a part of the educational state – doing the work of performance management at institutional level, re-instantiating the

discourses of accountability and quality, bringing the gaze of government to bear upon the practices of headteachers and teachers.

Ball (2016) further note that devolving responsibility to school leadership teams from the Government to individual decision-makers is an important strategy in reforming education. The DfE (Matthews et al., 2014) advises that freedom within or from Government policies is the route for schools to be successful, claiming there are:

successes and high potential in the government's policy of devolving more responsibility for teacher development and school improvement to the profession, and demonstrate the readiness of the most capable leaders to grasp the opportunity to the benefit of their schools and others.

(Matthews et al., 2014, p.4)

Therefore, the Government appear to claim that a successful school is a result of its policies. Yet, there is the implication that failure within a school results from the failure of school leadership, headteachers, teachers and/or their pupils, citing their misuse of the given autonomy. Niesche and Thomson (2017, p.203) highlight the paradox for school leaders that Government policy can enable school leaders to be autonomous, which can foster a 'local progressivism' and so legitimatises the discourse of autonomy. However, Niesche and Thomson (ibid.) argue that autonomy is only for those leaders in successful schools. Thus, if a school is unsuccessful, blame can be placed on the autonomous school leaders for not being capable of grasping these opportunities for success, thus responsible for their own failure. Done and Murphy (2018, p.151) and Thrupp (2009, p.6) refer to this as the 'politics of blame', which is considered implicit in policy:

The politics of blame have often involved uncompromising stances on the part of politicians and policymakers, where the quality of student achievement is seen as the result of school-based factors and any reference to wider contextual issues such as socio-economic factors are ruled out as excuses for poor performance. The net effect is to hold teachers and schools responsible for problems beyond their control.

(Thrupp, 2009, p.6)

This is supported by Blackmore and McNae (2021), who state that focusing on school leadership as a solution distracts from wider social, cultural, and economic factors impacting schools and their communities. Furthermore, Thompson et al. (2022) highlight that these accountability measures are subject to change as

politicians continually revise the aims of school reforms. Alexander (2014, p.358) further notes that changes in educational standards create a 'catch-22 of centralisation': '[t]he more policymakers micromanage, the more they risk blame when things go wrong, and the more they then strive to deflect the blame back'. The constant need for changes is wrapped in the managerial discourse of continually improving standards. Therefore, this type of accountability is seemingly unattainable. Thompson et al. (2022, p.92) explain how the changing nature of accountability measures leads to 'work intensification'. Thompson et al. (ibid.) research, which included 130 interviews with education stakeholders across Australia, England, New Zealand, and Canada, explored issues relating to work intensification, school autonomy and accountability policies and concluded that:

The desire for autonomy amongst the profession emerges as a belief that, if schools and school leaders were better able to respond to their local communities, they could better counter the effects of pernicious accountability measures and seemingly malevolent policy directives aimed at teaching and learning.

(Thompson et al., 2022. p.99)

However, Thompson et al. (ibid.) also note that there is a paradox in the notion of school autonomy, with school leaders still being constrained by Government policies, whilst at the same time facing a reduction in centralised support services, which limits the autonomy given. Thus, the result 'tended to increase workload as school leaders found themselves responsible for what might be termed 'corporate' leadership' (ibid., pp.99-100). Done and Murphy (2018) acknowledge the affective importance of responsabilisation resulting from conditions linked to reduced funding, excessive workloads, and intensified accountability. However, Done and Murphy (ibid.) further note that rather than the system being held to account, the issue or blame is seen as a deficiency with the individual, which requires 'greater individual resilience and imagination' (ibid., p.10). This further reflects the neoliberal discourse of individualised and responsabilised leaders to deliver creative solutions to problems within schools.

The issues relating to accountability are not only linked to cases of performativity and measurable outputs but are also linked to the caring responsibilities required within schools. Keddie and Mills (2019) make this connection in their research into

headteachers, suggesting they are moral agents. Foucault's mechanism of neoliberal governmentality is linked to the notions of responsabilisation and assumed moral agency (ibid.). Keddie and Mills (ibid., p.57.) use this assumption of moral agency and responsibility concerning headteachers, school improvements and accountability measures to get higher scores. Furthermore, Keddie and Mills' (ibid.) attest headteachers as constructing and complying with the neoliberal rhetoric of entrepreneurialism, in which headteachers 'freely accepted' non-negotiable programmes of accountabilities. However, Keddie (2018, p.2) also notes the focus on data fails to account for the 'stories behind the data'. Keddie (ibid.) note how neoliberal subjectivities can work together or alongside relations of care for students and their families. Done and Murphy (2018, p.149) also advise how schools are required to deliver pastoral care and performance optimisation, in which they consider the notion of care as being 'bound up with processes of systematisation, quantification, comparative measurement and accountability' (ibid.). Therefore, school leadership is complex and challenging, with leaders responsible for the prescribed accountability measures and the needs of the school community.

In contrast, Fuller's (2019) work considers the everyday resistance of headteachers in relation to neoliberal discourse. Drawing on the work of contemporaries, Fuller (ibid., p.34) explains that there are differing types of resistance:

Resistance occurs in opposition to neoliberal education reforms as covert (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Niesche, 2013) and overt actions (Theoharis, 2007; Thomson, 2008), counter-narratives and discourses (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Ball & Olmedo, 2013), and is enacted by individuals (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; English, 2003) and as collectives (Thomson, 2008). It is daily work in the lived reality of mediating emotions in school leadership (Blackmore, 2004; Niesche, 2013).

Fuller (ibid., p.47) identified resistance to neoliberal education reforms in the everyday practices of headteachers through a critical engagement with policies. Fuller (ibid.) suggests a need to avoid binary discussions of compliance and resistance in favour of a nuanced understanding, recognising cases of 'semblance of compliance as resistance'. This insight by Fuller (ibid.) will be useful within the research when considering everyday small practices in primary schools in relation to neoliberal governance.

4.6 School leadership culture, ethos and values

School leadership is not only accountable for student performance but must also develop a school culture, values, vision, and ethos. The DfE (2021) advise that all schools 'must' publish a values and ethos statement on their school website. A school's vision and mission statement generally include academic expectations and a range of values related to motivation, school belongingness, teacher support, and personal character (Allen et al., 2017). The culture, values, vision, and ethos also form part of the strategic leadership requirements in the Governance handbook (DfE, 2020b, p.14), in which a strategic leadership vision and ethos strategy is required to be set and should include:

strong and clear values and ethos which are defined and modelled by the board, embedded across the organisation and adhered to by all that work in it, or on behalf of it.

Yet, the Government fail to define the terms used within their documents. Solvason (2005, p.85) believes that ethos is an 'elusive' term and a product of a school's culture. The most cited definition of school culture, which is adopted in this research, was established by Deal and Peterson (1999, pp.2–3), who describe school culture thus:

Unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or not, and how teachers feel about their work and their students.

This notion or definition of school culture is elaborated by Ylimaki and Brunderman (2022, p.44) to include the 'values, beliefs, and norms of behavior embedded within the individual, the leadership team, the organization, and the larger community'. Therefore, a school's culture could be considered as the day-to-day life the school is built on. Within this culture, the school's ethos is 'the ambience that is felt at a school as a result of its cultural history' (Solvason, 2005, p.85), and as such, a school's ethos can be ever-changing. Solvason (ibid., p.87) summarises that 'we comprehend the school culture, whereas we experience the ethos'. Bennett (2017, p.30) states that 'school culture will exist whether effort is invested in it or not' and

advises that school leaders should be the ‘conscious architects of their school cultures’ (ibid.). As such, the role of school leaders or the headteacher is responsible for designing, building and enacting a school’s culture.

Along with culture, values and ethos being part of the overall leadership team’s responsibility, it is also seen as a vital part of the headteacher’s role. As part of the *Headteacher Standards* (DfE, 2020a) the first area of responsibility and accountability listed is that of ‘Culture and ethos’ (ibid., para.8). The school combines aspects of direction and partnership with the community along with positive learning environment and high standards.

1. School culture
Headteachers:

- *establish and sustain the school’s ethos and strategic direction in partnership with those responsible for governance and through consultation with the school community*
- *create a culture where pupils experience a positive and enriching school life*
- *uphold ambitious educational standards which prepare pupils from all backgrounds for their next phase of education and life*
- *promote positive and respectful relationships across the school community and a safe, orderly and inclusive environment*
- *ensure a culture of high staff professionalism*

(DfE, 2020a, para.21)

The Headteachers Standards and the Governance handbook consider that all school visions must be ‘connected with, and responsive to the communities they serve – particularly pupils, parents and carers – through effective engagement’ (DfE, 2020b, p.18). In addition, if the school has a religious character, the culture, values, and ethos should be created in conjunction with the diocesan authority and the local parish (ibid.). There is still an emphasis on accountability data-driven measures, while the school ethos should be based on ‘high expectations for the behaviour, progress, and attainment of all pupils and for the conduct and professionalism of both staff and the board themselves’ (DfE 2020b, p.18).

Moreover, the ethos and values statements relate to the marketisation of education and are used in the marketing and promotion campaigns for the school (Allen and Kern, 2018; Carden, 2021). Yet, as Allen et al. (2017) highlight, although the statement may explicitly imply a school prioritises, they may not be carried through consistently or implicitly in a school's culture, although 'whether or not it is applied to daily practices, can still indicate what the school may aspire to' (ibid., p.32). Therefore, it can be argued that schools do have a certain amount of autonomy in how these policies are interpreted and enacted to reflect their circumstances.

There is some evidence that a well-written statement of a school's ethos and vision can reflect the values and practices of schools Ball et al., 2012; Chapple, 2015; Allen et al., 2017). Ball et al. (2012, p.27) advise that most schools have 'distinct sets of professional cultures, outlooks and attitudes that have evolved over time and inflect policy responses in particular ways.' However, Ball et al. (2012, p.27) also note there is a possibility for tension between the embedded school's values and the prescribed and ever-changing nature of Government policies. This could create a space for fostering ethical virtues such as trust and empowered reflexivity, as highlighted by Davies (2011), where school leaders adopt a network governance approach. The notion of a network governance approach is supported by Allen and Kern (2018, para.5) who advise that:

schools need to balance parent interests, the local community, political pressures, information and misinformation available online, and constant pressures on time and resources. Vision and mission statements can help keep the school on track with its greater purpose by helping school leaders navigate competing interests.

Leadership, therefore, can be considered instrumental in shaping the school's ethos. Yet, Gurley et al. (2015) raise the issue that there is 'a lack of understanding of exactly what mission, vision, values, and goals statements are and the value such foundational statements offer'. Often, these statements are linked to school improvements, which again links back to school accountability pressure. Moreover, ethos and values also relate to school staff. Warin (2017) highlights that leadership practices are crucial in communicating the school's ethos, but also the need to recruit 'like-minded staff who already share the same values and do not have to be persuaded into a different philosophy' (ibid., p.192). Furthermore, Barnes (2021,

p.16) advised that teachers' own values are imperative for 'teachers wishing to create a positive classroom ethos and find long-term fulfilment in teaching'. Without a common ethos and value shared between leadership and teaching staff can result in low morale. Sturrock (2022, p.15) noted that if 'school leaders' values and practices correlate with increased accountability and managerialism', then this resulted in teachers' view that 'nothing is ever good enough' (ibid.). While ethos and values may be a prescribed necessity for a school, leaders can benefit from shaping the school ethos to create a learning and working environment beyond accountability measures and marketing materials.

Whilst leadership in educational policy discourse is often linked to accountability based on student performance, leadership also needs to respond to, and support the whole school community. For a school to be an effective place for student learning, there is a need for ethical and caring support along with an ethical approach to accountability policies (Blackmore and McNae, 2021; Leithwood, 2021; Louis et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2020; Smylie et al., 2016). Blackmore and McNae (2021, p.250) state:

School leadership is about knowing your students, staff and community; having the capacity to listen and to encourage initiative; gathering and allocating resources; buffering staff against multiple conflicting policy agendas.

Ball et al. (2012) advise that policy enactment is about a competing set of values and ethics, which includes social values and social justice. However, these broader social components are often a less prominent part of the policy process, which Ball et al. (2012, p.10) found to be 'glimpsed fleetingly as asides [... and] referred to outside of, or beyond, policy.' Furthermore, and of importance, Braun and Maguire (2020, p.4) advise that in the context of English primary schools, 'assessment policies are enacted within the context of the education and care of young children'. They note that in:

primary schools, links with parents and the local community tend to be stronger and more immediate. [with an] emphasises [on] child-focused and developmentally appropriate approaches to education and learning. Even if these principles are sometimes hidden in everyday practice, they inform and shape the ethos and work of the primary school.

(Braun and Maguire, 2020, p.20)

Sturrock (2022, p.3) noted that a 'traditional, caring and community-focused world' was considered an essential reflection of a primary school; this was also evident in the 'professional discourse pervaded by notions of 'family' and 'care''(ibid.). In addition, Sturrock (ibid.) further highlights that Ofsted values the notion of a 'family atmosphere' and 'sense of community' as being cited as strengths in the primary school formal inspection process. Headteachers also utilised the same discourse related to schools feeling like a family in their description of their schools (Towers, 2022). Thus, Blackmore and McNae (2021, p.250) suggest that school leaders mediate relationships between teachers and parents. Therefore, good leadership needs to reflect the school's circumstances and themselves as the leader. Blackmore and McNae (2021, p.250) advise that leadership is:

values driven and draws on a capacity to display empathy and compassionate authority and to accept feedback but always being reflective with regard to one's own position and self-reflective to others in terms of the relations of power and difference.

This is supported by Leithwood's (2021, p.4) meta-analysis of 63 empirical studies, which found that there is '[c]onsiderable evidence associated with ethical leadership, [which] points to both personal and professional values influencing the leaders' success'. Ethical leadership is vital to delivering social justice for diverse school intakes in education. This notion aligns with Braun and Maguire (2020), who found that whilst the needs of diverse intakes and communities played a part in how policies were enacted, it is the difference in the leadership/headship style rather than any more contextualised factors that affect policy interpretation and enactment within primary schools. Khalida et al. (2016, p.1,289) also noted that 'culturally responsive leaders show determination to create a welcoming school environment for all students and their parents'. However, this did pose challenges for students within diverse and marginalised contexts (ibid.). Forde and Torrance (2017, p.22) also noted that the 'motivation of individual school leaders in their readiness to exercise social justice leadership in a deeply contested space' and that it is via these social justice leaders there is the ability to 'work towards ensuring barriers to learning for all pupils are removed so that the conditions for effective learning are fostered in an inclusive culture' (ibid.). One way in which school leaders can achieve the aim of

removing barriers is via an inclusive culture that can create a sense of belonging. Roffey (2013) confirms that creating an inclusive culture for schools in disadvantaged areas positively affects learning, achievement, and behaviour. Furthermore, Roffey (ibid.) also noted that shaping inclusive school communities could benefit the wider community in disadvantaged areas.

There are many headteachers' careers that are focused on ensuring social justice for their school community. Towers' (2022) research with long-service headteachers in disadvantaged primary schools found that the headteachers' own identities were considered as 'shaped by their moral purpose, core values and belief that they can make a difference for the children' (ibid., p.3). This also included providing 'a sense of stability, security and continuity' (ibid.). James et al. (2006, p.90) highlight that primary school headteacher's work was 'underpinned by very strong educational values, beliefs and ideals' in which the 'sense of obligation and responsibility was very powerful' (ibid.). Headteachers' leadership is seen as going beyond simply caring about the school but also caring about the welfare of the children and their families and ensuring that the school is a safe space (Keddie, 2018; Towers, 2022). However, Towers (2022) also noted that headteachers did not view the children as victims of their circumstances but highlighted that the headteachers had high expectations and belief in the children to succeed. This type of leadership based on personal beliefs to do the best for their pupils was also highlighted in Matthews et al. (2014) document for the DfE *Freedom to Lead, a study of outstanding primary school leadership in England*, noted that outstanding primary school leaders were all:

driven by a commitment to do the best for every child in the school. It is in this sense that their schools are 'child-centred'. Children come first. These headteachers also have a strong sense of social justice, seeking to remove the barriers to achievement such as disadvantage and low parental aspiration, by compensating for what the children lack and by working closely with families and the community.

(Matthews et al., 2014, p.19)

However, this type of personal belief and commitment by headteachers can lead to the notion of responsibility. Keddie (2018) theorised how being a headteacher can be aligned with being a responsible neoliberal subject, that of 'a self-determined and rational actor who readily takes up the modes of regulation and measurement

expected of them' (ibid., p.1). Keddie (ibid.) further highlights how this form of subjectivity 'sits within and alongside relations of care and concern for the welfare of students and teachers'. As Lemke (2001, p.201) notes, '[t]he strategy of rendering individual subjects 'responsible [...] entails shifting the responsibility for social risks [...] for life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of 'self-care'. In the case of the headteacher's commitment to the school community, it extends the concept of self-care yet still reflects the notion of neoliberal subjectivity.

As the choice of options for action is, or so the neo-liberal notion of rationality would have it, the expression of free will on the basis of a self-determined decision, the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them. This strategy can be deployed in all sorts of areas and leads to areas of social responsibility becoming a matter of personal provisions.

(Lemke 2001, p.201)

Trnka and Trundle (2014) highlight the 'multiple framings of responsibility [that] at times require a switch between neoliberal logics of self-responsibility and care of the self, and other forms of interpersonal responsibility and obligation' (ibid., p.145). Thus, obligation appears to form part of a headteacher's responsibility to the students beyond the requirements of mere academic learning to pass the required tests. However, this also enables headteachers to expand their leadership beyond neoliberal accountability. Keddie (2018, p.12) informs that the 'neoliberal framing of care were aspects of [...] leadership that reflected an intense commitment to the welfare of others. This was a form of personalised and relational care that either challenged or was not associated with matters of audit and accountability'. Thus, it can be considered that a caring and ethical form of leadership can create a space for headteachers' sense of responsibility to move beyond the preoccupation of creating data of children and caring about the whole child. This is pertinent to the research to gauge the tension between the caring role within schools and the need to satisfy the Government's need for data.

4.7 School leadership and context of the school

This final section will consider the importance of the school's individual context. The current research is based in four primary schools with differing locations, sizes, and local contexts. As noted above, how policies are interpreted and enacted is not a linear process or a process carried out in the same way within different schools (Ball et al., 2012; Braun and Maguire, 2020; Miller, 2018). In addition, Thrupp and Lupton (2006, p.309) state that not all schools are the same or even similar, and as with my sample schools, the 'nuances of local context [can] cumulatively make a considerable difference to school processes and student achievement'. To acknowledge the differences in policy enactment in relation to school context, Braun et al. (2011, p.588) devised a framework to identify the variety of factors that can influence differences in policy enactments between schools that appear similar. They identify four main areas concerning how policy is enacted, which are as follows:

Contextual dimensions

- *Situated contexts (such as locale, school histories, intakes and settings).*
- *Professional contexts (such as values, teacher commitments and experiences, and 'policy management' in schools).*
- *Material contexts (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure).*
- *External contexts (e.g. degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities).*

Braun et al. (ibid.) argue that by 'conceptualising these factors as situated, material, professional and external dimensions, [they can] examine the role of context in shaping policy enactments on the ground'. The notion of a situated context is of interest here, taking account of the location, school histories, intakes, and settings, reflecting the wider school community.

The location of the school can determine the school community. The term 'school community' typically refers to the various groups, individuals and institutions that are invested in the welfare and support of a local school; this relates to the situated context. Hillery (1982, p.31) provided a singular definition of community, which he describes thus: 'a social group inhabiting a common territory and having one or more

additional common ties'. Hillery's singular definition provides a simple view of community and one that can be easily related to a school community, which by definition is fixed by location and whether parents, pupils, teachers or wider staff can be considered as having a common tie. Differing types of schools will have a different understanding of their school community: schools with a religious affiliation would have wider links to places of worship, and academy chains and free schools may incorporate differing structures within the running of the schools involving different connections to their communities.

Gerard Delanty (2010) debates how differences in community have been used and contested within classical sociology and community studies and how the term has changed over time. Delanty (2010, p.xi) suggests a general definition for sociologists is that 'community has traditionally designated a particular form of social organization based on small groups, such as neighbourhoods, the small town or a spatially-bounded locality'. Delanty (ibid.) expands from a singular definition, implying that there are many other ways to define communities based on class, ethnicity, religion, or politics, which may create differing attachments. This indicates that people can belong to one or more communities simultaneously. However, the term community is often contested, as it can be seen as homogenising, and therefore, it has the limitation of neglecting and ignoring the diverse, dynamic and contingent nature of community groups (Joseph, 2002; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013). This definition appears evident in The Department for Education (DfE, 2017a, p.7) highlights the importance of the wider community to schools and education by stating:

In Britain today, the community where you grow up will shape your chances of attending a good school and your wider educational and career outcomes. Education and skills outcomes vary significantly across the country and are, in turn, one of the biggest drivers of regional variations in productivity.

The statement appears to homogenise everyone within a single community and a single school, which can affect life chances without considering the impacts of the context of individual communities. Disadvantaged communities are referred to as 'othered'. Maginess (2011, p.210) advises that 'othering' occurs when 'there is a projection of any aspects of the dominant culture which it wishes to repress onto the groups which are dominated'; this type of cultural construction functions within the

construction of 'community' (ibid.). Individuals labelled as disadvantaged, or those who experience inequality are labelled by those of the dominant culture or 'othered' by those who could be deemed responsible for the inequality (Maginess, 2011; Reay, 2017; Tyler, 2013).

Much research supports the Government's notion that there is a correlation between academic achievement and strong links with the local community, whereby an awareness of community life is reflected within the school (Alexander et al., 2010; Arthur and Bailey, 2002; Desforges and Abouchar, 2003; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002, 2005, 2006; Groves and Baumber, 2008). The history and the wider school community can affect the child's educational experience, including how the school and the community relationships are made and the benefits, disadvantages, or hindrances of these relationships. Furthermore, Ofsted reports on leadership and management in relation to the community. However, Ofsted, in the *School inspection handbook*, does not provide clear direction for school leaders about the wider community but states: 'leaders engage effectively with learners and others in their community, including – where relevant – parents, carers, employers and local services' (Ofsted, 2021, section 18). Therefore, school leaders need to consider the context of the wider community. Leithwood et al. (2020, p.10) explain variations in school contexts, including how different cultural contexts can have significant consequences for those engaged in leadership. Thus, school leaders need to take into account these variations in context when interpreting and enacting policies into their school's practices if schools are to succeed in being inclusive (Leithwood, 2021).

Keddie et al.'s (2018, p.15) research also highlighted that school leaders could 'responsibilise themselves' via a form of social entrepreneurialism beyond student performance, to support student equity, well-being, and inclusion, which can be informed via the needs of wider community issues. However, there is little policy recognition for local challenges or limited access to resources, which can impact disadvantaged schools (Passy and Ovenden-Hope 2020). As highlighted in the section above, leadership responding to the locale context in disadvantaged communities often reflects the headteacher's own moral response to social justice (ibid.). This can, therefore, further impact the responsabilisation of headteachers to

address issues that go beyond the school's needs and respond to wider issues in the context of the school community.

4.8 Summary

This chapter aims to provide an understanding of the importance of leadership in primary education and the day-to-day running of schools. It has been shown that leadership is complex and must take account of internal and external influences on the school community. Headteachers need to respond to Government policy demands, ensuring that accountability measures are adhered to. However, leadership goes beyond merely meeting these targets. Leadership also must take account of the needs within their school of staff and students, and the geographic and social context; this incorporates the wider community of the school. Furthermore, headteachers' own social and moral beliefs in response to social justice can impact how their schools are run. Thus, this may result in headteachers reproducing the notion of responsabilisation, whereby the headteachers render themselves responsible for the disadvantages within the school community. This demonstrates that school leadership is individual in terms of leadership, the school and the wider community, creating a complex set of individual school circumstances that need to be considered when researching schools.

The two chapters, 3 and 4, conceptualising aspects of neoliberalisation in education, have revealed a gap in the literature regarding the potential challenges for schools to meet the new performativity measures following the introduction of the more rigorous National Curriculum and the resulting SATs. However, whilst there have been increased challenges for schools to meet these new expectations, an emerging aspect of the literature is the suggestion that wider austerity measures are impacting schools. This could further impact headteachers in aiming to alleviate aspects of social injustice and could further impact schools aiming to maintain a child-centred approach.

In the next chapter, I detail the strategies for inquiry used in this research. Specifically, I explain the rationale for the paradigm, the influences of the research design and the methods used. I describe the sampling and explain the changing

nature of the research due to participant access. Finally, I explain the approaches for analysing the data gathered and the ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 5. STRATEGIES FOR INQUIRY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the selection of literature to provide contextual knowledge concerning the neoliberalisation of education. The chapter drew on a large body of literature exploring changes in primary schools and their communities regarding Government policies. There was a focus on leadership with discussions of perceived autonomy and responsabilisation for delivering wider social justice within education. This was followed by highlighting the binary narrative in Government policy concerning parents and social class, which had the potential to impact school-parent relationships. The final section highlighted the impact of wider austerity policies for primary schools.

Building on this analysis and addressing the study's aim, this chapter details the conceptual framework that supports the basis of the study, in conjunction with a description and explanation of the research design. Ritchie et al. (2013) advise the importance of methodological approaches is to underpin the theoretical assumptions of the research to ensure consistency of approach throughout a project. Dyson and Brown (2006, p.2) advise that 'the choice a researcher makes about strategies and methods is always a contextual choice', in which different philosophical traditions underpin different research approaches. Dyson and Brown (ibid., p.3) have identified a research process with five conceptual levels to guide the researcher:

- **Research philosophies** (*research paradigm detailing both an ontology and epistemology*)
- **Methodological criteria** (*the reliability and validity of the research*)
- **Research strategies** (*the organisation of the research*)
- **Research methods** (*the type of data to be collected and the approach to be used*)
- **Methods of analysis** (*how the data collected will be analysed*).

These five conceptual levels will aid in structuring the methodology of this research. The research was conducted in four different primary schools, with the focus of the study being to explore the experience of school leaders and other actors within primary schools. The research employs an interpretivist paradigm to gain varied and

multiple meanings of the individual participants' experiences of primary school education. A key point in considering an interpretivist approach is it enables a way of 'discovering how different people interpret the world in which they live' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.7).

The methodological criteria followed Cohen and Crabb's (2008) recommendations for qualitative research for justification of the importance of the research, recommendations for an ethical approach, use of rigorous methods, knowledge of the importance of reflexivity, establishing validity or credibility, and ensuring verification or reliability of the research. The research strategy followed a generic qualitative approach, which supported the use of in-depth and semi-structured interviews to gather data to answer the research questions. Finally, the methods of analysis used were that of a thematic analysis appropriate to the qualitative data collected.

I will begin by explaining the ontological and epistemological position that I adopted within the research. A justification for a generic qualitative approach will follow. I will detail my positionality within the research. This will be followed by describing the methodological tools adopted. Finally, I will outline the data analysis and the ethical issues involved in the research.

5.2 Paradigm and philosophical influences

It is important the research commences with a statement of the philosophical assumptions, ontologies, and epistemologies (Crotty, 1998) or the paradigms (Lincoln et al., 2011) that support the inquiry to *evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in English primary schools*. The paradigm for the research encapsulates its ontology and epistemology (Guba, 1990). The researcher's theoretical assumptions underpin the methods and the philosophical approach to be undertaken. Dyson and Brown (2006, p.4) highlight the importance of the researcher having an awareness of their position as it 'permits appropriate caveats and cautions to be included in a discussion' and it enables the 'researchers to situate themselves in the research process and at least makes possible reflection upon the effects of their activities on the creation of the data'

(ibid.). Therefore, using a paradigm is essential to illustrate the theoretical foundation the researcher will adhere to. Guba (1990, p.18) advises that the researcher consider three questions when focusing on a paradigm:

1. *Ontological - What is the nature of the “knowable”? Or what is the nature of “reality”?*
2. *Epistemological – What is the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the new (or knowable)?*
3. *Methodological – How should the inquiry go about finding out knowledge?*

As such, the research question reinforces certain beliefs that I, as the researcher, hold concerning the education system and schools, as being part of a larger structure or system that perpetuates a particular form of society to support economic and social arrangements. I have been influenced by the many works of Foucault (1980), including how specific fields of scientific knowledge establish a set of rules and norms and a means of maintaining power. Foucault (1980, p.131) further connects this with the notion of 'political economy' as a 'Truth' via a 'scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it'. Economic production for political power operates via education as an apparatus for producing and transmitting political control (ibid.). In addition, a further influence of my research question is Ball's (2013, p.126) assertion, when considering Foucault's use of genealogy as a 'critical ontology' of ourselves. Ball (ibid.) argues that 'if power acts upon us in and through our subjectivity, then that is where our resistance and struggle to be free should be focused'. Therefore, there is space for resistance to power circulating through Government policies for agency, autonomy, and acts of resistance.

Aligned with the research aim to understand the experiences of individuals concerning their school, the paradigm needed to reflect the differing ways social realities are constructed and the corresponding ways in which they may be interpreted (Cohen et al. 2011). Cohen et al. (ibid.) advise that a starting point is understanding the conceptions of the social world by examining 'the explicit and implicit assumptions underpinning them' (ibid., p.5). These assumptions apply to the collective structure and the individual nature of understanding the social world. Therefore, considerations of ontological and epistemological assumptions, along with concerns about the relationship between human beings and the environment,

influence the methodological choices of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018). I recognised that each individual will have a different interpretation of the school environment, and their experiences will be unique. Following these deliberations, my position focuses on the use of an interpretivist paradigm. Many researchers, including Cohen et al. (ibid.) and O'Donoghue (2018), advocate an interpretivist paradigm within educational research. Cohen et al. (2018, p.20) advise an interpretivist paradigm aims to 'understand the subjective world of human experience'.

To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated and the nature of research is exploratory. Cohen et al. (2018, p.20) explain the interpretivist approach as 'verstehen' ('understanding') and hermeneutic (uncovering and interpreting meanings) to try to see the social world through the eyes of the participants rather than as an outsider'. O'Donoghue (2018, p.16) links an interpretivist approach with education research; thus, 'if we want to understand education, we must begin by looking at everyday activity in the different education sectors'. Furthermore, and of relevance to this research was O'Donoghue's (ibid., p.20) point that the focus of the 'are issues for the participants being investigated, rather than those which might exist from the outset as problems in the mind of the researcher which he or she deems worthy of investigation.' Therefore, an interpretivist paradigm aligns with the exploratory nature of the aims of the research to evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in primary schools.

5.2.1 Identifying an ontology

An interpretive paradigm supports ontological assumptions that the nature of reality is socially constructed by varied interpretations by individuals. Individuals' experiences of events are also constructed, with each person having differing interpretations of those experiences (Creswell, 2007; 2013). This aligns with the arguments of Cohen et al. (2011), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013) that interpretivist researchers seek to discover reality through participants' views, backgrounds, and experiences. Teater (2010) advises that individuals construct their realities. Therefore, each participant in the current research, including myself, will have differing perceptions of Government education

policies and their impact on the individual and the primary school. As a researcher who considers that each individual has their interpretation of the social world, I will also have my interpretation of the research process and data. I speak to this in section 4.2.3.

Neoliberal school research is an ever-evolving subject area, as education is not static, nor are the policies or individuals within the system. As previously discussed within the literature review in Chapter 3, the UK's policy landscape has changed due to austerity policies since 2010, with effects having impacted schools. I also consider Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's (2013, p.4) suggestion of a constructivist–interpretivist approach, which attests 'belief in the existence of (potentially) multiple, intersubjectively constructed "truths" about social, political, cultural, and other human events'. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (ibid.) further highlight how understanding is created or 'co-generated, through interactions between researcher and researched as they seek to interpret those events and make those interpretations legible to each other.' These assertions further underpin how Foucault's works have influenced my research question.

The linkage of power and knowledge aligns with my constructivist–interpretivist position. In particular, Foucault's (1980) studies of power/knowledge have shaped my view of the world and my approach to the research. Foucault's many theories, connecting how societal structures shape lives via normalised judgments (Foucault, 1976/1998; 2008), influenced a key aim of the research to explore the effects of neoliberal policies on the experiences in schools. This was further influenced by Foucault's 2008 work *Birth of Biopolitics*, which theorises the influence of neoliberalism within Western societies. Foucault (2008, p.243) considers American neo-liberalism, which he describes as:

[A] principle of intelligibility and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and individual behaviour. This means that analysis in terms of the market economy or, in other words, of supply and demand, can function as a schema, which is applicable to non-economic domains.

This construction of neoliberalism as a schema can link back to the notion of a constructivist view of how the social world is shaped and constructed. Furthermore,

the shaping of the social world can denote the position and the construction of individuals' roles within society, including those of children. Foucault (2008) further associates neoliberalism with the child as a country's future means of generating human capital. Thus, neoliberal ideology can provide the means for governing the population, which is central to the theory of biopolitics. Therefore, this reaffirms the belief that mechanisms within structures can 'maintain and perpetuate an unequal distribution of resources and power' (Henn et al. 2005, p.29). I aim to consider how mechanisms within structures of Government policies, both educational and ideological, shape primary school education and the day-to-day experiences of those within the system.

5.2.2 Identifying an epistemology

Epistemology concerns knowledge's basis, effectively 'how it can be acquired, and how it is communicated to other human beings' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.6). As with ontology, epistemological assumptions are conjectures and reflect the personal philosophy of the researcher. As previously stated, my research values are based on interpretivism and constructivist–interpretivist. This informs the epistemological assumptions of the research on how knowledge is acquired not only by participants but also by how I, as the researcher, analyse and report the data gathered (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2020). Braun and Clark (2012) and Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013) assert that qualitative research study should be driven by the participant's experiences and the meanings derived from those experiences. The role of the researcher is to make sense of those experiences and the realities that participants report.

An interpretivist paradigm is aligned with a constructionist epistemology (Creswell, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018). I chose to adopt a constructionist approach to investigate the impacts policies have on school leaders and other staff and parents with primary schools. This approach to epistemology assumes that knowledge is contextual and varies over time, space, and between social groups, and knowledge varies between individuals (ibid.) Furthermore, knowledge is considered as an outcome of the conditions of its construction (Jupp, 2006, p.93). This constructionist epistemology

focuses on socio-cultural contexts and the structural conditions that can shape experiences and interpretations of policy in primary schools.

As previously stated, my ontology is shaped by Foucault's works, which also influences my epistemology. Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge assertion is relevant, suggesting that individuals continually reproduce power and have power exercised upon them. Therefore, power becomes embedded in knowledge, and any knowledge system constitutes a system of power, creating a notion of a "power/knowledge" couplet (ibid.). Thus, knowledge produced within education systems has the means to transmit power that can shape individuals. The philosophical beliefs of the researcher, with regard to *power* that *permeates* social institutions and Government policies, may bias the research findings. However, I followed Cohen et al.'s (2018, p.26) advice of objectivity as a means of 'adhering to the 'epistemic virtue' of keeping only to the canons and requirements of the research itself, setting aside any extraneous personal convictions or subordinating the research to any other goals outside the research'. I aimed to suppress my 'personal, subjective beliefs, values, commitments' (ibid.) to maintain objectivity and reliability throughout all aspects of the research. My position as the researcher position will be discussed further in Section 4.2.3. below. However, as noted by Cohen et al. (2018), I subscribe to the view that a researcher is never completely neutral.

5.2.3 Understanding the researcher's positionality

In the paradigm, I outlined the influences that have shaped my understanding of the world and how this influenced the research and framing of the enquiry. However, I still need to address who I am as a researcher. In this, I acknowledge that my influences can impact the research. Hodkinson (2004, p.20) advises that 'researchers develop different identities, with differing interests and value positions, and consequently see research issues differently', which underpins the interpretivist paradigm. As such, the research question itself reflects certain beliefs that I hold with regard to the education system and schools being part of a larger structure or system that perpetuates a particular form of society to support economic and social arrangements. These beliefs partly influenced by my academic journey through a BA in Education Studies and my MA in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies, shaping

how I see and perceive the world. Therefore, what I know about the world and what can be learned and understood is fundamental to my identity as a researcher. My research focuses on 'how people are experiencing an event, a series of events, and/or a condition' (Agee, 2009, p.434). In addition, I believe that each individual within the education system will have a different experience and interpretation of their lives.

Aligned with the research aim to understand the desire to understand the experiences of individuals in relation to their primary school, the paradigm needed to reflect the differing ways social realities are constructed and the corresponding ways in which they may be interpreted (Cohen et al. 2011). Cohen et al. (ibid., p.5) advise that a starting point is understanding the conceptions of the social world by examining 'the explicit and implicit assumptions underpinning them'. These assumptions apply to the collective structure and the individual nature of understanding the social world. Therefore, considerations of ontological and epistemological assumptions, along with the concerns about the relationship between human beings and the environment, influence the methodological choices of the researcher (ibid.).

It is also important to address my positionality regarding the research and the participants. Call-Cummings and Ross (2019, p.3) suggest that positionality is the researchers' view of 'their position in the world in relation to others, especially those who are involved in or may read our research.' In addition, Call-Cummings and Ross (ibid.) advise that positionality requires researchers to consider 'how our background and experiences play a role in our relationships with participants and in how we carry out research'. Parsons (2019, p.17) advises that research should start 'by identifying the salient and non-salient aspects of personal identity and the power and privilege embedded in the intersection of one's salient identity'. My non-salient aspects were outlined in my ontology and epistemology, and I need to continually address my assumptions of power structures from Government policy within the research. This reflection enables the research to change due to the participants' interpretations of my questions (discussed in 5.4).

The salient description of myself reflects my positionality: a white, middle-class, middle-aged woman, a mother, a researcher, and later in the thesis journey, a lecturer. Several of these identity markers position me 'as a member of a dominant group and/or with privileged outsider status' (ibid., p.15). However, whilst I may now be labelled as middle-class, I grew up in a working-class household in a deprived area and did not attend university until I was 38 years old. I considered myself an outsider to the research as I have never been a primary school teacher or employed within a school setting. Whilst I was an outsider to the research, my positionality was continually negotiated throughout my study, with the fieldwork conducted in four primary schools. I interviewed 26 participants from various positions within the school and some parents who knew me. Whether or not I was perceived from a dominant position or felt as if I was from a dominant position reflected on who I was interviewing.

All headteachers and deputy headteachers had similar identity markers, simultaneously making me an insider and an outsider (Parsons, 2019). In addition, whilst interviewing parents who were also friends, my insider status was more apparent. However, Kohl and McCutcheon (2015, p.752) advise that 'researchers can become more critical and recognize the multiple power structures that impact their research through 'everyday talk'. Considering this notion, it became apparent that the power structures within the interviews with learning assistants or lunchtime assistants in my dominant group and with the privileged position. Whilst the ethics process and voluntary consent were adhered to, some participants appeared defensive at the start of the interviews and sought to defend their school. I perceived that there were also power structures for the learning assistance or lunchtime assistants on being asked by headteachers if they wished to participate in my research. I aimed to reassure participants that I was only interested in their views and opinions and explained my position as a researcher and a parent. My parent identity, with a child in year two of primary school, created a commonality, this demonstrates the continued negotiation of the insider/outsider positionality. All the school support staff, bar one, were parents. However, these differing power structures may have impacted the responses from the participants.

Furthermore, Kohl and McCutcheon (2015, p.753) advise that 'at times as researchers we are so embedded within our work, it is difficult to determine how our insider/outsider status changes and how this impacts our research'. Considering this point throughout the research, I kept a journal detailing my thoughts after each interview and used it throughout the thematic analysis and coding process. Orange (2016, p.2,178) recommended a continual critical process of self-evaluation, which asserts that 'a researcher's positionality influences a study's setting, the participants, the data collected, and how data are interpreted'. This approach was maintained throughout the research journey and will be discussed in more detail using reflexivity throughout the data analysis process.

5.2.4 The Importance of reflexivity

This detailed data analysis process aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness within qualitative research to demonstrate dependability and confirmability via an audit trail through all stages of the analysis. Symon and Cassell (2012, p.72) advise:

Reflexivity is an awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research processes and outcomes.

Symon and Cassell (ibid.) provide a detailed description of reflexivity within each stage of the research and the choices made. Throughout my research journey, reflexivity was employed to critically reflect on my role as the researcher, my biases, and my influence in the research process (Cohen et al., 2018). The use of reflexivity aimed to address issues of bias via the use of validity of the generic qualitative research approach (ibid.). Reflexivity enhances the research process's transparency and credibility by acknowledging the researcher's positionality (see 5.2.3). In doing so, the researcher aims to build trust with the reader (Flick, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2020, p.38) further advise that reflexive is integral to the thematic analysis process (see 5.7). The process of reflexivity was a critical practice throughout the research to provide rigour and validity. I employed a research journal/diary throughout all stages of my research, as Layder (2013) recommended. This allowed for first-hand accounts of situations and evolutions of my thoughts and ideas.

5.3 Research Strategy

A good research design is one in which all the components work harmoniously together.

(Aurini et al., 2016, p.35)

The opening quotation expresses the aim for any qualitative researcher to form a seamless plan to execute a research project. The purpose of this study was to critically evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and the experiences in English primary schools. The research aimed to highlight the everyday experiences of those within primary school communities, the challenges they face and how Government neoliberal policies, including education policies, either contribute to or alleviate these issues.

Therefore, this project required a research design that would elicit in-depth, rich qualitative data to conduct a thematic analysis and ultimately answer the research questions. The journey towards a research design was not linear as no single research method provided a process to fully realise the research questions from the participants and the data that were available. The research strategy needed to meet the requirements of the paradigm of interpretivism, in conjunction with working within the requirements of the participating schools. Access to participants posed challenges within the research, which are discussed within the sampling section, and as such, a flexible approach to the research strategy was also required.

Throughout an investigation of differing qualitative approaches, a generic qualitative research design emerged as the most suitable approach. Generic qualitative research does not follow one approach in its entirety, which provides a means of selecting and combining the differing aspects of qualitative research methods to best support the study's aims. The following will detail the generic qualitative research design approach and how it was utilised.

5.3.1 Generic qualitative approach

There are varied ways to approach research within primary schools, encompassing various paradigms, research methodologies and methods. In the following

discussion, I justify using a generic qualitative approach to gather rich data reflective of the interpretivist paradigm.

The research design underpins the interpretivist paradigm. As such, the research was qualitative. Qualitative research is 'a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p.43). Via these interpretive material practices, the researcher aims to recreate the world with 'a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self' (ibid.). The aim of gathering data should be within the natural setting to make sense of or interpret the phenomena and the meaning individuals apply to them (ibid.). Reflecting this notion of a qualitative approach, the research was conducted within four primary schools, using in-depth and semi-structured interviews with various staff members. In addition, there were some parent participants, with those interviews being conducted at a time and location convenient to them.

Within qualitative research, various interconnected interpretive practices are established to gain an understanding of the research project subject. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) advise that each interpretive practice will make the world visible in different ways. Therefore, it is not uncommon for researchers to commit to using more than one interpretive practice within their study (ibid.). Many researchers have advised that emerging educational researchers engaging with qualitative research should consider working against pre-tailored methodology (St. Pierre, 2011a, 2011b; Higgins et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) advise that there are various research designs to support qualitative research projects, namely ethnography, case study, phenomenological research, and narrative enquiry. However, the field of qualitative research is ever-evolving, with other research adding to these methodologies (Kahlke, 2014). Within these five qualitative approaches, no single approach in its entirety could be utilised in its pure form to answer this project's research aims or questions.

Differing qualitative research approaches are often presented as a series of methodological rules and guidelines for a researcher to follow. However, Holloway and Todres (2003) highlighted that this can cause tension and struggles for a

researcher between the need for flexibility and structure. This assertion reflected my experience with regard to identifying an appropriate methodology for the research, which required flexibility in relation to the contexts of each participating school and the differing access to participants (discussed 5.4). Caelli et al. (2003) observed an increase in qualitative studies that did not subscribe to pre-established qualitative methodologies. Thomas (2006) further highlighted that many studies failed to label their research methodology as belonging to any specific qualitative traditions.

With these considerations in mind, it was a dilemma within the current research to ensure that all participant's opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and reflections on their lived experience related to primary education and their community could be captured in their entirety. It was also important that the diverse nature of the interviews and the data gathered would not become lost or aspects omitted due to following one single method. To address these challenges and based on my principles for the research to be authentic and capture the participants' voices, I was guided by the definition of a generic qualitative inquiry as specified by Percy et al. (2015, p.78), stating: 'Generic qualitative inquiry investigates people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences, of things in the outer world.' The following section considers the different qualitative approaches relevant to the general qualitative approach used in the research.

Whilst I considered the established traditions of qualitative research, an ethnographic approach did not apply to the current research. Ethnography is 'the art and science of describing a group or culture' (Mills et al., 2010, p.86), which requires the researcher to be immersed in the research environment. I was not embedded within the life of a school but gained my data across four unrelated sites. Therefore, this research approach did not apply. Similarly, a case study design, according to Creswell (2013, p.97):

explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information [...] and reports a case description and case themes.

Whilst of initial consideration, a multiple case-study approach could imply the need for multiple sources of information, which was not possible due to the limited access to each school.

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research seeks to ascertain the lived experiences of individuals. Therefore, phenomenology appears relevant to this research as the focus is to evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on the experience of primary schools. Phenomenology is applicable to this research as it embraces the notion that reality is subjective. Creswell and Poth (2017, p.266) define phenomenology as ‘the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon’, in which the aim of phenomenology research is ‘to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence’ (ibid.). However, whilst this approach to the current research project appears to be relevant, the further details relating to phenomenology bring this approach into question. van Manen (1990, p.163) advised that the phenomenon within the research is identified as an ‘object’ of human experience, which is often linked to experiences such as anger or grief, with the participants being asked “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it’ (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.267). This definition of the human experience linked to a clearly defined object questions the usefulness of a phenomenological approach for the current study—the research aimed to explore Government neoliberal policies, which is an often-ill-defined concept. Asking participants about their experience of neoliberal policies would have been unlikely to generate the in-depth, rich data required for the thematic analysis.

Narratology or narrative-based research also focuses on individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenology is often part of a narrative research approach (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (ibid., p.241) advise that narrative-based research is ‘a method [that] begins with the experiences expressed in lived and told stories of individuals’. However, the differing context here to phenomenological research is that the lived experiences are also ‘an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted’ (Clandinin, 2016, p.18). In connecting individuals’ experiences to institutional narratives, this definition by Clandinin (ibid.) supports exploring how Government

policies are enacted and experienced within primary schools. Andrews et al. (2013, p.2) express that:

By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted.

My research has used the collection of participants' narratives of experiences to investigate their thoughts on their school community and the critical issues within the school. The narrative aspect has enabled me to produce interpretations and representations of the experiences of Government neoliberal policies. The overall aim of the narrative approach is to generate responses that would create a more complex and sophisticated understanding of the issues faced by primary schools. A narrative approach requires a specific interview technique whereby the participant can explain or describe all relevant information to produce a comprehensible story. This contrasts with semi-structured interviews, whereby the interviewer asks participants open-ended questions based on a given agenda (Cohen et al., 2018). The research utilised an open narrative approach whereby I became a listener to the stories of school community members. However, this approach was unsuitable for all participants, as some appeared nervous and unsure how to respond. This indicated a perceived power imbalance between the researcher and the participant, as discussed as a reflection of the researcher's positionality. As a result, a traditional semi-structured method was used for these participants to include more questions. This type of in-depth interview enabled the gathering of rich data to generate a thick description of each school and to provide a detailed account of participants' perceptions and experiences.

Whilst there was no single qualitative method for the research, the justification for a generic qualitative approach is the ability to combine established methods. I applied a narrative approach in conjunction with a thick description to provide rich data for the subsequent analysis and discussion. A thick description is used to characterise the process of paying attention to contextual detail in observing and interpreting social meaning when conducting qualitative research. This notion of a thick description, coined by Geertz (1973), is most often used within case study research.

Whilst this research does not follow a case study method, the use of thick description has provided external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise that external validity can be understood by describing events sufficiently to evaluate how conclusions can be drawn and transferable to other events. Furthermore, using a thick description contextualises the social and political setting of interview data and documents (Mills et al., 2010). Using a thick description allowed for each school's location to be analysed within its context and the consideration for the schools' communities to be described. This resulted in a detailed and nuanced account of each school's circumstances and challenges. The thick description also provided the means of situating the schools within the current political and social context. This proved useful as a way of highlighting the impacts of wider Government policies beyond education that were impacting primary schools.

Reflecting the ontological position of the research, Denzin (1989) highlights the importance of thick description to enable a thick interpretation to illuminate the data within the research. Mills et al. (2010, p.942) advise that a thick description does not require 'voluminous details about everything that happens' but instead provides a description that can be balanced by analysis, 'seeking to establish the significance of actions, behaviours, or events for the participants involved' (ibid.). Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013, p.48) further note that '[t]he interpretive orientation toward knowledge, with its focus on meaning-making (instead of a priori model specification) and contextuality (rather than generalizability), ripples through the entire research design process'. This understanding of a thick description provides contextuality within the methodological rationale for using thick description (ibid.). These understandings of thick description further reinforced the aims of the research and the data gathered from the interviews. The use of a thick description enabled an understanding of the unique context of each school. It provided the ability to establish the significant actions of the participants within the space to account for cultural practices within the school and the social interactions among the school community.

The final research design, based on interpretivism, underpins individuals' different interpretations of their experiences. A generic qualitative approach was chosen, providing a fluid response to the research, which no traditional qualitative methodology could provide. I employed aspects of traditional qualitative methods to

gain a collection of participants' narratives to explore their thoughts and experiences of their primary schools. The narrative approach to the interview data enabled me to gather varied interpretations and understandings of their experiences of the Government's neoliberal policies. I combined this narrative approach with a thick description to understand the context of each school, which was particularly salient within the research. All four participant schools' experiences were a reflection of their social contexts.

5.3.2 Quality and trustworthiness of the research

All research must ensure trustworthiness and rigour within the research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define four criteria for trustworthiness within qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I consider each of the four terms to ensure trustworthiness within the research.

Credibility with qualitative research is understood as a means to address the trustworthiness and plausibility of the research. Stahl and King (2020, p.26) pose that credibility asks, 'How congruent are the findings with reality?', as qualitative researchers can 'never capture the object of truth' (Locke, 2019, p.120). However, credibility can be achieved within qualitative research by the employment of 'Theoretical triangulation, the use of multiple theoretical orientations to understand findings or to direct the research' (Stahl and King, 2020, p.27). I set out the theoretical framework for the research in Chapter 2. Stahl and King (ibid.) and Flick (2014) advocate member-checking, where the researcher is a novice fieldwork practitioner, reflecting my circumstances. This was achieved through supervisory meetings checking each stage of my research. Patton (1999) further details three elements of credibility through the use of rigorous methods (described in 5.4), the credibility of the researcher (addressed in 5.2) and the belief in the value of qualitative research (explained in 5.3.1). Furthermore, Flick (2014) advises that you must ensure that you have enough evidence to support the claims that you are making. This was achieved via 25 interviews with 26 participants. One interview was with two participants.

Transferability within research often refers to the aim for replicability and generalisation of the project. This, as suggested by Stahl and King (2020, p.27), 'can

be somewhat tricky, given that by design qualitative research does not (cannot) aim for replicability'. However, Stahl and King (ibid.) highlight that a thick description may provide transferability within a local context if enough contextual information about the fieldwork site is supplied (see 5.6). Therefore, if other schools reflect the circumstances of the participating schools, some transferability may apply. However, this research aimed to explore the context of each school's experiences.

Dependability is a characteristic of trustworthiness within the research. The concept of dependability correlates with credibility and relies on an audit trail to enable 'the research to address the issue of confirmability of results, in terms of process and product' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.271). Dependability is achieved through the research design, which must be explicit, and all processes should be transparent (detailed in this section). In addition, Cohen et al. (2018) detail many approaches to ensure dependability. I utilised the notion of member-checking with supervisors and the use of a reflective journal throughout all stages of the research. The journal also provided a means of 'reflexive auditing' (Stahl and King, 2020, p.27). Stahl and King (ibid.) suggest this process to monitor the researcher's influences, values and passions. Yet when researchers are 'immersed in the research with their values creates another level of trust, providing researchers are able to communicate their entailment in their own research' (ibid.). The aim throughout Chapter 5 is to demonstrate and communicate not only the process of the research but also to address my influences. This will be further discussed in the limitations of research (see 5.5).

Finally, confirmability was achieved through the research findings being grounded in data (Cohen et al., 2018). The choices for the use of thematic analysis and the codebook (detailed in 5.6) are consistent with this premise, enabling the data analysis to articulate the participants' experiences, rather than the preconceived notions and preferences of the researcher (see 5.2.2). In addition, I maintained a commitment to reflexivity throughout all stages of the research process to uphold methodological trustworthiness.

5.4 Research methods

The preceding section detailed the research strategy for the project. This section provides an understanding and justification for the type of data collected and the approaches to be used.

5.4.1 Sampling and recruitment methods

Qualitative research should include self-reflection as part of the researcher's journey (Ortlipp, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Orange, 2016;). The qualitative researcher's role, positionality, biases, and decisions that may affect their data must be critically examined (Orange 2016); this process should occur throughout the project. Schwandt (2007, p.260) describes reflexivity to critically inspect:

the entire research process including reflecting on the ways in which the fieldworker establishes a social network of informants and participants in a study; and for examining one's personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for generating particular data, for behaving in particular ways vis-à-vis respondents and participants, and for developing particular interpretations.

I maintained this notion of reflective practice throughout my research journey to be authentic to my project. As such, I endeavoured to represent the participants' voices throughout the research analysis and the resulting findings and discussions (see 5.7). This sampling section includes a narrative of the process and access to participants and its impact on the research. The initial aim of the research was to follow a case studies approach with the desire to get to know and understand each case school in an in-depth way. However, as the research progressed, access to schools became more challenging, and I needed to readdress the research design. Access to schools often hinders educational research (Wanat, 2008; Kennedy-Malfoy, 2013; Ahern, 2014). Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert's (2008) paper explores the issues relating to methodological dilemmas of interactions between researchers and gatekeepers and advises that the gatekeeper relationship 'is often the first point of contact in the field research process, yet it is a relationship that is fraught with inconsistencies and instabilities' (ibid., p.544).

I can concur with this, as the initial agreement of headteachers to be part of the research was met with enthusiasm and agreement to the project in the Summer term,

with the research due to commence in the Autumn term. However, when trying to arrange times to conduct my research and access to observing staff meetings and access to various staff members and parents was required, access was not forthcoming. Wanat (2008, p.192) advises the challenges of gaining cooperation via the following four research questions:

- *Who grants access and cooperation?*
- *What are the differences between access and cooperation?*
- *How do perceived benefits or threats influence granting of access and cooperation?*
- *How do gatekeepers and participants withhold cooperation when access has been granted?*

These four questions underpin my research journey. After gaining access and perceived cooperation from the headteachers, my follow-up emails were often met with a polite 'we will get back to you' or ignored. Wanat's (ibid., p.5) research highlighted the notion of "forgetting" as an effective tactic that gatekeepers used as 'a method of telling researchers no while appearing to be cooperative'. However, I appreciate the busy and demanding role of the headteacher within the current education climate. This failure to progress with commitment to my research continued throughout the Autumn term and half of the Winter term, which resulted in only four initial interviews, reflecting Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert's (2008, p.558) findings that 'the time spent negotiating with gatekeepers and the relative 'success' in negotiating access to respondents is not easily quantifiable'. The loss of time impacted the study and my relationship with the study as I felt increasingly frustrated and concerned about the progress of the research.

With access to the schools and participants being problematic, I recognised that a change of research design was required. Wanat's (2008, p.207) research concludes that:

Other researchers caught in this dilemma will have the greatest chance of full cooperation by remaining flexible. Each research setting is unique. Learning the context of what is valued and feared and who is able to persuade others will maximize or—if not learned—threaten cooperation.

The notion of threatened cooperation was evident as I perceived I may no longer have access to the schools to continue the research. This was highlighted with the initial agreement to attend staff meetings, which was later revoked via email when I requested a date to attend. As a result of the lack of cooperation, I feared losing the participation of the schools. I deliberated on the unique settings and remained flexible within the research. The initial aim of involving two schools increased to four schools, which no longer supported a case study approach as access to participants within the schools varied greatly. Therefore, the case study approach was also no longer viable. It was interesting to note that none of the headteachers was forthcoming with access to parents, consistent with Ahern's (2014) and Wanat's (2008) findings. Furthermore, Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert's (2008, p.558) research highlighted how 'gatekeepers come to play an important role in the research process, especially in the recruitment of potential respondents'.

However, on reflection following the interviews with the headteachers and teaching staff, the interviews may have been denied to protect the parents. The lack of access to the school community changed some of the focus of the research. As a result, this relationship with the headteachers as gatekeepers changed the initial aim of the research from *A critical evaluation of the impact of Government neoliberal policies on the lived experiences of English primary school communities*. However, the interview data gathered was rich and diverse, creating an interesting and engaging data set for analysis to answer the revised aim of the research, to focus upon primary schools. In addition, the original research plan also needed to be changed.

I, therefore, had to revisit the notion of qualitative research methods, by seeking out the best approach to effectively engage with the qualitative data being gathered solely from semi-structured interviews and Government policy. The initial research design included focus groups followed by semi-structured interviews and observations to triangulate results and ensure validity (Creswell, 2007). However, it was not possible to co-ordinate the focus groups within the schools. To ensure the schools' continued participation, in-depth and semi-structured interviews with willing participants recruited by the headteacher at a convenient time was the best approach to gather data. As a result of the changing nature of the research, due to

access to participants and the type of data available, a hybrid qualitative research strategy emerged.

However, I was able to access parents at Ashfield Primary School (see 5.6) via the use of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used by researchers when they have access to or know participants who can provide the best account of the phenomena being studied (Curtis et al., 2014). Instead, the participants were personal friends with children attending the school. Therefore, there was a potential for bias within the interviews. However, due to the time lapse between the data being collected and the coding and writing up process (explained in 5.7), a distance emerged from the notion of the interviewer as a friend when coding the data.

5.4.2 Data Collection

The criterion of any qualitative research is to collect rich data for analysis and interpretation. I adopted in-depth and semi-structured interviews to obtain participants' opinions and thoughts relating to their school communities and their schools' current issues. This approach underpins the interpretive research paradigm, which assumes that social reality is constructed by the participants. Aurini et al. (2016) advise that in-depth interviews facilitate a comprehensive exploration of multifaceted issues. Guest et al. (2013, p.376) express that in-depth interviews provide the means to understand participants 'views of processes, norms, decision-making, belief systems, mental models, interpretations, motivations, expectations, hopes, and fears. These are the things that make human experience more than mere facts.'

The data collection from in-depth and semi-structured interviews supported the open-ended nature of the study to evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on the differing school communities. As the notion of neoliberalism has the potential to be experienced in different ways, the method of in-depth interviews enabled me as the researcher to direct 'the content to be discussed while allowing participants to shift ideas in new but related directions' (Aurini et al., 2016, p.45). This use of in-depth interviews was salient for the initial interviews with the headteachers and family support workers to ascertain the current general areas of interest to each

school. The in-depth approach reflected the narrative nature of interpretivist enquiry with the headteachers, enabling them to provide a thick description of their schools and challenges. Some interviews lasted more than 1 hour, with one headteacher interview lasting 2 hours.

The responses from the initial in-depth interviews with the headteachers informed the semi-structured interviews for other staff members of the school and the parents I had access to via a purposive sampling approach (See Appendix 1 for interview schedule). The semi-structured interviews followed Cohen et al.'s (2018, p.214) notion that the questions were prepared and sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be re-ordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken.' The semi-structured interviews aimed to maintain validity through gaining 'honesty, depth of response, richness of response and commitment of the interviewee' (ibid.). As highlighted in the positionality, this was more difficult with some participants when the perceived notion of power was identified. However, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled flexibility to encourage and reassure participants that there was no right answer and that I was genuinely interested in their views, opinions, and experiences.

5.5 Limitations

There are some limitations to this research due to the data collection methods. These are detailed in the difficulties in accessing participants, which did affect the initial stages of the research. The original aim was to use focus groups in conjunction with semi-structured interviews to enable triangulation of results to add reliability to the data analysis. However, whilst there is only one means of data collection, interviews, these were rich in data, especially from the headteachers and the family support workers in two schools. There was a further consideration of conducting a specific policy analysis to support the data gathered. Yet, this approach was not possible due to the exploratory nature of the data gathered. The schools did not refer to a specific policy or policies impacting the schools. Therefore, the research aligned with an exploratory approach concerning Government neoliberal policies and their impacts on the schools. The data gathered was rich, in-depth and diverse, illustrating the context of each school, which enabled all of the research aims, objectives, and

questions to be fulfilled. The data analysis process (detailed in 5.6) details the rigorous approach taken to ensure the reliability of the findings.

5.6 The schools and participants

The following section will briefly describe the four primary schools involved in the research. Whilst the schools' names have been changed, the other information provided is from the schools' websites and Ofsted reports, in conjunction with my reflections after visiting each school. The aim is to highlight the diverse nature of the individual schools and the similarities and differences discussed in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9. I will describe the schools in the order in which I visited them, with the schools being discussed in the present tense to reflect the immediacy of the impression of the schools at the time the research was taking place, reflecting the use of a thick description.

Table 5-1 below summarises the schools' populations and the percentage of pupils entitled to various additional support using data from the Department for Education school comparison website. This table aids in illustrating the differing contexts of each school and the potential challenges the leadership team. The individual schools' populations have been rounded to the nearest fifty to ensure anonymity.

Table 5-1 School population and % of additional pupils receiving additional support.

Year 2017-2018	Ashfield	Elmtree	Ivywood	Oakdale
Total number of pupils on roll (all ages)	200	400	300	250
Pupils with a SEND Education, Health, and Care Plan %	1.5	1.2	0.6	10.4
Pupils with SEN support %	8.4	10.8	8.4	9.2
Pupils whose first language is not English (EAL) %	2.5	72.9	59.6	1.6
Pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during the past 6 years %	7.9	39.1	47.2	27.7
Overall rate of absence %	3.4	5.2	4.1	4.0
Persistent absence ⁶ %	6.8	17.2	14.5	7.7
Ofsted rating	Good	Good	Good	Good
Type of primary school	Independent /standalone Academy	Part of a small MAT	Maintained	Maintained

5.6.1 Ashfield primary school

Ashfield primary school is a small village primary school in Leicestershire. The school resides within an affluent village, suggesting an archetypal middle-class, leafy-green area. The school is classified as smaller than average, with a one-form intake; the children come partly from the local and surrounding villages. Low numbers of children receive free school meals, with low pupil premium funding. The school is mainly of white British heritage, with low numbers having English as an additional language. However, in contrast, there is a higher-than-average number of special educational needs pupils, which demonstrates the headteacher's approach that all children deserve a good education. The school is a standalone academy, and the headteacher 'Hattie' explained in her interview that this was partly due to it being a Church of England (CofE) school. A restriction was placed on the school by the

⁶ The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of the mornings or afternoons they could attend, meaning that if a pupil's overall rate of absence is 10 % or higher across the full academic year, they will be classified as persistently absent (DfE 2019).

diocese on it joining an academy group that does not contain a majority of CofE schools.

I was introduced to the school via personal friends whose children attend the school. I have several acquaintances at the school, including the chair of governors ('Gary') and a parent governor ('Gareth'). The chair of governors approached the headteacher on my behalf to request the school's participation in the research. The headteacher, Hattie, has been with the school for many years and is approaching retirement. My impression of Hattie is that she is very candid, both in our original meeting and the subsequent interview; this could be due to her imminent retirement and lack of concern for her future career path. Hattie is a long-term resident of Ashfield village, where she raised her family, with her children having attended the school. It was evident throughout the initial interview that Hattie considers the school very much part of the village community and her role as a key link between the two.

The school is set within the centre of the village, with a large playground attached to a further playing field and park. Artworks along the corridors have a positive message, encouraging children to learn via a growth mindset and to keep practising. The school hall had a stained-glass window depicting bible proverbs, and the school's connection to the Church of England was evident in several displays around the building. Hattie was keen to express how many former pupils she knew and discussed an idea for a display based on these alumni and what they were doing now.

Whilst on a tour of the school, Hattie explained her ethos for teaching was to create "good citizens of the world". Her belief that all children deserve a good education was reflective in the high number of special educational needs children, some of whom were turned down by many other schools, but she is happy to accept them. Hattie was proud of this. My overall first impression was of a small, friendly school, where the headteacher appeared to be very much involved in all areas of teaching and learning. In addition, possibly due to Hattie living in the village, there were signs that the wider community was relevant to the school.

5.6.2 Elmtree primary school

Elmtree primary school is considered a larger than-average primary school in an ethnically diverse part of inner-city Leicester. I had access to the school as the headteacher is an acquaintance. I am aware of the potential to be influenced as a researcher by this personal connection (addressed in 5.7.3). However, the process of anonymising the school, the thematic analysis process, the engagement of my supervisors in member-checking, and the object distancing over the time of the project have reduced the risk of bias in my analysis.

The intake of pupils reflects the diverse nature of the local community, with 79.2% of pupils listed as having English as an additional language (EAL). The headteacher 'Heidi' advised that at the time of the interviews, around 50 languages were spoken by children in the school, with the breakdown explained as:

410 children enrolled at the moment. We've got 84 Slovak speakers, they're predominantly of Gypsy-Roma heritage. The next one is Gujarati with 55 speakers, then Somali 52, Urdu 21, French 17, Farsi 11, then the numbers get smaller and smaller, there are two children who've come from Venezuela.

The headteacher described the school population as 'transient', which she linked to high levels of deprivation and issues relating to the private rental market. The school became an academy towards the end of 2015. The school was part of a MAT at the time of the interviews, which included three primary schools and one secondary school within Leicester (since the interviews in 2018, the MAT has grown).

The figure of 39.1% of pupils known to be eligible for support through pupil premium funding is well above the national average. It is worth noting that Heidi explained that due to the rules for calculating working tax credits, many more families were experiencing levels of poverty than the official numbers suggested. Ofsted report that the proportion of pupils at the school with a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Statement or an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) is below the national average. However, there are still over 10% of pupils considered as having SEN, which could be combined with EAL and free school meals eligibility, suggesting that many students will have complex needs. Reflecting the complex nature of the

support needs for children and their families, the school staff include a family support officer.

The school has a creative approach to learning, which was evident on my first walk around the school. There were large murals painted throughout the corridors and each afternoon spent on creative activities. The school also has an inclusive approach to the families with an open-door policy. It recruits teaching assistants to ensure that languages and cultural customs of families are understood and represented.

5.6.3 Ivywood Primary School

Ivywood primary school is a medium-sized school in an ethnically diverse part of inner-city Nottingham. I gained access via an acquaintance who knew the deputy headteacher at the school. The school has a higher-than-average number of EAL students, who comprise 59.6% of the population. In addition, the school also has a higher-than-average number of pupils entitled to pupil premium at 47.2%. The school, at times, has had a high mobility of pupils, with many families moving to the UK from other countries and some families moving due to a change in their rented accommodation. The families at the school have changed in recent years from a predominantly Caribbean cohort to a more diverse population, now including a large Roma-Gypsy community. The school has had to expand in size to accommodate an increase in pupil numbers, responding to a new social housing development nearby.

Staff at Ivywood enjoy talking to people about their school and inclusive approach and were enthusiastic about being part of the research. The headteacher, 'Hilda', states that education should be driven by a 'strong social justice imperative', which was a mantra of the school. There were many approaches aiming to ensure an inclusive approach to all aspects of education, not just for the child but for their families too. Ivywood employs a full-time family support worker who is an integral team member from the local community. A key aim of the school is to remove barriers to education and create positive relationships with families.

5.6.4 Oakdale Primary School

Oakdale is a village primary school within the county of Leicestershire. I gained access to the school via an acquaintance who used to be a clerk to the governing body. The school resides within a conservation village and, from appearances, reflects an archetypal leafy green setting, with the school being located opposite a large park. However, the school has a larger than average population of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and FSM, at 27.7%. The headteacher 'Holly' describes the school as having a socially mixed cohort, with many families classed as white working class, some of whom have complex issues. However, some families were described as middle class, with parents having professional occupations.

Holly further described the village as being geographically and socially isolated. There were few employment opportunities locally, with the school being the highest employer in the village. Many of the teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors were from the local area. Ethnically, the school has a predominately white cohort, with only 0.6% of pupils classed as EAL. The school has 9.8% of pupils with SEN support, and 10.4% with an EHCP, which reflects a specialist unit on the school site. The school employs an Emotional Learning Support Assistant to work with the children and provides many lunchtime and afterschool opportunities for the children.

5.6.5 Research cohort comparisons

All four schools were unique in their situations and approaches to teaching and learning. All four schools were rated as Good by Ofsted and had a similar number of pupils requiring SEN support. However, it is important to note some strong similarities between Elmtree and Ivywood. These schools were based in highly deprived areas close to their city centres, with a high number of pupils from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and high proportions of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). The schools both employed family support officers, whose remit related to supporting the wider family, many of whom experienced multiple challenges that had been identified as impacting their child's attendance and engagement. In addition, Elmtree and Ivywood both had an inclusive approach to children with EAL. Elmtree and Ivywood schools influenced the results and discussion due to their relationship with the wider families, which went beyond

teaching and learning. These schools have provided a rich seam of data for the research.

In contrast, Ashfield was a traditional Church of England village school in a conservation area, with predominantly white middle-class children on roll. However, statistics in Table 5-1 indicate Ashfield to be an outlier in the research cohort compared to the other three schools due to the low numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals. In addition, this difference was reflected in the interview data, which will be highlighted in the results and discussion chapter. Whilst Oakdale was also located in a picturesque conservation area and appeared similar to Ashfield, the school cohort included a minority of middle-class families and many families that would be categorised as white working-class and families experiencing multiple challenges. In some instances, it had similar challenges to Elmtree and Ivywood. However, whilst families in Elmtree and Ivywood supported the school and education; this was not the experience expressed by the participants at Oakdale, in which lack of parental engaged was discussed.

The thematic analysis and the resulting findings and discussion chapters were influenced by the number of interviews and access to different participants within each school (see Table 5-2 below). These ranged from headteachers to various teaching staff, governors, other staff members, and some parents. However, the representation of the different categories was not consistent across all schools. All my introductions to the schools came from a variety of personal contacts. The headteacher was then the gatekeeper to access all the participants within the school. However, whilst Ashfield's headteacher was the gatekeeper of the teaching and other staff members, I was able to approach the participating parents and governors directly as these were personal friends.

Ashfield provided the most interviewees (a total of twelve, compared to four or five in the other schools), partly due to my connections with families of children at the school, and links to two of the governors. The headteacher was also aware of my connections to families within the school community and freely embraced the connection. I contacted parents directly without needing access via the headteacher as the gatekeeper. As discussed in 5.4, whilst all the headteachers were initially

onboard with the idea of contacting parents to participate in the research via interview or focus group, which did not happen, apart from at Ashfield.

As a result, Ashfield was the only school where I could interview parents, which limited the data collection. At Elmtree, I was able to interview an LSA with children attending the school, and in Oakdale, the governor's (Goldie's) child was also a pupil on roll. Having only limited access to parents has influenced the results of Chapter 7, the complexities and challenges of the school-family relationships. This factor affected the thematic analysis as the data reflect the schools' perspectives in three cases. In each school, the headteacher was interviewed: these were generally the longest and most in-depth interviews in relation to every aspect of the school and the wider community. Therefore, the headteachers' data are most influential throughout the findings. At times, when interviewing the learning support assistants, they appeared hesitant to talk to me initially as they appeared to want to protect the headteacher and the school, which may have limited the findings. However, whilst these interviews tended to be much shorter than those with senior staff members, they were informative and added to the rich data of each school.

Table 5-2 Interviews by position and school

	Ashfield	Elmtree	Ivywood	Oakdale	Totals
Headteachers	1	1	1	1	4
Deputy head	1		1	1	3
Family support		1	1		2
Teachers	2			1	3
Learning Support	1	3	1	1	6
Other staff	2				2
Governors	2			1	3
Parents	3				3
Total	12	5	4	5	26

5.6.6 Key for interview aliases

The results, analysis, and discussion section will refer to participants via an alias, to maintain anonymity. In addition, the use of an actual name as the alias for each participant was important so that their voices retain a human and individual nature. This approach sought to maintain an engagement with each participant's voice,

reflecting the richness of narratives gathered, which could have been lost if referring to someone via their role or a number, e.g., *headteacher 1*. A key was created to clarify who is being quoted (see Table 5-3 below and Appendix 2). The first letter of each alias refers to the role, e.g., ‘H’ for headteacher, and the second letter refers to the school, e.g., ‘a’ for Ashfield. Therefore, Hattie, the headteacher at Ashfield primary school or Fiona is the family support worker at Ivywood primary school. Thus, the reader can easily associate each alias with their role and the related school.

Table 5-3 Key for participant aliases

Job Role	Interview Coded name	Interview Coded school		Name first letter	First letter of participants name equals their job role
Headteacher	Hattie	Ashfield		H	Headteacher
Deputy Headteacher	Daisy	Ashfield		D	Deputy Headteacher
Teacher year 1	Taylor	Ashfield		T	Teacher
Teacher year 6	Tara	Ashfield		B	Business Manager
Business Manager	Barbara	Ashfield		F	Family Support Worker
LSA & parent	Layla	Ashfield		L	Learning Support Assistant (LSA)
Lunchtime supervisor & parent	Maisy	Ashfield		E	Emotion learning support assistant (ELSA)
Parent Governor	Gary	Ashfield		M	Lunchtime supervisor
Parent Governor	Gareth	Ashfield		G	Governor
Parent & PTA	Pat	Ashfield		P	Parent
Parent	Patsy	Ashfield			
Parent	Paige	Ashfield			
				Name second letter	Second letter of participants name relates to the school
Headteacher	Heidi	Elmtree		A	Ashfield
Family Support Worker	Fearne	Elmtree		E	Elmtree
LSA	Leoš	Elmtree		I	Ivywood
LSA & Parent Governor	Leelah	Elmtree		O	Oakdale
LSA	Leanne	Elmtree			
Headteacher	Hila	Ivywood			
Deputy Headteacher	Diane	Ivywood			
Family Support Worker	Fiona	Ivywood			
LSA	Lisa	Ivywood			
Headteacher	Holly	Oakdale			

Deputy Head, SENCO, teacher across various year groups.	Dora	Oakdale	
EYFS Teacher	Toni	Oakdale	
ELSA & Parent	Eoin	Oakdale	
Lunch time supervisor, LSA, Parent Governor, Parent, PTA	Goldie	Oakdale	

This section aimed to underpin the results, analysis and discussion chapters 6-9. The purpose was to provide the context of each school, how I gained access, and a description of my initial impressions. Next followed a key for the participants, with their aliases used in the research and their position in the school. Due to the uniqueness of each school, the context has influenced the thematic analysis (5.7), the results and the findings of the research. Thus, a detailed description was needed to reflect the differing challenges each school experienced, both in the interpretation of policy and the differing leadership approaches to the governance of each school. The tables provided should support the reading of the following chapters in relation to understanding the individual schools and their context. Each school was unique, and my access to participants varied across the schools, influencing the data collected. With the research having an interpretivist approach, it is important not to draw overly generalised conclusions but to ensure that each school and the participants' voices are heard.

5.7 Data analysis

The data gathered supported the qualitative nature of the research, which provided a data corpus (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of 25 interviews from 26 participants. The interview data gathered varied in length from the differing participants. However, all the data was rich in detail, experiences and reflections, providing valuable insight into the experiences of the differing schools. As Wolcott (1994, p.9) stated, 'the greater problem for first-time qualitative researchers is not how to get data but how to figure out what to do with the data they get'. This quotation aligned with my initial thoughts on having completed the interviews, which provided considerable data for analysis. In this section, I provide a detailed account of how I made sense of the data corpus, which will aid in the audit process to demonstrate the reliability of the research findings. I will explain my use of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012; 2019; 2020) steps and approaches to develop the thematic analysis.

5.7.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79)

I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012; 2019; 2020) thematic analysis described in the quotation to analyse my data. Reflecting on the aims of this research, Braun and Clarke (2019, p.591) advise that 'qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating'. Braun and Clarke (ibid.) further argue that 'the final analysis is the product of deep and prolonged data immersion, thoughtfulness and reflection, something that is active and generative'. There is no single method to conduct thematic analysis, yet Braun and Clarke (2020, p.39) advise a tripartite typology consisting of coding reliability, codebook and reflexive approaches. The typology approach aids in defining a strategy for thematic analysis:

1. *Coding reliability - involve early theme development and conceptualise coding as a process of identifying evidence for themes. Themes are typically understood as topic summaries.*
2. *Reflexive approaches involve later theme development, with themes developed from codes. Theme development requires considerable analytic and interpretative work on the part of the researcher.[...] Reflexive approach involves six—recursive—phases of analysis.*
3. *Codebook approaches combine the qualitative research values of reflexive TA with the more structured approach to coding, early theme development and the conceptualisation of themes as topic summaries characteristic of coding reliability.*

(Braun and Clarke, 2020, p.39)

The tripartite typology has been the guiding approach to the thematic analysis of this research. These typologies were used in conjunction with Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012) six stages for thematic analysis, which involved a systematic search across the data set to find repeated patterns of meaning.

5.7.2 The search for codes

For the data analysis of the 25 interviews with 26 participants, I followed the six-step process defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87), as detailed in the table below.

Table 5-4 Phases of thematic analysis

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

To commence my analysis, I focused on my first interview with Hattie, a long-term headteacher close to retirement within a village school. My initial process started with re-listening to the interview with the anonymised transcribed Microsoft Word document. The step was useful as there were a few mistakes within the transcription, which were rectified. In addition, I reminded myself of the richness of the overall interview. The next step was to upload the document into NVivo. It was in the step two process, which I attempted a couple of times to find a strategy that worked. I was mixing step 2, generating initial codes, and step 3, searching for themes, together. As a result, I utilised working with NVivo for the generating of the initial codes by reading the interview line by line and generating nodes for the relevant codes (Appendix 3.1). In addition, I used a printout of the interview in which to write my thoughts alongside passages of the interview (Appendix 3.2) and my research diary in which to write down initial themes as they emerged (Appendix 3.3), as I did

not want to lose these initial thoughts on the search for themes. This was beyond the scope of NVivo to gather multiple thoughts in one space.

To ensure that the codes created matched the data from the interview, the first interview with the headteacher, Hattie, was checked by my PhD supervisor. This reflects the advice of Stahl and King (2020) and Flick (2014), who advocated member checking for novice researchers. In addition, this approach of member checking aids with the notion of 'reflexive auditing' to demonstrate dependability and trustworthiness within the research findings (Stahl and King, 2020, p.27). Following the member checking, I commenced with a systematic process of coding all 25 interviews. I created an anonymising key to aid in coding the large data set (see 5.6.6). Further member checks of four interviews were conducted.

The coding process and the research were further delayed due to being interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in a one-year gap with only minimal engagement with the study. The interruption may have influenced the coding process and the resulting finding, as the time away and other world events may have influenced my interpretations of the data gathered and initial analysis. However, the rigorous and systematic approach provided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) process and my different coding methods (see Appendix 3. Thematic analysis steps). I was able to apply the same consistent approach. The interruption further suppressed bias as I was focused on the data gathered instead of the memory of the events. The anonymisation process additionally aided with reducing my bias as I worked with the aliases, helping with the objectivity of the data collected and the resulting findings.

5.7.3 Codebook generation

On completion of the coding process, the NVivo software was used to extract a codebook of all codes generated. This process reflects the third typology in Braun and Clarke's (2020) recommendation in the thematic analysis methods. Codebooks present 'a well-established tool for improving the consistency of coding in qualitative research projects' (Oliveira, 2022, p.2). Codebooks aid in the construction of a comprehensive list of codes, providing strategies and guidance on how to code and interpret the resulting data (ibid.). The document compiled a list of each code (or

node) created against the number of interviews linked to the code (these are referred to as files). An additional column detailed the number of times a code was used (referred to as references on NVivo), which could be multiple times within a single interview. The extracted codebook was then used to create a detailed thesis codebook.

An examination of the extracted codebook identified that the original codes were more of a label approach to the coding than a definition of the codes. In addition, 106 codes (see Appendix 4. Original codes) needed to be streamlined and collated to identify potential themes defined in stage three of the thematic analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was a useful process in revisiting each code label and the associated data, which enabled a useful re-connection with the detail of the data and the thought processes that had happened over the time of the interruption. The approach aligned with Creswell's (2007, p.237) notion that coding is a 'process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data'. From these codes, I was then able to 'collapse these...into broad themes' (ibid.). This time-consuming task took many months and provided much time for reflectivity throughout the process, which aided in later development of the final themes.

Once the list of codes was completed, it was necessary to reduce it to a manageable number (Saldaña, 2013). During this phase, some codes were deleted due to lack of occurrence. Those that shared a meaning with other existing codes were merged. The code book was expanded to include a review of the description and then a review of the initial and final themes. Throughout the process, lines were coded to indicate those merged and others not included in the review of the theme due to a lack of use or relevance to the final codes. This process aligned with Bryant and Charmaz's (2007, p.1) assertion that researchers require 'persistent interaction with their data while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analysis'. An example of stage 3 analysis was reconsidering the codes when searching for themes initially under the policy label. Within the original coding process, all policies were coded under the 'policy' label (for example, attendance and Pupil Premium). On revisiting the many policies listed, the codes were subsequently redefined and assigned thematically (See Appendix 5. Codebook). I identified that the data partly reflected the research's original aim to understand the primary school community.

Some data was collected and coded into links with the wider community. However, this appeared more in relation to the local context of the surrounding communities. These included the school's location and the demographic of the wider community, including economic and cultural diversity. Most provided information when asking participants to identify or describe their school community or the wider community. As a result, many references to the wider community in the NVivo database did not support a thematic discussion. However, the data provided richness to understanding each school context.

Following stage 3 of the thematic analysis, emerging themes were within the data. The codes were checked against the original data gathered, following stage 4 of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was then followed by a further revisit of the descriptive codes to create and ensure that the definitions were clear and related to the theming of the analysis. For example, several codes related to the differing types of school-parent relationships or school-parent communications. It was important that these discussions were subsections as they related to differing aspects of relationships that schools and families have. These subcodes were grouped thematically under the final theme of 'The complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship'. The process was supported by Braun and Clarke's (2012, p.65) understanding of the researcher beginning 'to explore the relationship between themes and to consider how themes will work together in telling an overall story about the data'. Stage 5 reflected the ongoing analysis, refining the specifics of each theme to create an overall story and providing the final definitions and names for each theme (Appendix 5.1-5.4, labelled overarching themes). The final theme developed from the different types of relationships that schools and parents have, but this is also related to how Government neoliberal policies can affect the relationship.

The final stage 6 of the thematic analysis process is selecting the compelling extracts related to the research questions and the literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The detailed thesis codebook (Appendix 5.1-5.4) includes the principal codes and subcodes along with a description and example of each code and in which school(s) it occurs. The length of each chapter also reflects the total references made by the participants to each theme. Not all participant's voices from Ashfield are quoted.

However, their interview data was coded and added to the thick description of each school. Due to the diverse context of each school, not all the final themes were relevant to all schools in line with the interpretivist nature of the research. The final four themes, which inform the findings of the research, are: The Onus of Leadership (Chapter 6); Complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship (Chapter 7); Context of learning (Chapter 8); and The responsabilisation of the school for the welfare of children and families (Chapter 9). These four distinct but related chapters present the findings, analysis, and discussion, demonstrating my data analysis process and the interpretation of selected data extracts from all participants.

5.8 Ethical Issues to Consider

The project adhered to De Montfort University Research Ethics Code of Practice (RECoP), which provides a comprehensive framework for good research conduct and the governance of all research carried out across the University. I was aware of the ethical issues of working with participants within schools. However, whilst the study did not include children, the research adhered to the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. This specifies that all participants should be treated fairly, sensitively and with respect for their choice, privacy and confidentiality. Whilst my research did not include children, I gained a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to work within the school environment as there was a potential that I would be in proximity to children.

BERA (2018, p.6) Ethical Guidelines instruct that all research participants must be 'treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice' and that researchers must 'be mindful of the socio-economic status'. These stipulations were integral and maintained throughout all aspects of the research within the interviews and throughout all stages of the coding and writing process of the thesis. As BERA (ibid.) recommended and following De Montfort University's RECoP (See Appendix 6. Ethics approval). All participants were provided with a participant information sheet, with a clear understanding that participation in the research was voluntary and that they need only answer questions and share information they were comfortable with. Furthermore, all participants signed a consent form and were advised of their right to withdraw their consent.

5.9 Summary

This chapter has detailed the rationale for the research design, identified the paradigm for the research, and specified the methodological principles utilised to establish the trustworthiness of the findings. These methodological choices were based on the five guiding conceptual levels framework outlined by Dyson and Brown (2006).

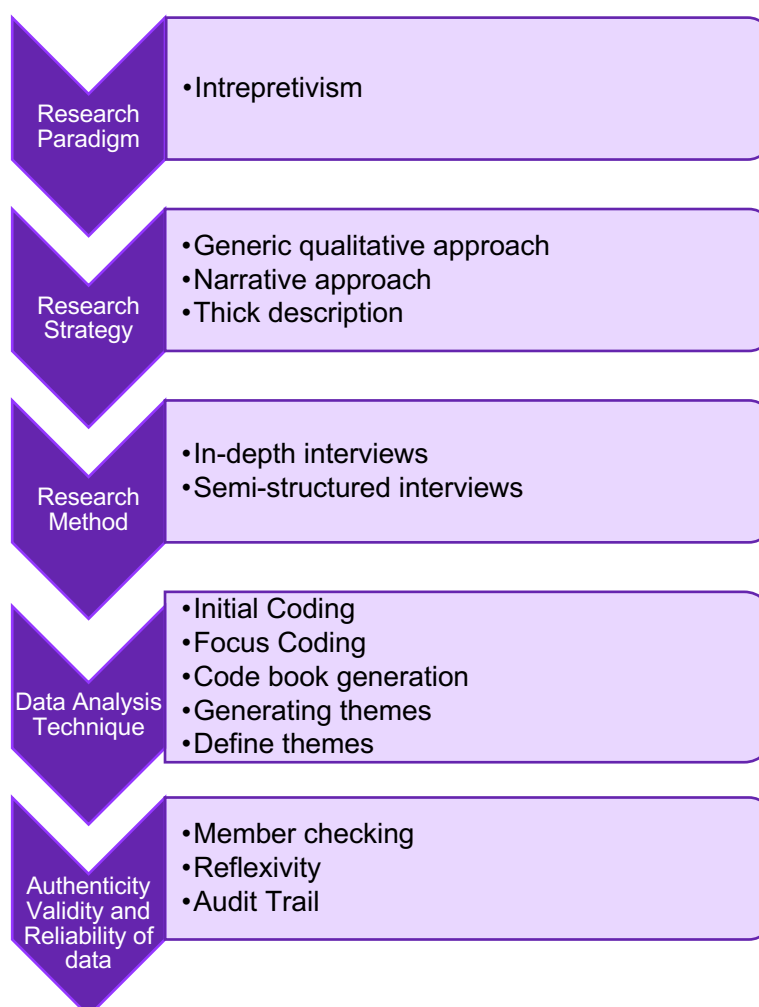


Figure 5-1 Final research design

This research design, with a foundation based on interpretivism, supports the notion of individuals having differing interpretations of events and experiences. Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm facilitated the research to utilise participant voices to *evaluate the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in English primary schools*. The final research strategy chosen was a generic qualitative approach, which enabled a fluid response approach to the

research, which no traditional qualitative methodology could provide in response to the differing context of the four primary schools and the varied access to participants (discussed in 5.4). I employed aspects of traditional qualitative approaches to gain a collection of participants' narratives to explore their thoughts and experiences. The narrative aspect of the interview data enabled me to gather varied interpretations and understandings of the experiences within the school of Government's neoliberal policies. I also utilised a thick description to understand the context of each school. The data gathered were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012, 2019, 2020) stages of thematic analysis. This produced a detailed coded book that guided the writing of the following findings, analysis and discussion Chapters 6-9. The research design decisions were grounded in trustworthiness and reflexivity to ensure rigour throughout all stages of the research.

CHAPTER 6. THE ONUS OF LEADERSHIP

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, I established the methodological rationale for the study and described the approaches to data generation and analysis. In this chapter, I will present the findings of the researcher, who gathered qualitative data from 27 interviews across four primary schools. The thematic data analysis seeks to address the research question in relation to the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in English primary schools.

This chapter begins the analysis of the findings and the discussion of new insights, which will continue in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. The findings of these chapters follow the thematic analysis detailed in the codebook (Appendix 5. Codebook). The key for the aliases of schools and the participants (see 5.6.6 or Appendix 2) will support the reading of these chapters. The four findings' chapters will draw on the thematic framework in Chapter 2 and the literature from Chapter 3. and Chapter 4. This Chapter 6 will focus on *the onus of leadership*. Subsequent chapters will address themes of *complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship; context of learning; and the response realisation of the school to support the welfare of the child and family*. Within each chapter, subthemes reflect the interpretivist paradigm of the research, with each school and participant having differing perspectives on their experiences of primary school life.

This first chapter focuses on the many leadership responsibilities placed on the headteacher, which is integral throughout all the findings and discussion chapters. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the role of the headteacher as the school leader shaped the school in many diverse ways. The headteacher and the leadership team set the school's culture, ethos and values. This influenced how the schools enacted policies or resisted them.

6.2 Leadership: the setting and practising of school ethos, culture, and values.

School leadership has many differing responsibilities. An essential part of any school leadership is setting and maintaining a school's ethos, culture, and values. This is addressed and detailed within the *Governance handbook Academy trusts and*

maintained schools (DfE, 2020b) along with the *Headteacher standards* (DFE, 2020a). Government (DfE, 2020b) policy states that all schools should have a vision mission based on high achievements. However, this will be open to differing interpretations for all schools. The Government advises that the vision should be based on strategic leadership and should include 'strong and clear values and ethos' (DfE, 2020b, p.14), but also the school's vision must be 'connected with, and responsive to the communities they serve – particularly pupils, parents and carers – through effective engagement' (ibid., p.18).

This was interpreted in differing ways within each school, however, the mission statements for three of the participating schools appear generic concerning ideas of cooperation and aspiration. Only Oakdale's mission statement refers to the school's locality, making it appear a more personal approach. These statements reflect more of the marketisation of education and the school's marketing and promotional campaigns (Allen and Kern 2018; Carden 2021). All the schools' published mission statement and values could be considered generic. In contrast, the schools demonstrated a strong individual ethos that formed an integral part of the school's culture and identity in response to the needs of their community.

Each school had a different 'feel' on entering the school grounds and buildings. This was an indication of each school's identity and the resulting culture of the school. The following research journal excerpts and comments illustrate my first impressions of how each school appeared to me and how they appeared to be demonstrating their ethos.

Ashfield – Just outside the main entrance, I was struck by the prominent display of links to a school in Kenya. The school's motto was prominently displayed. Whilst the message related to a small school, it was set in large grounds, giving the feel of space. After going through the reception, this was followed by a large Christian values tree mural with various inspirational messages to aspire to. It appeared that Christian values were integral to the school. There was a display board on the topic of Lent and examples of things that the children were giving up. This was the first school I visited, and my overall impression was that it was a Christian space for the staff and children.

Elmtree – I had difficulty figuring out how to get into the school grounds. However, once in, the reception was bright and colourful. There was a larger welcome board with, I assume, the word ‘welcome’ in many languages. Once through the reception, the corridors were brightly decorated with a mixture of themed words by the children and large murals painted by an artist, based on children’s books. This gave the feeling of a bright, welcoming, creative space.

Ivywood – The school's location was bordered by high-rise flats, appeared to have very little space and was overshadowed. On entering the grounds, there was an A-frame board advertising a Zumba class for parents during the school day. There were information boards outside detailing everything from school term dates to events for parents, open evenings and coffee mornings. This created a welcoming impression, before arriving at the reception. Once through the reception, there was a wide-open space with soft style chairs, reading books and a variety of display boards featuring trips and schoolwork. The first impressions were of a welcoming, inclusive space.

Oakdale – Faced a lovely park, the school looked like an old Victorian village school. On entering the small reception area there was a leaflet stand containing information leaflets for parents on issues relating to e-safety and a sparsely populated notice board. These factors made the school feel less welcoming. This was the only school I did not have a walk around. There were many boxes in corridors due to work being carried out in classroom. However, reflecting on this point, it is worth noting that this was the last school visited and I was more aware of looking at reception spaces and how school receptions can be presented in differing ways. The initial impression of the reception area was in contrast to the warm welcome by the staff.

In all schools, a strong sense of culture and ethos formed an integral part of each school’s identity. The headteacher was the person who drove the culture and ethos within the school, on which the vision and values were based. Ivywood’s inclusive approach was evident from entering the school grounds (as detailed above in the

research journal). Hila, the headteacher at Ivywood, situated in a deprived area, stated:

I've always had a really powerful moral imperative really, from starting out as a newly qualified teacher about breaking that [injustice]. That isn't okay, and I want to empower or be part of a system that empowers people to be the best that they can be. Because what I know is, that these communities have got an incredibly rich and diverse amount of stuff to offer.

(Hila, Ivywood)

Hila's strong sense of moral or social justice was the driving force that shaped the school's ethos and culture of inclusion. This reflects Bush and Glover's (2003, p.5) definition of a successful leader as someone who develops their school vision, or I would term culture, based on their personal and professional values. Towers (2022, p.3) and James et al. (2006, p.90) also highlight that it was headteachers' own identities, moral purpose, core values, beliefs and ideals that could make a difference for the children. The headteacher, in this case Hila, has taken on the responsibility for sharing her beliefs, which she appears confident will make a difference. The ethos, culture and values, which were embedded within Ivywood were based on Hila's own beliefs, which she championed when taking over the school:

It was really important for me that there was a really strong climate that challenged the injustice, prejudice - and where the staff weren't putting glass ceilings into place. Because hand on heart, that was the climate that existed here when I first arrived. Kids that were poor or kids that were Black boys or kids that didn't get going.

(Hila, Ivywood)

This notion of social justice was echoed by the headteacher at Elmtree, which was also in an area of deprivation and had a large multicultural school population:

The vision is that, regardless of disadvantage, or prior attainment, or whatever the barriers to learning are, that you will achieve. You will come out of here with outcomes that are in line with national expectations. Our percentages of children getting expected standards at key stage two are above national, and we're absolutely committed that, if anything's going to bridge the aspiration gap, making sure the children are equipped for going on to do well in their GCSEs. That's absolutely crucial for us.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

As with Oakdale, Elmtree's inclusive approach was evident from entering the school with the embracing of the different cultures in the welcome boards.

When arriving at the school, it was difficult to ascertain Oakdale's ethos from my initial impression. This may have been due to Oakdale having a mixed cohort in relation to only some pupils being disadvantaged. However, Holly identified that the school's isolated position resulted in many children not having learning experiences beyond their time in school. Holly sought to address this via a reward system, linked to the school values, to gain experiences. Holly also introduced wider learning experiences for all children, as explained below:

I think what we try to do here is to make the learning as interesting and exciting as we can. Also, we do probably a disproportionate number of special days where we try and get the children experiences they might not have because they're limited in where they might have been.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Within Ashfield, there was a similar moral approach from Hattie that all children deserve a good education. Hattie was a champion for children with special educational needs. On my initial meeting with Hattie, to see if the school would be a willing participant in the research, I made the following reflective notes:

On the walk round, Hattie explained her ethos for teaching was to create good citizens of the world. Her belief that all children deserve an education was reflected in the school having a high number of special educational needs students, in which some children are turned down by many other schools. Hattie explained that the LA often contacted her as she was known to accept many children that other schools refuse. Hattie appeared proud of this.

(Research Diary, July 2018)

The headteachers' approaches strongly demonstrated the Headteacher Standards, especially, the notion to 'uphold ambitious educational standards which prepare pupils from all backgrounds for their next phase of education and life' (DfE, 2020a, para 20). Preparing pupils from all backgrounds was noted within these two schools with diverse backgrounds, demonstrating the inclusive and caring culture within the

schools' approaches. Whilst this may have been the rhetoric from the headteachers, it was also noted by other staff members:

No matter what language the kids are speaking, the school's trying to help them out in any way that we can. If they speak Chinese or French or any language really, the school is always trying to do the best they can to provide help for the kids. Also, it doesn't matter really if they're Roma or Slovak or any other background; they're all equal in school, and that's quite nice.

(Leoš, Elmtree)

It is valuing people, valuing the staff as well as the children. Making sure that everyone's needs are met. Caring. It is. It's caring. It's knowing all those children, and not just knowing them as focus on the learning ladders, [...]. We do get to know our children exceptionally well.

(Lisa, Ivywood)

The clear understanding by various school staff members of the inclusive culture imitates Bush and Glover's (2003, p.5) description of a successful leader being able to articulate their vision to influence their staff and stakeholders. These statements highlight the school ethos of going beyond supporting the child to achieve academically and emphasise that the school ethos seeks to support the child holistically. This caring approach was further demonstrated in the decision of the headteachers of Elmtree and Ivywood to use school budgets to employ family support officers, whose remit was supporting not only the child but also their family with wider social issues. The schools' leadership is seen to work in contrast to taking the purely neoliberal approach that Sellars and Imig (2021) argue is widespread within schools. Sellars and Imig (2021) advise that schools should engage with a progressive approach based on Nodding's (2015) notion of the philosophy of care.

Here, I argue that Elmtree and Ivywood advocate a progressive leadership approach. The schools invoke Sturrock's (2021) ideal of a traditional caring ethos that is community-focused, with an overarching professional discourse of 'family' and 'care' (ibid., p.3). The ethos of the headteachers appeared to be a way of resisting a purely neoliberal approach to education, instead aiming to consider the whole child and their family's needs, demonstrating the notion of ethics of care. Thus, the headteachers demonstrated a caring approach within their leadership (this will be explored further in subsequent themes and chapters).

Reflecting the diverse community context and deprivation challenges, Elmtree's and Ivywood's approaches to creating an inclusive culture went beyond the school gates. Both schools aimed to create wider engagement by appointing family support officers. In Elmtree's case, the school also employed learning support assistants from the local community speaking languages reflective of the diverse school population. Heidi employed Leoš as he was part of the local Roma community, she felt this would help engage the Roma families with the school. Leoš noted:

I would say Heidi made lots of changes to the school. Also, that I'm a part of the community, that makes lots of difference for the kids so they can go on the trips as well and the support that the families have interacting with the school more often than they would in the past.

(Leoš, Elmtree)

Ivywood's inclusive culture went beyond the child to the wider family being part of the school. Along with various coffee mornings and Zumba classes, the whole family are invited to attend the school trips to the seaside. This inclusive nature of the approach appeared to go beyond the requirements of Government guidelines, which state that schools' 'should be responsive to the communities they serve – particularly pupils, parents and carers – through effective engagement' (DfE, 2020b. p.18). It was highlighted by several staff that previous headteachers did not have the same approach in relation to engagement with the wider families, and this was very much an individual approach by the current headteacher. This illustrates Braun, Maguire, and Ball's (2010) notion that policy enactment can have differing and multiple interpretations depending upon the competing needs of the local context of each school. Therefore, policy enactment can reflect headteachers' values in response to their interpretation of the needs of their school.

Within three schools, there was an explicit desire that the school culture should be that of a family. The 'family feel' approach is consistent with Towers' (2022) and Sturrock's (2021) findings and Ofsted's frequent reporting that 'good' primary schools have a 'family atmosphere' (ibid.). Whilst 'family' may be a contested term or a term used without definition, the three schools positively used the term to convey an inclusive feeling. Diane expressed this notion of family in relation to the central culture and ethos of the school:

We talk about choosing the core purpose, but what is it specific to us here and now for our children, our staff, and our community? Much as we've got the pressure of data, and much as we've got the pressure of Ofsted and accountability, this is still- we've always managed to hold on to what Ivywood is about, and that thing about family and being happy and being safe, that everybody can achieve.

(Diane, Ivywood)

This notion of a school family was echoed in both Ashfield and Elmtree, with the idea of 'family' being linked to support. That's the sort of school we are, it's very much the whole family and support team.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

They're so supportive. I haven't seen it like that in other jobs. School's a family. That's what I say to the children, "We're not just a school, we are a family, and we talk to each other."

(Leanne, Elmtree)

The notion of being a family implied the creation and implementation of inclusion and the idea of a sense of belonging within the differing school cultures. This echoes Forde and Torrance's (2017) finding that individual school leaders can work towards removing barriers to learning by fostering an inclusive culture. Furthermore, creating a family atmosphere aligned with Roffey's (2013) research that a conscious approach from school leadership to create an inclusive feel can result in a sense of belonging for all pupils, which removes barriers to learning, attainment and behaviour.

Ashfield and Ivywood also used this idea of 'family' to create an inclusive approach to lunchtimes. Both schools described having a 'family service' system for their meals, in which each table had a mixture of all-year groups, with the older children helping to serve food to the younger ones. The aim was to foster support and friendships throughout the school rather than just within a single class or year. It is interesting to note that the two schools, which implemented inclusion in this way could be classified as socially and economically advantaged (Ashfield) and disadvantaged (Ivywood). However, the pupils of Ivywood may benefit more from this approach, reflecting Roffey's (2013) findings concerning disadvantaged communities. Roffey (2013) advises that a conscious and sustained school development in inclusion can create a sense of belonging, which benefits disadvantaged children in school and their wider communities (ibid.). The idea of the school family was also related to a more inclusive

approach by Elmtree and Ivywood with the inclusion of the wider family of the children, all viewed as part of the school family.

This family approach was also demonstrated in the relationships between staff members, who were supportive of each other and of the children. The term family was used to create a safe, friendly feeling within the environment of the schools. However, the school ethos in response to the term 'family' was not evident in all the schools. Oakdale did not evoke this term, which may have been due to its more challenging relationship with some families. Therefore, the term family was not viewed in the same positive light as within the other three schools. Holly noted that it was 'quite a tough cohort in terms of the parents, and the parents can be very vocal'. There was little in the discussion of values within Oakdale, but the staff did feel supported by the headteacher.

The differing ethos and culture appeared to be embedded within each school, not only for the children but also for the school staff. Learning Support Assistant (LSA) Lisa noted, 'A lot of that is down to Hila's headship. [..]. Her and Diane in particular, they're really keen for people to be completely involved and completely dedicated to the children's learning'. Lisa also noted that 'there's finally that acknowledgement that TAs can take ownership of their own teaching as well'. Lisa's experience reflected Hila's commitment to creating a 'system that empowers people to be the best that they can be'. The headteacher's perceived commitment to creating an inclusive working environment was supported by staff members within all participating schools, illustrated in the following quotations:

The hierarchy, the heads and deputy heads, they're very good with the staff and all this and incorporate teachers' ideas if they know it is going to work feasibly. The hierarchy are pretty good; I do like them they have spun the school around.
(Leanne, Elmtree)

Yes, we all have a voice. I was saying that the other day to one of the TAs, I said, "This has been the best thing Heidi is." I can actually just go and walk into their room and the teacher's classes, [...]. Nobody is separated, nobody is left out.
(Leelah, Elmtree)

It's from the top. It's from Hattie. She's a warm and welcoming person, and it just oozes through the school. The presence of everything is just very welcoming.

(Layla, Ashfield)

I think that Holly facilitates – that's sort of her ethos, she talks a lot about workload, making sure that we're not doing more than we should do. She felt very, very considerate about what she expects from us and what she doesn't. There's nothing unnecessary that she expects of us. I think that she leads as well, and that helps.

(Dora, Oakdale)

These comments from the staff members illustrate an appreciation of the ethos and values of their headteacher, which was consistent across all four schools. The headteachers' modelling of the school's ethos conformed to the requirement set out by the DfE (2020b). However, this behaviour appeared more reflective of the headteachers' overall approach to education rather than adherence to external Government expectations. The staff openly expressed their positive support for the inclusive culture set by the headteachers, whilst at the same time implying that there was an organisational hierarchy. Ivywood's headteacher, Hila, recognised the need for a headteacher to be present and visible:

Ivywood it does run itself a little bit. But I always underestimate how much it needs me here. I've got brilliant people. Diane's brilliant. Tisha, Tina, and the leadership team. Fantastic, middle leaders are really good at what they're doing, but I think I have to get the balance right because people need me here. Children need me here. Staff need me here because that's-- not about me, it's about the head, that there's a head that they like. It's about the role of being in the building.

(Hila, Ivywood)

In reference to Solvason's (2005) understanding that a school's ethos is a product of a school's culture, the participating schools demonstrated the headteacher to be the driver for developing a strong culture within schools, which in turn influences the school ethos. Furthermore, the schools depict Day and Sammons' (2014, p.7) notion of a successful school leader who can create 'a positive school culture including the proactive school mindset and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment'. This was echoed by Warin's (2017) findings that, to be successful, schools need to recruit like-minded staff that share the same values. Within the four schools, it was clear that there was a proactive school mindset and respect shown

for staff at all levels within the hierarchy. Of interest to this research was that three of the four schools faced higher levels of deprivation than the national average. Day and Sammons (2014) noted that a positive school culture can promote success within such schools. This point was demonstrated in the participating schools with challenging circumstances, which were all judged Good by Ofsted.

The school culture set by the participating headteachers was evidently based on their own morals and values. Headteachers investing their personal morals and values to shape the school culture could be considered as aligning with Foucault's (2007, p.389) notion of 'conduct of conduct', which involves 'governing the self to govern others'. However, whilst the headteachers were influencing their staff and the school's culture, it appeared less in response to the meeting of Government expectations, and more a reflection of the headteacher's own values. The evidence highlighted that the headteachers' values were based on the traditional notion of ethics of care. Returning to the literature, this caring approach to creating a school culture based on inclusion concurs with McLeod (2017), Hellowell (2018) and Sturrock (2021), who argue ethics of care remains very much a consideration in the running of schools.

6.3 Leadership and accountability via performativity

The above section sought to demonstrate how the headteacher drives the school's culture and ethos based on their individual values and beliefs. Within each school, the culture was demonstrated from the top down via a hierarchical approach, in which staff members were able to articulate and embody the school culture. This next section will consider how leadership navigates the neoliberal discourse of performativity linked to attainment based on test results and Ofsted inspections. The different discussions relating to testing measures within primary schools reflected the culture the headteacher had embedded in each school.

The prevalent neoliberal discourse in education is that of accountability via performativity. The discourse is widely evident in many of the Department for Education's guidance, handbooks and policies requiring schools to make continuous improvements to raise standards. The measurements and judgements are based on how schools perform in Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs) and external Ofsted

inspections (Atkinson, 2015; Hutchings, 2015; Carr, 2016; Ball, 2017). Each school had a different engagement with these expectations and requirements.

Oakdale was seemingly caught in an accountability and performativity trap, invoking Torrance's (2017, p.49) notion of 'fear and treat'. The school has an integral special needs unit, where children do not follow the standard requirements of the national curriculum or the SATs process. However, whilst these children are exempted from testing, they are included in the pupil population numbers for the SATs results, thereby lowering the overall percentage score for the school. Reflecting on Bradbury's (2019) finding that there is a constant fear that one set of bad results can trigger an Ofsted inspection, Holly explained:

Ofsted came in, and so we did have a- the lady that came, and she took a good morning to be convinced that I wasn't- that there was a genuine reason why these children couldn't take the SAT's exams, but it's quite difficult sometimes.

(Holly, Oakdale)

As Bradbury et al. (2021) later highlight, headteachers' careers depend on SATs results, yet Holly has been placed in a position whereby the SATs results are not reflective of the school. Holly needed to navigate the two different forms of accountability pressures. For the school to appear successful, they must achieve high scores, but this is not possible, which places added pressure on Holly to continually justify the test results:

but it's just that if you were just a parent who's obsessed with data, you could look and compare the local schools and think that that's a failing school. It wouldn't make sense because we've got a good Ofsted.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly's predicament with poor test results echoes Niesche and Thomson (2017, p.203), whereby Government policies place headteachers as autonomous leaders in the school's running whilst also making them responsible for any failures.

Holly's justification of the results to Ofsted implies the notion of 'politics of blame' (Thrupp, 2009, p.6; Done and Murphy, 2018, p.151). The wider contextual issues, in the case of Oakdale SEND pupils, are treated as excuses, making the school and, ultimately, the headteacher responsible for factors beyond their control. Holly

appeared to challenge the value of the SATs results for the Government's purpose of creating parental choice via league tables. Holly's approach to explaining the results demonstrated her ethos of valuing wider learning experiences. She was keen to explain the positives of the special educational needs unit for all:

we've got the benefit of having children who understand [SEND] now are integrated at break, dinner, and play together, and we get all the benefits of that.
(Holly, Oakdale)

Therefore, in the case of Oakdale, the Government measurements did not fulfil the desired role in providing parental choice, as the narrow measurements failed to reflect the school.

The opinion of SATs varied across the schools. Within Ashfield, SATs testing was not a key focus or priority, as Hattie freely declares:

SATs aren't the be-all or end-all. I know I'm accountable, but whenever I show people around, I say, "We're not on the mission to teach children to tick boxes." because there is a lot more to education than that [...] because the SATs are not a big thing, that sounds awful, doesn't it?
(Hattie, Ashfield)

Hattie evokes her beliefs concerning accountability measures as an act of resistance. Several staff members, including her deputy headteacher, echoed this sentiment of placing the child first. Daisy (Ashfield) also commented 'We're not a school that hothouse for SATs. We don't do lots of practice SATs papers. The year twos won't even know'. Ashfield's ethos of downplaying SATs echoed Braun and Maguire's (2020, p.4) finding concerning English primary schools that 'assessment policies are enacted within the context [...] and care of young children'. Hattie's school ethos of creating 'good citizens of the world' demonstrated her whole school's approach to the SATs and appeared stronger than the Government's zeal for testing. Hattie and her staff appeared to place their own values above the Government's accountability measures. This prioritisation of their own values, contrasts with Atkinson's (2015) and Carr's (2016) findings that governmentality shapes teachers' practice in response to policy. This belief that SATs are not important was supported by the governors and the parents that were interviewed, illustrated in the following quotations:

Looking at the data and evaluating the data. As a school, we've resisted that.
(Gareth, Ashfield)

I don't like the system. I don't like SATs, but that's not the school's fault.
(Paige, Ashfield)

Similarly, Ivywood staff voiced resistance to the pressures of SATs. Lisa (Ivywood) stated, 'I mean, we do make a really big effort to downplay SATs'. This idea of resistance concerning children's experience of formal assessments, with the aim of protecting them, is much-researched (Hutchings, 2015; Hayler, 2017; Bradbury, 2019; Braun and Maguire, 2020; Bradbury et al., 2021) effects of high-stakes testing. These approaches voiced in the two schools reflect the caring ethos, in which the children are placed above the measurable outcome data required by the Government.

Ashfield did not place much value on the SATs or the resulting data, with the governors also voicing their resistance. Hattie's verbal approach to the value of the SATs and the resulting data evoked the notion of the SATs 'game' (Fuller, 2019). However, in contrast to the resistance of the SATs was Ashfield's approach to managing the SATs process, which appeared rigorous. Hattie was keen to express that she did not interfere with the test data, which she highlighted thus:

to some extent, you do play the SATs game, but we're a very honest school, we make sure-- I never look at any of the SATs papers when it's being done. We have governors in to monitor how we administer them and what you put them in. It's all very secure because I am scared stiff of being accused of tampering in any way.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

In the comments about SATs by the headteacher and the governors at Ashfield, it could be considered that compliance and resistance appear to co-exist. However, drawing on Atkinson (2015) and Carr (2016), Hattie could be interpreted as subjecting herself to the notion of governmentality by implementing robust procedures for conducting the SATs. This notion of governmentality concurs with Ball et al.'s (2011) and Perryman et al.'s (2017) findings, which describe how actors within schools become policy translators and ultimately become compliant via the implementation of policies. In addition, whilst Hattie was verbally resistant to the SATs as the key policy

translator and implementor within the school, she could be considered as aligning with Foucault's (2007) notion of governmentality, shaping oneself to shape others. As Perryman et al. (2017) highlight, school leadership through the translation of policy becomes a form of governmentality. Furthermore, Hattie's compliance, prompted by feeling 'scared stiff', intimates Torrance's (2017, p.49) notion that 'fear fulfils an important moral function in neo-liberal government' via the idea of a 'constant threat'. Thus, policies that evoke fear result in headteachers and schools being compliant with neoliberal governance via the testing regime.

Whilst resistance was expressed to SATs testing in Ashfield, the school did gain high SATs results and a 'good' Ofsted rating. Both elements translate into the notion of a successful school (DfE, 2014; DfE, 2020a). Ball (2016) and Niesche and Thomson (2017) argue that Government perceived success enables autonomy for school leaders. This was evident in Ashfield, which had been rated 'good' over several years and where a governor noted that Hattie was happy for the school to be or stay good in their recent Ofsted inspection:

What Hattie does is incredible. As far as she is concerned, she is happy to maintain her level as a good school in order not to put undue pressure on the staff and students.

(Gareth, Ashfield)

As with the SATs, Hattie does ensure that policies are followed but appears to resist the discourse surrounding them. As Gareth further noted:

The day before OFSTED, everyone was cleaning and tidying, but everyone was incredibly chilled; they knew that everything was in place ready for observations, and they were confident [...] It was a good school, they knew we were good schools, teachers were absolutely clear, being a good school, they knew how to play the system, they chose to play the system because of the fact that they wanted to stay as a good school.

(Gareth, Ashfield)

Hattie's behaviour echoed Fuller's (2019, p.47) notion of 'semblance of compliance as resistance' to the neoliberal discourse by playing the system, following the guidelines enough to ensure the 'good' rating but not to strive for 'outstanding'. Government policies have made headteachers more autonomous, making them more accountable for the ruling and success of their schools (Wilkins and Gobby,

2021). However, here, Hattie is using her autonomy to subvert the pressures of accountability of Ofsted inspections and to protect the teaching staff and the children within the school. Hattie was able to play the system due to the Government-reported successful position of the school. This playing the system was not an option for Oakdale or Ivywood, reinforcing Thrupp's (2009, p.6) findings that the 'policy of blame' fails to take into account any reference to wider contextual issues of individual schools.

The differing notions of the 'policy of blame' (Thrupp, 2009, p.6; Alexander, 2014, p.358; Done and Murphy, 2018, p.10) and ideas relating to 'fear' and threat' (Torrance, 2017) were apparent in Ivywood. Hila explained of the SATs results:

When I first arrived, I arrived at the Easter and then SATs took a dip, which was always very suspicious to me because they'd been in the 80s. Then I arrived, and I arrived at the Easter. We did the SATs. Then, in July, there were 30s and 40s. [...] That's huge, it was half. What's been going on there then?

(Hila, Ivywood)

Hila suggested that the results had been inflated previously; this echoes Fuller's (2019, p.42) notion of 'gaming playing'. However, the 'gaming playing' differed from Ashfield as the SATs papers have been potentially influenced in some way to ensure that the performativity data looked more beneficial for the school. Hila further noted the drop in results triggered an Ofsted re-inspection, as was found by Bradbury (2019). This illustrates the entwined nature of accountability policies. SATs results and Ofsted judgement can create a precarious position for headteachers, linked to notions of blame (Alexander, 2014). While Hila implied the drop in results was not her fault, she was keen to express how quickly she identified the issues and increased the results. Hila appeared to be complying with the neoliberal rhetoric of entrepreneurialism, in which she 'freely accepted' non-negotiable programmes of accountabilities (Keddie and Mills, 2019). Hila's method for increasing the grades demonstrated her ethos within teaching, with the approach suited to the cohort of children:

we've built on it - these kids need that. Maths and English is not going to do it for them. They need a rich diet of experiences here. Curriculum experiences, residential experiences, visits. That whole idea of starting to say about sticky learning.

(Hila, Ivywood)

Hila's dedication to the children and the need to raise SATs results implies Thompson et al.'s (2022, p.92) point that accountability measures lead to 'work intensification'. This was evident in Ivywood's wider creative approach to the whole curriculum, going beyond focusing on Maths and English, the focus of the SATs tests. Hila's wider approach to learning reflected Ball et al.'s (2011, p.30) notion that teachers 'engage with policy and bring their creativity to bear on its enactment' and, as a result, are captured by it. The discussion with Hila was consistent with that of the other participating headteachers, creating a dichotomy between creating broader educational experiences and navigating accountability measures.

Discussions at Elmtree did not relate to SATs, but there was some mention of their 'Good' Ofsted report, which several staff members, including the headteacher, were proud of. Previously, the school had been in special measures. There were comments concerning their hard work in securing the 'Good' rating:

we've had a bad time a few years ago with Ofsted [...]. We hit rock bottom with that. The teachers and the staff just rallied together and worked damn hard, really hard, to build it on to what it is now. I'm just amazed. I like to be here another few years to see what the next Ofsted results are.

(Leanne, Elmtree)

Again, the need to work hard to achieve change illustrates accountability measures leading to work intensification (Thompson et al., 2022, p.92). Elmtree, as with Oakdale, appeared to value their Ofsted rating. Discussion concerning Ofsted did not evoke the same resistance as the SATs tests. Ofsted inspections had seemingly become an accepted part of school management. This acceptance reflects Foucault's (1995/1975, p.170) notion of 'hierarchical observation' leading to a 'normalising judgement'. Government policies appeared to have normalised the notion of external judgement, with schools becoming self-surveilling and monitoring (Foucault, 1995/1975). Elmtree further acknowledged this self-monitoring with the explanation of why they employ a data manager:

Another thing, this wouldn't have happened before we employed a data manager for one day a week. He's shared across the Trust. He does all the number crunching. What we found was that senior leaders were spending far too much time doing the number crunching [...] He does a lot of the statutory reporting for us, things at the end of foundation, key stage 1 and stage 2. At the end of an assessment point, [...], he's a statistician, which is amazing because he will give us the reports basically and analyse. [...] That means teachers don't lose track.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

There was no discussion about the SATs tests with any of the participants within Elmtree, but there was an embracing of the need for data analysis of pupil progress, reflecting the requirements in the *Governance handbook* (DfE, 2020b). These state that there is a need for measurable output of pupils, which enables an 'effective and efficient performance management of staff' (ibid., p.13). This appeared to be how Elmtree were using their data analysis:

obviously, we use it to monitor people focused across the school. Subject leaders take it, and they make amendments to how they provide for their area. Teachers use it to focus in the classroom. It makes a massive difference.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Heidi stated the positives about data gathering to save time in the classroom 'because people aren't getting lost in doing it and spending hours'. Heidi's approach reflects Atkinson (2015), whereby schools and teachers produce management strategies to implement accountability measures. As such, Heidi has embodied the notion of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject that was compliant with accountability mechanisms (Dardot and Laval 2014). Elmtree's approach of being accountable via data has resulted in neoliberal discourse being normalised within the school (Wilkins, 2016; Young, 2016; Gobby and Niesche, 2019; Verger et al., 2019). This normalisation has been achieved in a Foucauldian (2008, p.19) 'knowledge-power' sense via governance policies, with knowledge being achieved via embracing data analysis for pupil progress and staff monitoring. The power of the Government has been achieved via policies that have ensured the schools regulate and govern their own practices (Bailey, 2013). Ball (2013) noted that pupils are transformed into self-surveilling learners, with self-improvement being the aim of performance measures. Through data monitoring of performance, teachers are also being shaped by the need to self-improve and self-monitor (ibid.). However, in contrast, the need for data was not

evident in the teaching and learning approach of Elmtree, which focused on creative learning via daily art lessons as a means of inclusion.

Throughout all the interviews, SATs, Ofsted, and data gathering appeared to be an accepted part of the job role and school management, but distinctly different from teaching and learning. Attitudes to teaching and learning still reflected traditional values, placing the idea of care for pupils over the need for measurable outputs, signifying findings from Keddie and Mills (2019) and Braun and Maguire (2020). Yet there were some aspects of Fuller's (2019) notion of everyday acts of resistance to neoliberal discourse concerning the value of SATs. In Ashfield's case, there was also resistance to Ofsted judgements, expressed as "Good" is good enough'; this statement embraced Fuller's (2019) point '*semblance of compliance as resistance*'. However, in contrast, the other three schools valued the Ofsted 'Good' rating, with inspections an accepted part of schooling, reflecting Foucault's (1995/1975, p.170) notion of normalisation via judgements. All the headteachers appeared to accept the accountability and performativity measures in some form within their schools, reinforcing Keddie and Mills' (2019) notion that headteachers construct and comply with the neoliberal rhetoric of entrepreneurialism by accepting the non-negotiable programmes of accountability based on performance.

6.4 Leadership and organisational management of the school

In the previous themes of setting and practising school ethos, culture, and values and accountability via performativity, each school's approach to how Government policies were enacted reflected the headteacher's individual approach to education. This next section will consider leadership in relation to the organisational management of the school. It will assess how Government policies are received, interpreted, and enacted and the differing pressures that the schools were experiencing. This will be followed by discussing financial constraints and the individual schools' responses.

During all the interviews of the headteachers and deputy headteachers, I asked how Government education policy affected their schools. I made the following research journal note:

From interviews to date, individual policy is not overtly obvious other than the new Safeguarding policy, which is impacting schools. This might be because I do not directly ask which policies are impacting on the schools, as this did not yield much of an answer in my initial interviews.

(Research Journal, February 2019)

However, the most interesting response was Hattie's explanations of how the Department for Education communicates its requirements to schools. Hattie stated 'Do you know that a lot of Government policy you find out by osmosis'. Hattie further elaborated:

I wouldn't say that I get emails from the Government saying this is what we're looking at, which would be useful. I have to go on the DfE website and see what the latest documents are. You know, there's no list that comes out of this is what we're looking at. It's down to us to find out. Somethings they'll let you know about. I think it helps with the other local Headteachers have you seen that bit have you seen that.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

Hattie explained that previously, the Local Authority (LA) would inform headteachers of Government changes and decisions. However, due to changes over time in the structure of education, and reduction in the size and power of LAs (Southworth, 2008; Whitty, 2008; Glatter, 2012; Ball, 2017; Robinson, 2017), headteachers are now made responsible for finding information for themselves. Hattie's comments are consistent with much research highlighting the reduction in schools' partnership with the LA and the rise of neoliberal education policies that sought to shift power away from the LAs to schools (ibid.). The cuts to the LA support were affecting schools, as further explained by Barbara, the business manager:

when we were a local authority school, you have the local authority telling you what you could do and couldn't, and they would check things for you. Any of the services that we want, we have to buy - legal advice, you have to buy, HR, payroll, you have to buy because a school this size, we can't be experts in everything. [...] We buy back from the local authority.

(Barbara, Ashfield)

The loss of guidance from the LA in several areas has resulted in the rise of private companies supporting state education. Ashfield was a stand-alone primary school,

and their school budget was also used to navigate the policy terrain of education, both in the 'big P' of Government policy and the 'little p' of everyday policies used within schools. One way in which Ashfield purchased support was via 'a subscription costing £600 a year to [a company called] The Key' (Hattie, Ashfield). The Key is a privately run company offering many leadership services including 'Lawyer-approved model policies you need and alerts if things change so you know your school is compliant' (The Key, 2023, para.4). Hattie shared with me the many different policies documents that the school used (see [Appendix 7. Ashfield policy documents](#)). Ashfield's approach to navigating changes in DfE policies with no wider support illustrates a shift in school management and adds responsibility to the headteacher.

The reduction in support from the LA may give increased autonomy to the headteachers but could also result in increased isolation. Thus, isolation may add to the burden of accountability pressures within leadership. Measures to alleviate the loss of support from the LA have resulted in options for further paid-for services, again reflecting the continued commodification and privatisation within education (Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Hill et al., 2015; Ball, 2017). Hattie explained that she paid to be part of a group of primary headteachers group:

they run a lot of Headteacher briefings. It used to be run by the LA, but we actually pay for that now. They put on training for Headteachers. But they also do briefings sessions to try and update you on all of it [policy changes].

(Hattie, Ashfield)

Hattie further explained that the school also paid for additional training to support policy changes at a cost of £2,500. However, Hattie observed: 'I wasn't getting value for money. I've got to start looking at value for money now.' Hattie's experiences concur with Niesche and Thomson's finding (2017, p.199) that schools 'negotiate the uneasy tensions between forms of de-centralization and re-centralization'. Decentralisation has made this standalone school increasingly responsible for finding out about policy initiatives, resulting in additional costs for the school budget. This decentralisation, resulting in additional responsibility for schools and headteachers, also echoes Wilkins and Goby's (2012) point that decreased Government involvement ensures that school leaders make themselves accountable to Government requirements.

Paying for wider support services was also the case for Ivywood. Ivywood was still part of the LA, but due to cuts to services, support that the LA previously provided was no longer available:

We're part of [a] Schools Trust, but it's like teaching a school of lions without all the developmental stuff. So, we pay a bit of money to be part of that with a bunch of other schools that haven't converted, that works well for us.

(Hila, Ivywood)

Both Hattie and Hila's positions appeared reflective of Thompson et al.'s (2022) paradox in relation to school autonomy, in which school leaders are constrained by Government policies, whilst at the same time facing a reduction in centralised support services, which limits the autonomy given. The fragmented approach to primary schools in the UK appeared to affect how the headteachers found and accessed support, resulting in further accountability pressures, and cost implications for the schools.

Accountability pressures are further exacerbated via headteachers being made responsible for 'overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent' (DfE, 2020c, p.9; DfE, 2020b, p.13; DfE, 2020d, p.13). Finance and funding were key issues for all four schools when discussing Government policy and its impacts, reinforcing Wilkins' (2016, p.16) point that financial data is one aspect that can dominate 'the everyday work performed by headteachers'. This was apparent as Heidi stated:

The other thing that I'd say is cuts in funding definitely. I know the Government is saying that they're giving more money to every school, that's not being realised in the school budget at all. [...] I think it's the financial aspect of the school that is just so difficult. That really impacts in the everyday.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Heidi further explained the financial implications are felt throughout the school:

we have to be so careful with all that down to cuts and funding, and costs going up, [...] We're 9,000 pounds out of budget, out of pocket, because of the way it's calculated. We have to find that. Last year, there was a teaching assistant pay rise. Absolutely right, that they had it, but it wasn't centrally funded. It was in the middle of the year, You've got to provide this, and we haven't budgeted for it. We have to fund it. I think it's a bit of a fallacy this Government is giving record levels of spending to schools.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Heidi appeared to be facing many financial challenges shaping the role of the headteacher into that of 'corporate' leadership' (Thompson et al., 2022, p.100). There appeared to be excessive pressure concerning balancing the books and the impacts in the classroom. Heidi explained that they had reduced numbers of 'adults in the classroom' referring to the employment of LSAs. These financial demands appeared to be adding increased pressure and responsibility to the headteacher's position. Financial pressures relating to funding were echoed in the findings in Ashfield:

At the end of the day, we get funding, and we've got to make sure that we use that in a proper way and in the funding, it's getting tighter, and it's really just balancing everything.

(Barbara, Ashfield)

These conditions experienced by the schools align with Done and Murphy's (2018) observation that a reduction in funding, excessive workloads, and intensified accountability can lead to the responsabilisation of headteachers and schools. At the time of the interviews, there reportedly was a 4% real-term funding cut for primary schools between 2015 and 2018 (Belfield et al., 2018). The cuts in funding were also affecting other members of staff, as described by a teacher and an LSA at Ashfield:

the money side of things that's difficult. I know I'm not hugely aware of what goes on or not in those conversations, but the bits that fade down to us is that there's no money for this, there's no money for that, there's no money for the other.

(Taylor, Ashfield)

Funding, I think, is the main thing. We're being starved of money [...], that's the one that worries me. If I go to bed at night and you think, "Have I got a job next year and things like that." That's the only thing that really worries me about being within the school.

(Layla, Ashfield)

Layla's fear for job security is reflected in Webster's (2018) reporting of the record loss of teaching assistants in 2017 and 2018. This pressure and fear appear to be impacting wellbeing, echoing Ravalier et al.'s (2021) research that considers the impact of working conditions and the precarious nature of the position. The loss of learning support assistants in the classroom was already evident in Elmtree.

The increased accountability via finance and funding was shaping the schools' workforce. Portions of the school budgets were being used to recruit positions specifically to support the management of the schools. These positions reflect the neoliberalisation of schools needing to operate as businesses (Niesche and Thomson, 2017). As previously mentioned, Elmtree employed a data analyst to help manage and report performance data. Ashfield employed a business manager, illustrating the need for corporate neoliberal skills in schools (Thompson et al., 2022). Ashfield had the lowest number on roll but, as a stand-alone school, had decided to recruit a business manager. The business manager, Barbara, explained her position:

I run the business side of the school; it's really like any small business. I do HR, finance, health and safety facilities management. Really, I don't have a lot to do with children [...] I run the Ashfield school business.

(Barbara, Ashfield)

During the interview, Barbara was quite explicit on several occasions that the school was "a business". She did highlight the many demands that the school faced, but ultimately, for her, the school was a business:

There's just many demands on schools and teachers. They can't look after everybody all the time. At the end of the day, it's a business. I see that the school is a business. I know we're here to educate the children, but the children are our customers, parents are our customers in some ways, and I don't think that everyone sees it like that, but I certainly see that that is what it has to be now nowadays. We are here to offer a service.

(Barbara, Ashfield)

Barbara's views of schools being businesses demonstrate the changes in education due to a neoliberal discourse (Gunter, 2004; Niesche and Thomson, 2017). Barbara is explicit in viewing the school as a business that provides a service, yet this contrasted with the ethos and values of the headteacher, Hattie, who was intent on creating good citizens of the world. Hattie was even happy to support families of

children that had left the school, as for Hattie, the school was a central part of the community. The Board of Governors appeared to reflect Hattie's ethos of prioritising the children:

Do you buy the extra hundred books that you need for the library? What's more important? To us, at governors', it's more important that child get counselling. Rather than, the library gets more books because, basically, you can read on an iPad. There are enough books they might be a bit tatty. But the well-being of a child who really needs to talk to them is more important.

(Gary, Ashfield)

These differing viewpoints between Hattie, the governors and Barbara suggest a tension in the vision and aims for the school. As Ball et al. (2012, p.27) noted, there is a possibility for tension between the embedded school values and the prescribed Government policies of financial accountability.

This tension between the school's values and the prescribed Government policies concerning the training and employment of staff was less evident in Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale. The autonomous position of the headteachers appeared more in line with the school ethos and values, using their budget for staff training or the creation of positions that reflected the local context of the schools. Oakdale used its budget to train three Forest School teachers, two Emotional Learning Support Assistants (ELSAs) and a lunchtime coach. This demonstrated Holly's commitment to providing wide learning experiences. The addition of the ELSAs to the school staff was to support the challenging cohort who experienced isolation and disadvantage, reflective of the school's local context. Holly's approach has embraced the DfE (HTS, 2020, para 1) of leadership to create 'a positive and enriching experience of education for pupils.' Elmtree and Ivywood took a different approach to the employment and training of staff members reflecting the context of their school communities, which also experienced high levels of economic deprivation and had the additional demand of meeting the needs of a diverse pupil cohort. Both schools employed a family support worker and English as an Additional Language (EAL) support:

[We have a] full-time family support worker who helps to do some of the functions of social care, so you know that funding is reduced for social services and what they can offer.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

We've got a family support worker. Her remit isn't necessarily safeguarding. It is about support. That can be with all kinds of things.

(Diane, Ivywood)

We have three staff now just working for English as an Additional Language children, well, two teachers, one TA, not all full-time but just with that specific remit.

(Diane, Ivywood)

The role and function of the family support workers were primarily to work with the families of the children within the school (will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 9) and demonstrate the schools' endeavours for education as a means for social justice (Leithwood, 2021). In addition, funding for Elmtree and Ivywood was spent on translation services to ensure that their families could access the schools' communications. Furthermore, Ivywood also engaged a counsellor from a charitable organisation supporting children's mental health. Ivywood also employed, in their office team, a person with the remit to answer telephone calls from families, as an approachable contact point. These positions were outside of teaching and learning or management accountability roles but reflected the individual needs of the school context and the ethos of inclusion. Both schools used their autonomous positions to better 'respond to their local communities' (Thompson et al., 2022. p.99). Thompson et al. (2022, p.99) further advise that this type of autonomous approach has the potential to mitigate 'the effects of pernicious accountability measures and seemingly malevolent policy directives aimed at teaching and learning'. This expression of autonomy illustrates both schools' consideration of the whole families' needs, which went beyond teaching and learning in the classroom.

There was a further advantage for the headteachers to create job roles outside the classroom. Holly explained the benefits of having the ELSA:

That's why we did the ELSA training. Because prior to that, it would fall into my lap on top of my headteacher's role because I've got a teaching deputy. So we, it was worse before, believe you me, my ELSA, you can imagine what my door was like. It was sort of all the time.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly's need to train the ELSA to protect her time illustrated the many roles a headteacher must cover. As Dimmock (1999, p.442) observed, school leaders

experience 'tensions between competing elements of leadership, management and administration'. This was echoed in the recruitment choices of the additional job roles in all the participating schools, and all the headteachers commented on the need to protect their time from the day-to-day lower-order tasks. This aligns with both Dimmock's (1999) and Connolly et al.'s (2019, p.3) findings that accountability pressures have resulted in headteachers looking for ways to reduce lower-order duties and certain time-consuming responsibilities so that they can focus on the leadership of their school.

The headteacher's position is complex, with many demands on their leadership in the organisational management of the school. The research has highlighted that there are multiple challenges for headteachers navigating policy requirements, exacerbated by the continual reduction in LA support and the multiple types of school structures. The headteachers participating in this study noted the lack of support available to them, which prompted the recognition that the headteacher's position is often isolated. However, seeking wider support impacted school budgets due to the need to purchase additional services and create positions to ensure schools run effectively. Financing was a key issue raised by the headteachers in relation to accountability pressures as a result of funding cuts. The complex needs of managing the school and the isolated position of the headteacher could further imply the notion of responsabilisation echoing Peeters' (2013, p.585) notion of 'obligated citizens'. The behaviour of the headteachers demonstrated neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurialism, self-motivation and productivity (; Rose, 1999a; Ball, 2013; Dardot and Laval, 2014). The headteachers assumed responsibility not only for the school but also for the wider families of the children. Furthermore, the headteachers' accountability in terms of educational standards and management of the school invokes the notion of neoliberalisation of schools and schools as businesses. These types of responsibilities placed on the headteachers reflect the shift in the position to one of leadership (Gunter, 2004; Bush, 2007; Glatter, 2014; Gage and Smith, 2016). The responsabilisation of school leaders enabled an autonomous approach for the headteachers to respond to the local context and needs of their school. The headteachers' ethos and values were most apparent in responding to the local context.

6.5 Leadership and Governance in the local context of the school

The above section demonstrates how headteachers are accountable for the organisational management of their schools. The headteacher participating in this research experienced many pressures as a result of the cuts to school funding and the loss of services provided by the LA. However, within the pressures, there was also space for the headteachers to assume their autonomy in relation to employing wider staff members that were reflective of the needs of their individual schools. This final section will consider the headteacher's relationship with the wider governance of the school. It was apparent that each school had its individual approach to governing structures, which were influenced by the local context of each school.

Headteachers should be supported within their leadership positions by senior leadership teams and a board of governors (DfE, 2020b). All school leadership and governance teams are expected to include diverse stakeholders from staff, parents, local community members and representatives from the private sector (ibid.). The DfE (2020c) considers these stakeholders as being a vital part of any school leadership team. Governors are viewed as critical friends who should hold the school leaders to account for the decisions regarding the running of the school (DfE, 2020b). Often, schools look to the parents of their school communities to be an integral part of the governing board. Wilkins (2016, p.2) expresses the governors' remit as volunteers who are expected to provide "appropriate" challenges and support to senior school leaders, including in the school's financial management.

However, the burden of the financial everyday running of the school appeared to be assumed by the headteachers alone; this was most apparent in Elmtree. This burden of financial pressure could be due to the differing governing structure within each school. Heidi at Elmtree explained their specific structure due to being part of a MAT:

Yes, we do [have governors]. We don't have to, but we do have a governing body. They're now called an Academy Council. [...] their scheme of delegation has changed. They have slightly less accountability than before because we're directly accountable to the Board of Trustees, the Trust Board or the Board of Trustees. That's who we are responsible to. There are various mechanisms by which we report to them, and we are held accountable to them.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Heidi's interview focused more on the financial pressures she was experiencing (as discussed above), compared to the discussion with the other participating headteachers. Although Heidi had been made accountable to the Trust for the financial running of the school, the previous support mechanisms of a Board of Governors had been removed. This appeared to have intensified the financial pressures on Heidi, resulting in a form of responsabilisation for the financial running of the school (Done and Murphy, 2018). The Academy Council, as with a traditional Board of Governors, aims to recruit from the local community (Barton et al., 2006). The DfE (2020c, p.13) states that governors must "*have the skills required to contribute to effective governance and the success of the school*", which includes financial expertise. However, on the school tour, Heidi expressed difficulty recruiting members to the Academy Council with the required skills. Elmtree had a local Parent Governor in Leelah, also employed at the school as an LSA and a participant in the research. Despite her commitment to the school and skills in other areas, Leelah appeared to lack the required financial skills. Leelah's comments reflected a surprise at the financial pressures experienced by the school:

Yes, because everything just costs so much. From books to-- Just everything that goes into school-- just wow. Just how much they actually spend. It's amazing how we don't know anything like this. Budgeting and the staffing it just opened my eyes to a lot of things to think, wow.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Whilst there was some support from the Trust, Heidi appeared to bear the primary responsibility for understanding and managing the school finances. Similarly, this was an issue for Ivywood. Diane, on the school tour, also expressed that the local community did not have the required skills. Therefore, the school had to reach out to the wider business community to meet the requirements of the Governing Board. The experiences in Elmtree and Ivywood further emphasise the idea of primary schools reflecting a corporate managerialist approach (Ranson, 2011; James et al., 2013; Keddie, 2015; Wilkins, 2016; Young, 2016; Gobby and Niesche, 2019). Holly echoed this:

We have got one member of the community, but it's mostly parents. We don't get a lot of interest, that is a bit of a weakness for us. [...] We've got 10. We've

got a couple of vacancies. We are always looking. The idea would be to get somebody that's not got children within the school because, at the moment, we're a bit heavy in that respect, around that side of things. It's a case of just getting the governors that you can, really. It's not easy to recruit people because it is quite a commitment and quite a lot of responsibility.

(Holly, Oakdale)

The need for parents or local community members with wider skills to be strategic partners in relation to governance through the Governing Board was more problematic for the schools within deprived areas. Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale voiced a lack of business expertise within their community to be an effective part of the governing team. These schools had a strong ethos for social justice within the ethos and culture of the school to ensure the children's inclusion and success, but this appeared less evident in the discussion of parents in relation to positions as members of the Academic Council or the Governing Board. Davies (2011) highlighted that a 'network governance' approach was the ideal position, which should empower communities, thereby 'cultivating inclusive policy-making' (ibid., p.2). In addition, Davies' (2011) notion of 'network governance' was based on the principles of ethical virtues to bring about changes within a community. Yet this was not always realised within the schools. Leelah, the Parent Governor at Elmtree, did not seemingly view her role as strategic but more as an opportunity to learn about the school:

I've got to learn a lot of things that I didn't know within the school and how much hard work goes into it because when you are a parent, you just bring them [children] to the gate and you leave them, so you don't really know. That was just from how the school got money budgeted, how many staff they need and things like that. A lot of things that I got to learn that I didn't really know about at all.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Being a Parent Governor appeared to be a good opportunity for Leelah, as her initial involvement led to employment as a learning support assistant. However, in general, the approach to governance within the school appeared more to relate to that of a 'governance network', which Davies (2011) suggests as prevailing within institutions, perpetuating hierarchies, inequalities, and exclusions, which they were meant to replace. With reference to Davies' (2011) notion of hierarchies, when considering Leelah's position, it is likely that she does not feel empowered to hold the school to

account and could be co-opted by the headteacher into supporting her ideas. Throughout the interview, Leelah was passionate about the school and positive about Heidi's leadership. Leelah's final statement reveals her passion for the school but also a possible naivety: 'Our school is absolutely brilliant—the best school in the whole universe' (Leelah, Elmtree). Oakdale also had a similar Parent Governor who also had multiple roles within the school. Goldie described her positions:

I currently am the lead mid-day supervisor in this school. I'm also a Parent Governor at this school. I actively participate in the Friends of Oakdale Primary School, it's a charity - it's the PTA. I'm also the Looked After Children Governor in this school, as well. I'm part of the Business and Premises Committee within the governors.

(Goldie, Oakdale)

The data illustrate a potential tension for headteachers in schools in deprived areas in how they follow and enact Government policies that prescribe the need for business skills to hold the school to account. If these skills are not available, this may result in further responsabilisation for the running of the school by the headteacher.

The experience recruiting governors differed in Ashfield, where the Parent Governors, Gary and Gareth, were employed in professional and managerial fields. Both governors were able to integrate their wider skills and their professional acumen within their governing roles. This integration of professional skills reinforces the notion of entrepreneurial management of primary schools (Ranson, 2011; James et al., 2013; Keddie, 2015; Wilkins, 2016; Young, 2016; Gobby and Niesche, 2019). Ashfield embraced the DfE (2020c, p.13) advice of recruiting governors with the required skills to 'contribute to the success of the school'. However, whilst the parents expressed a desire to support their school and local community, they also acknowledged the potential personal benefits for their own children of being a governor:

I thought it would be quite good to have more involvement with the school where the kids go, benefit my kids. I'm glad I did become a governor.

(Gary, Ashfield)

Gary's acknowledgement of personal benefits illustrates the idea of a neoliberal entrepreneurial subject aiming to create an advantage for their child (Oria et al., 2007; Ball, 2013; Dardot and Laval, 2014). This form of parenting also demonstrates the

internalised influence of governmentality (Foucault, 2010), ensuring that one's child has the best education, thereby conforming to the values of a neoliberal society. However, while Gary and Gareth stated the personal benefit of being a governor, both were clear on how time-consuming their positions were, especially with school visits and recruitment.

Of the four Parent Governors interviewed, only Gareth and Gary were clear on their remit of holding the school to account. Both initially presented what Wilkins (2016, p.4) describes as a 'professionally driven culture' within the interview in general, and when asked to describe their positions and responsibilities within the Governing Board. This professional, business-like approach contrasted with that of Leelah and Goldie, who were more informal and represented, parents volunteering to help out, which Wilkins (2016, p.4) describes as a 'traditional' approach to school governance. Gareth and Gary reflected on Government expectations to hold school leaders to account for the performance management of staff, and for pupil progress and attainment (DfE, 2020b, p.13; DfE, 2020c, p.9; DfE, 2020d, p.13). Gary explained how they analysed the performance data:

We still look at the data. We still spend time evaluating the data and presenting it. Very objective - and judgment from where they [children] are because of that put pressures on to perform. [...] We do look at the data. We still have training on the data [...]

(Gary, Ashfield)

In one sense, the governors were demonstrating Ball's (2016) notion that they are doing the work of the state at an institutional level by bringing their gaze on the practices of the headteacher. However, as with Hattie, both Gary and Gareth did not fully embrace the performative measures as prescribed by the Government. Gary expressed this about Ashfield's recent Ofsted inspection: 'It would be very easy to get an Outstanding school. I think we worked hard to maintain a Good, rather than to get an Outstanding.' There was also resistance to holding the school to account based on data concerning pupil performance.

By discussing cases and the reference of a particular students. You recognise the significant influence of the situation because of the view that Hattie has,

which is to take students who have been to three, four different schools previously, that have been expelled [...] She's very clear about how she's going to put the support around that student. Her own time and energy. She'll find ways to connect with that student.

(Gary, Ashfield)

Gary's understanding and willingness to accept the differences in pupil performance suggests upholding the caring ethos expected by parents within a primary school (Sturrock, 2021). There appears to be a wider opportunity in the governance of the school when the governors and the headteachers share the same ethos and culture. This shared approach was apparent in Ashfield, which enabled supportive and understanding discussion concerning performance data and looking beyond the data to uphold the school's inclusive approach. Gareth expressed this:

Absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt, the anomalies in the data, the individual students, and their abilities. You talk about the data, but they know the faces and the students and the influences that they have on them. [We are] Very value centred.

(Gareth, Ashfield)

The two governors also expressed their support for the school's values through various initiatives, which Gareth described as a form of 'socially engineering for a kind community around the school'. This shared approach aligns with Wilkins' and Gobby's (2021, p.311) notion that governance can work formally and informally as a means 'to shape the way organisations and individuals conduct themselves'. The embedded school ethos worked throughout the school organisation at all levels through management and into the shaping of the children. Gareth and Gary were critical of schools they had visited that did not demonstrate this sense of shared ethos and values and only concentrated on data. Policy enactment in Ashfield reinforces Ball et al.'s (2012) notion of the complexities at play in how policy interpretation is multifaceted and includes the histories, local context, and the people, which can work to recontextualise the policies in practice. Rather than the governors being agents of the state within Ashfield, they were more focused on the community of the schools and upholding the school's ethos.

Effective governance of schools should depend on senior leaders being held to account by Governing Bodies or, in the case of Elmtree, by the Academy Board.

Schools are advised to recruit corporate or business skills from their local communities to volunteer as part of these Governing Bodies to enable a school to be successful in their performance and financially demonstrate their value for money to the taxpayer (DfE, 2020b). This business skills approach was problematic within the schools in economically disadvantaged areas. The volunteer governors worked more to support the headteacher in their choices, rather than be a critical friend. Instead of the governors holding the school to account in Elmtree and Ivywood, this role appeared to be a further responsibility for the headteachers. Therefore, this could create further isolation for the headteacher and increase their responsabilisation in the running of the school. Ashfield did fulfil the notion of a corporate Governing Body, with the governors aware of their responsibility to hold the school to account for finances and performance. However, the governors tended to side with the headteacher concerning a focus on the needs of the child and upholding the schools' values, rather than striving for continued improvements. The self-governance of schools appeared to create a space for resistance to a strict, neoliberal rhetoric in primary education.

6.6 Summary

This first chapter has focused on leadership as it is integral to all the findings of this research. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the role of the headteacher is onerous, with the school leader shaping the school in many diverse ways. The headteacher set the school's culture, ethos and values, based on their personal ethos and values, reinforcing Foucault's (2007, p.389) notion of 'conduct of conduct' the 'governing the self to govern others'. The ethos and values of the headteacher influenced how the schools enacted or resisted policies. However, there were competing ideals within the headteacher's approach, in part conforming to neoliberal rhetoric by reflecting entrepreneurialism but also demonstrating the notion of ethics of care. These competing ideals were evident in two distinct areas: managerial aspects of running the school and the care of the staff and pupils. When the values and ethos of the headteacher and the Governing Board aligned, this created space to respond to the needs of the local community. The business aspect of running a school appeared to conform to neoliberal rhetoric, but the neoliberal approach was resisted in protecting teachers and students from accountability pressures.

The headteachers focused on creating a caring approach to the school culture in relation to the staff, children, and the wider families. The school leaders needed to demonstrate business acumen but still maintained a caring approach, which resulted in creating a split role for the headteacher between aspects of compliance and resistance to neoliberal ideals. These competing demands appeared to further responsabilise the headteacher in navigating between the two positions. However, the neoliberal approach of entrepreneurialism created a space for headteachers to assume autonomy in running their schools. The headteachers demonstrated their wider autonomy in responding to the local needs of their school in areas such as the employment of additional staff with responsibilities beyond teaching and learning. Whilst the headteacher should have support from the Governing Board, this was only sometimes apparent due to that lack of business skills in the wider community. This appeared to isolate the headteachers further and created additional managerial pressures. These varied demands, combined with the isolated position of the headteacher, create spaces which result in the further responsabilisation of the headteacher.

The following chapter will focus on the complex nature of the school-parent relationship. It will consider the binary discourse created by Government education policies. The school's ethos and culture are apparent in how schools build successful relationships or not with families. There is a wider discussion on how schools remove communication barriers to mitigate social justice. The final section focuses on the barriers to school attendance.

CHAPTER 7. THE COMPLEXITIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE SCHOOL-PARENT RELATIONSHIP

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 discussed the onus of leadership in relation to the primary school, and the individual nature of the headteacher's position. The headteachers' own personal ethos and values shaped the schools and were evident in the compliance or resistance to neoliberal approaches in education. The previous discussion of the headteacher's role in setting the school's ethos and culture will also be relevant in this chapter, focusing on the complexities of the school-parent relationship. The chapter discusses four sub-themes; the discourse of the middle-class parent; the paradox of parental involvement and engagement; complexities of communication; and attendance and parental engagement. A further discussion will follow this in relation to challenging the discourse of parents within policy. As previously mentioned, the data gathered were predominantly from the school staff.

There is much literature concerning the school-parent⁷ relationship and expectations of parental engagement with their child's education. Parental involvement and engagement with their child's education is stated as having 'a large and positive impact on children's learning' (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011, p.2). Extensive research has shown the need for better parental engagement within schools. However, there are several reported barriers to the required engagement for many families, often those from lower socio-economic groups and parents with English as an additional language. This chapter will explore the extent to which these polarised positions apply to the schools within this study and how the discourse could create further barriers to the school-parent relationship

7.2 The discourse of the middle-class parent

Throughout all the school interviews, there appeared to be complicated relationships with the parents. The degree of involvement and engagement varied between the schools, as did the schools' perceptions of the parents. The discussions concerning schools' perceptions of parents were often contradictory, viewing parents as

⁷ The term parent in the context of this research is a generalised label for all care giving roles and children in looked after environments.

supportive or problematic. When participants were asked about their school community, the responses related to the parents and wider families of the pupils, rather than the local community. Each school had an individual response when asked about how the parents and wider families were part of the school community. Reflecting the literature, there appeared to be many barriers and challenges to parental involvement and engagement within a child's education (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). This was evident in all four schools. However, some of the schools were able to embrace the challenges and create good relationships with parents.

Of the four schools that participated in the study, Ashfield's cohort could be the most closely described as middle-class. The literature suggests that it is middle-class values that are ought after in Government document discourses, with middle-class parents associated with higher levels of parental engagement and involvement, and with high expectations for their children (Reay et al., 2008; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Ule et al., 2015; Creasy and Corby, 2019). Middle-class parents are positioned as reflecting the neoliberal notion of a consumer and active chooser within education (Reay et al., 2008; Whitty, 2008; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Ball, 2013; Francis and Hutchings, 2013; Gunter, 2018). This form of neoliberal education in which parents are consumers was most evident in Ashfield. Ashfield was the only school where I was able to interview parents who the school did not employ. Paige was a parent with two children attending Ashfield and demonstrated being an active chooser (Reay, 2017):

I picked the village massively for the school. Yes, it's not perfect, but I really like it. Yes. I literally moved house to go to that school in the end.

(Paige, Ashfield)

Paige could enact her privileged position by moving house to ensure that her children attended the school that encompassed her values and aspirations. This invokes the assertion of Oria et al. (2007) that neoliberal education policies legitimise parental choice and self-interest to gain a competitive advantage for their child. Paige further explained the reasons for her choice of school:

One thing that put me off a school where we used to live was that they didn't have a breakfast club and an after-school club. Rightly or wrongly, I made an assumption that that suggests that there's lots of people that don't work [...] I don't think that's necessarily real life, and I don't want my kids to-- it sounds awful. I don't want them grown up thinking that's okay [...] Ultimately, I am completely middle-class, and I'm okay with that, but I would rather they were in the real world.

(Paige, Ashfield)

Paige's opinion of the real world demonstrated her middle-class ideals, including the notion that being a successful participant in society is equated with work. Paige's assumptions about other parents not working appeared to her as a choice, and there was no consideration of why parents might not be working. Her comments align with of Raco's (2009, p.43) notion that aspirational politics had been 'infused' within a middle-class consciousness, which also aligns with the wider Government discourse in relation to perceiving not working with lower aspirations (Field, 2010; House of Common, 2014; DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2014c; DfE, 2017; Reay, 2017). As such, Paige's role as a parent was linked to notions of parental care via choosing a school that best reflected her version of the real world, with education being a prerequisite to a successful future (Rose, 1999b; Oria et al., 2007; Ule et al., 2015). Heidi echoed these opinions at Elmtree:

I think it comes down to who's employed in a family, and what their aspirations are. If there are generations in a family where they haven't worked, then there's less likely to be those aspirations of academic achievement.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Paige's and Heidi's comments seemingly echo Government discourse in relation aspirations and social class. However, as Reay (2017) asserts discourse of high aspirations does not translate to high attainment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet the Government discourse was widely accepted in the interviews. Toni, a foundation stage teacher at Oakdale, also echoed the previous comments:

You've got a real middle-class chunk of people who are there supporting their children. Their children are ready to learn and doing lots of nice extracurricular things. Then you've got other children who aren't supported at all.

(Toni, Oakdale)

Throughout Toni's interviews, economic disadvantages and lack of parental engagement were entwined:

There's a core of ten children that don't read at home. We have a maths challenge as well, don't do those. They are the ten poorest children in the class. Every intervention group that we do is always this group of children. [...] The two very lowest children in our class [...] are the children from the least supportive backgrounds. There's a direct correlation with it really. It is a real battle to get them engaged.

(Toni, Oakdale)

Toni's experiences echo the discourse that parental engagement is essential to a child's success in school, in line with findings by Goodall and Vorhaus (2010). Most of the Oakdale interviews featured the perceived failure of some parents to engage with reading to their child. Yet throughout Toni's interview, there was no acknowledgement beyond deprivation as to that lack of engagement. The place of blame for the lack of engagement, and the choice not to be in work was levelled at individual parents. The discourse concerning deprivation echoes wider policies (DfE, 2014b; 2014c; 2016a; 2017), placing the responsibility on the family to ensure they enact their rights and responsibilities to be 'hard working' (Clarke, 2005, p.451). Parents perceived as not hard-working are often judged by those who perceive themselves to be so, as was demonstrated by Paige. This demonisation of parents by their peers was an issue in Oakdale. Holly explained the following situation:

We've had another one [parent] who was very, very outspoken about Pupil Premium. She was talking on Facebook about how it was completely unfair that she worked and she didn't get any benefit from Pupil Premium, and that people who are lazy, etcetera, got Pupil Premium and didn't have to pay for anything.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Such comments echo De Benedictis' (2012) and Jensen and Tyler's (2012) notion of the demonisation of parents from lower socio-economic groups, who are targeted in public culture. This acceptance of the demonisation of certain parents aligns with Foucault's (1984) notion of governmentality in which modes of subjectivation and objectivation in institutional contexts act upon behaviour to shape, direct, and modify conduct. Parents that fail to modify their conduct are seen as lacking, or within a deficit model, reflecting neoliberal modes of governance. This makes parents

increasingly responsible for the education of their child, which also fails to acknowledge social, economic, ethnic, and political obstacles faced by families (Bower and Griffin, 2011; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017). Therefore, some parents can enact power and agency within the education system, and some are further demonised. This can perpetuate the notion of middle-class parents being valued within the education system.

7.3 The paradox of parental involvement and engagement

The previous section discussed how parents and schools echo the middle-class discourse evident within policies. The continued upholding of middle-class values as the ideal can result in lower-income families being demonised in schools. From the literature, Ashfield's cohort presenting as middle-class would suggest that there should be a high level of parental involvement and engagement (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Francis and Hutchings, 2013; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017; Creasy and Corby, 2019). However, engagement within the school was mixed. Governor Gary described his understanding of parents' opinions of the school:

Parts of it are enthusiastic. Parts of it resigned. Parts of it are critical, bordering on the pathologically negative about the school. And that pathological negative is probably about maybe five to ten per cent. I think it's probably sixty to seventy parents that are positive and supportive of the school, passively supportive. They don't get involved in all the events. Generally, on any given day, if you asked a parent in the playground, they'd probably say that the school is good.

(Gary, Ashfield)

Gary's statement does not reflect a school with a high level of parental engagement, regardless of the middle-class cohort. This appears in contrast to the literature, which highlights parents from low socio-economic or minority ethnic groups being less engaged (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Whilst most parents at Ashfield appeared happy with the school, parental engagement by the majority is highlighted as 'passively supportive', which does not illustrate Epstein's (2001; 2018) framework of *Six Types of Parental Involvement*. Epstein (2001; 2018) considered that parents should be active within the school community for a successful partnership between

school and home to benefit the child. The headteacher echoed the notion of Ashfield's parents being passive:

It is parents who I think - the culture we're in, it's very much a take culture and not a given culture. They want to come to the show, but they're not willing to help.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

Hattie appears to blame a change in the wider culture of society as responsible for the shift in parents' lack of active support within school activities. Hattie does not seemingly take responsibility for the lack of engagement, or recognise it as due to any shortcoming of the school. This view of Hattie contrasts with Ofsted's (2021) expectations that it is the position of the school leader to engage with the school community. Leithwood et al. (2020) considered that cultural contexts can significantly affect engagement. However, often in the literature, cultural context refers to ethnic minority communities and how to engage and work with families. This suggests a failure in neoliberal forms of education, in which parents perceive themselves only as consumers of education, rather than as active partners with the school. Therefore, there may need to be further consideration of how school leaders with middle-class cohorts can develop active parental engagement.

There are many perceived benefits of parental involvement and engagement, which requires commitment from both the school and the parent. Epstein's (2001; 2018) framework was based on the need for parental involvement as a two-way partnership between the school and the family. However, the idea of a two-way partnership was not evident in Ashfield, with the sense of both sides feeling taken for granted. For example, Pat, a parent and also head of the PTA, commented:

There's this one friend of mine who used to go and volunteer every week once or twice a week. Going and reading, going swimming, really put a lot into it. But she ended up getting fed up because again, it's not thanks but recognition that you couldn't do that without her. The school takes her for granted and just sees us almost not as equal. [...] It's a case of just, "Thanks for that, bye."

(Pat, Ashfield)

The quotation suggests a distinct barrier between the school and the parents, in contrast to Torres and Murphy's (2016, p.208) recommendation that parents should be treated 'as citizens of the school community, not mere tourists'. Pat further highlighted the issues of the school lacking a community due to the hierarchical communication between differing groups:

Top-down and lack of communication between the parties involved. The head, the teachers, the parents, the PTA. Then you got the divisive parents on the playground.

(Pat, Ashfield)

Pat further stated that the headteacher not communicating between differing parties within the school, such as between the teachers and the PTA, resulted in the PTA feeling resented and suggesting the school had no respect for them. Again, whilst communication and volunteering are considered essential to parental involvement, according to Epstein's model (2001; 2018), this does not appear to be the case in Ashfield. The concept of resentment seemed to flow both ways, not only between the parents and the school but also between the school and the parents. This was expressed across several interviews, with Hattie commenting on parent expectations of the school:

I think that expectations have changed of people. From parents [...] Parents are more demanding, parents are expecting the school to do things for their children that parents might have done by themselves. [...] parents' expectations have changed a lot.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

Daisy, the deputy headteacher, further commented on parents not attending events, creating a feeling of resentment from the teachers:

I suppose one of the issues, one of the things that sometimes we feel a little grieved about, I suppose with the parent body, is that we do- sort of try to put on workshops about certain things and certain things, and then not well-attended. I don't think it's right to interpret that as a lack of interest by parents because I don't think it is. I think you can either say it's actually a testament to trust.

(Daisy, Ashfield)

These comments from participants at Ashfield suggest barriers between the teachers and the parents, with feelings of blame and resentment being placed on either side for not meeting assumed expectations. It is possible that the school and the parents have not expressed their day-to-day expectations of each party. The home-school agreement (School Standards and Framework Act, 1998) has the purpose of expressing parental responsibilities and the school's expectations of its pupils but fails to give space for parents to express their expectations of the school. The perception of blame between the school and the parents reinforces the notion of the politics of blame between the Government and schools (Thrupp, 2009; Alexander, 2014). Alexander (2014) noted blame deflection between schools and the Government, with policymakers blamed for imposing unwelcomed changes on schools.

There appears to be a similar process between the school and the parents at Ashfield, with each party blaming the other for not meeting the day-to-day expectations of the school-parent relationship. The comments from Ashfield align with Humphreys' (2017) point that there could be a potential contradiction in involving parents in school life. Humphreys (2017) further related this challenge in involving parents to neoliberal education policies that position the majority of parents within a deficit paradigm, removing them to the school gate (ibid.). Tara explained that parents at Ashfield, whilst not physically removed as far as the school gate, had been prevented from directly accessing classrooms by a physical barrier being installed. Tara implies this was needed due to parents not respecting staff or the classroom:

Communication on both sides. A bit of give and take on both sides. I don't agree that parents should just be able to barge in through the backdoor into your classroom, especially when there's children in there and start spouting off, but they can do that, or they have been able to do that. We've now got our fencing around a bit. They have to go through the foyer now. [...]

(Tara, Ashfield)

Ashfield's experience of parents making demands and feeling that they can walk into a classroom is reflective of a neoliberal ideology that positions parents as consumers. Parents who view themselves as consumers may have changed expectations to be more active in their child's learning and development (Ule et al., 2015). This reinforces Vincent and Maxwell's (2016) notion that there is an increased responsabilisation on

parents due to neoliberal imperatives, which has resulted in heightened anxiety for parents, as responsibility has been devolved to them from the state, to ensure their child receives a good education. These expectations from parents focusing on learning may be misaligned with the extra events that schools put on, which do not benefit their child directly. Government discourse promotes the notion of good parenting via the idealisation of the middle-class parent within reports such as School performance and parental choice of school (Allen et al, 2014). This concluded that 'middle classes tend to have access to higher quality information on schools and be more adept at using it' (ibid., p.28). Within Ashfield, neither school nor parents appear to benefit from these middle-class values within the context of their relationship.

In parallel to the upholding of middle-class parenting in education, there is much literature that reflects the notion of other parents being positioned within a deficit paradigm (Holloway and Pimlott Wilson, 2011; De Benedictis, 2012; DfE, 2014b; 2014c; 2016a; 2017). The deficit paradigm is considered to result in barriers between parents and the school (ibid.). This was most evident within the interviews at Oakdale, where participating teachers presented a general impression that parents did not trust them:

I think that parents' view of teachers has changed over the years, and that's something that irritates me quite a lot. I spoke to governors about it--Our last governors' meeting was that parents seem to be quite-- They don't trust us.

(Dora, Oakdale)

Toni mirrored Dora's comments on trust, but also related the loss of trust by parents to issues of trust in wider society:

That's becoming increasingly common that parents don't trust us. [...] Because we are the first point of contact, you find these days that a lot of people just don't want to let their children go, and they therefore don't trust us. [...]. That's a trust issue again, isn't it? I suppose it's because the parents that we're dealing with have got trust issues with every authority figure, and we're just another one.[...] But I do think for us; it is hard to get them to trust that we're not out to be horrible to their children. I think that is a challenge for us.

(Toni, Oakdale)

The issues concerning trust within Oakdale created barriers for the teachers in their interaction with parents. There was, as experienced in Ashfield, a sense of a mutual lack of trust and blame between parents and teachers. However, the feeling of blame and a lack of trust between the school and parents was not evident in Elmtree and Ivywood, even though both schools were in deprived locations. Hila expressed her definition of the school community being a single entity:

We are the community, and the community is us. It's a symbiotic-- It's not even that. We're all one. We're all part of the one thing.

(Hila, Ivywood)

This approach aligns with Torres and Murphy's (2016, p.203) communities of parental engagement, in which the school–family relationship is considered 'anchored in understandings of schools as communities'. This was also noted in the DfE document *Freedom to Lead, a study of outstanding primary school leadership* (Matthews et al. (2014). Furthermore, Torres and Murphy (2016) advised that the school leader can 'cultivate to promote membership, partnership and ownership' (ibid.). This reflected Ivywood and Elmtree's wider approach to families, which appears to remove the 'them and us' barrier between the school and the parents experience in Ashfield and Ivywood.

Whilst this research focuses on the school-parent relationship, there was less evidence of parent-parent relationships impacting the school-parent relationship and the school community. Hattie noted that prior to the widespread use of social media, parents gossiped in the playground, which was easier and quicker to identify and respond to. More recently, due to the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp parent groups, the school was unaware of issues being raised. These parent social media groups appeared to be the cause of further barriers between the school and parents, as Hattie identified:

I've got a group of parents who are on social media and going through the school that are quite vociferous. That has caused a lot of disruption between parents. Some parents were having arguments last year on WhatsApp.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

I feel as though that there's a lot of moaning-- People complain and voice their complaints more and more on here [FaceBook] than they would -- Just because they feel that they can do it.

(Barbara, Ashfield)

Oakdale experienced particular issues concerning social media parent groups, which compound issues of teachers not feeling trusted by parents to care for their children.

Deputy head Dora highlighted a recent case:

We get a lot of parents that that will say to us that their child is not safe at school. [...] We had an incident in foundation stage very recently where there was - a WhatsApp group had been started up. Some of the parents were complaining that their children were being bullied.

(Dora, Oakdale)

Eoin also noted an issue from both the parents' perspective as well as his understanding, as a staff member, of the school's position:

My wife that made this WhatsApp group for EYFS. So many ladies like talking and badmouthing, and you think, "Just tell it to the teacher. Don't be so-" I don't know. You should just talk to the teacher, not just sit on the phone and moan about your child coming home with dirty fingernails every day. Well, talk, communicate, don't use social media.

(Eoin, Oakdale)

This approach to parents discussing issues with other parents could be due to a lack of confidence in parents to approach the teacher, reflecting Rodriguez et al.'s (2014) point that parents' low self-efficacy can affect their school engagement. However, this was also an issue at Ashfield, where parents could be described as having educational knowledge and agency due to middle-class values and experiences (Reay, 2017). Discussion groups on social media platforms appear to have created more barriers to engagement and involvement for some families in their child's education. The experiences at Ashfield and Oakdale appear in contrast to Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) findings that there had been an improvement in the relationship between schools and families over time and that social media platforms had improved communication. This appears as a paradox to the neoliberal school-parent relationship. The parents using social media to complain about the school is reflective of the notion of the marketplace of education, whereby the parent as a consumer feels

able to complain but does not appear to feel empowered to hold the school to account. Blackmore and McNae (2021, p.250) considered it a school leadership responsibility to know the community and have 'the capacity to listen and to encourage initiative'. However, the school leadership in Ashfield and Oakdale did not appear to assume responsibility for addressing parents' problematic use of social media.

Elmtree's and Ivywood's cohorts were from deprived areas, yet the schools did not experience the same issues concerning the engagement of parents or their use of social media parent groups. Both schools had a strong culture and ethos, which is considered a positive way to remove barriers (Roffey, 2013; Mathews et al., 2014; Torres and Murphy, 2016; Forde and Torrance, 2017). The schools' discourse concerning parents was more respectful and inclusive in tone and language choice than was evident in Ashfield and Oakdale. A variety of staff members at Ivywood demonstrated their responsibility to build relationships with parents:

Knowing children individually families. I'm out most days on the gate in the morning because I like parents to know that I'm there and that they matter.

(Hila, Ivywood)

With every family, you've got to find a way to build trust, a way to respect their culture, to learn about their culture and all of that then to help them feel secure and part of the wider community. Then that slowly trickles down into-- It just helps them support the child to make sure they attend.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

The Roma families, because we work with them, we try to appreciate their culture, bring it into our teaching and into the books we read. Their language it's on display, they feel valued and welcomed, and that trust is there.

(Diane, Ivywood)

The importance of building trust was also evident in Elmtree with the employment of Leoš from the Slovak community with his Eastern European language skills and understanding of the community. Leoš stated that the parents put lots of trust in me. Heidi explained that Leoš had a school mobile telephone so parents could call and speak to someone they trust and who understood their culture, values and concerns. The approaches by Elmtree and Ivywood reinforce Boutte and Johnson's (2014) and Torres and Murphy's (2016, p.208) that welcoming parents into a school and

demonstrating respect in their interactions with parents can remove barriers and increase engagement. Elmtree's and Ivywood's cohorts were diverse, which was in contrast to Ashfield and Oakdale; the presence of different cultural values may further influence the school-parent relationship, as Toni, currently in Oakdale, reflected her own prior experience at another school:

In some schools, in a different community, for example. My placement in Leicester was all EAL children, so a very big Muslim community. The teacher would go out, and she'd say, "You're not reading at home with your child. If you don't read, she won't be able to read. You need to do it." Because they were so respectful of the teachers, they would be like, "We'll do it. We'll definitely do it." They'd do it with bells on.

(Toni, Oakdale)

Toni's experience was also echoed that of Heidi's. On the school tour, Heidi explained due to the diverse cohort within the school, parents were very supportive of their children's education, unlike what she described as schools in deprived white working-class areas. Heidi explained that the school had worked to achieve the engagement:

We're very well supported, but we've had to really chase. We worked out last year that we had 100% parents attend parents evening, because we chased, and chased, and chased. [...] It just shows that families are really aspirational for their children

(Heidi, Elmtree)

This sentiment was echoed by Fearne, who stated 'our families are just so grateful for whatever their children are achieving and the opportunities we're giving our children'. The findings are in contrast to the literature. Both Barker (2014) and Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggested that being from an ethnic minority group and having English as an additional language were barriers to parental engagement. Elmtree and Ivywood have a large cohort of families with English as an additional language, but the interview data suggested that the schools had achieved a trusting relationship with parents. This trust could be attributed to the leadership, which embodied a strong culture and ethos of inclusion and respect. Therefore, there appears to be a paradox in parental engagement as the schools within deprived areas fostered a stronger sense of engagement than those with a middle-class cohort.

7.4 Complexities of communication

I have considered above the paradox of parental engagement in schools, which policy suggests would be higher in parents from middle-class backgrounds. However, this was not always evident in the schools studied, where an overriding factor was how the schools engaged with parents, or not, to facilitate engagement. Throughout the interviews, a key area of discussion related to communication with parents. Communication is considered vital to parental involvement and engagement (Epstein, 2001; 2018; Baker, 2014; Schneider and Arnot, 2018). Each school had a different approach to the relationship with the parents, and communication was either a barrier or a success to engaging parents with the school. Communication was perceived as an issue within Ashfield and Oakdale:

We communicate a lot with parents over Twitter, through text, and through the website. I find it difficult to know how more to communicate with parents, but some parents still say that they don't feel like we communicate with them. I don't know what other means we can use to communicate.

(Hattie, Ashfield)

I type up a newsletter and post that, explaining everything we're doing in the week ahead and what we're learning. Any special events like, "Today is a French day." Anything they need to bring with them. There's no reason that they could say, "We don't know what's going on".

(Toni, Oakdale)

Ashfield and Oakdale appeared to use differing formats of communication, including technology. However, in contrast to Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) research, which suggests technology had improved communication and was more accessible for parents, this did not appear to be the case at Ashfield and Oakdale. According to Hattie, some parents were not satisfied with the school's communication. Pat, a parent, highlighted the contrasting views of the school's communication:

It's believed we have a communication problem with the school, but I think the school is quite good. They send texts, emails, newsletters, and things go home in the book bags, but everybody's got the excuse of, "I didn't know. I didn't see it."

(Pat, Ashfield)

Pat's comments illustrate the one-sided nature of the school's communication. This was also the case with Oakdale's newsletter. The comments are echo Schneider and

Arnot's (2018) argument that school communication is linear or one-sided, placing responsibility on the parents to adapt. Whilst various messages are clearly passed from the school to the parents in multiple formats, this does not appear to be perceived as meaningful communication between the school and parents. Consistent with Baker's (2014) findings, it seems in Ashfield and Oakdale that there is a mismatch in the schools' and parents' communication expectations. The version of communication expressed by Ashfield and Oakdale is more of a form of information-sharing about events and requirements, rather than a two-way communication process. This one-sided communication may create further barriers between the school and the parents.

Although Elmtree and Ivywood were in deprived areas, the schools did not position families within a deficit model. Both schools sought to remove the barriers by embracing the wider families and their culture. Both schools actively sought to employ from the local communities to facilitate better communication. In contrast to the issues raised of technology creating possible barriers in communication at Ashfield and Oakdale, are the positive experiences at Elmtree. These reflect Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) research, which asserts a positive shift in communication due to changes in technology that this school has embraced. Communication was considered a two-way process, which utilised various approaches to engagement with parents. Elmtree utilised technology as a means of communication, to remove barriers between school and the home. Leelah explained of a translation app the school had invested in:

They can put on there the language that you actually speak, and it translates over. It's actually been the best way of communicating both ways, because not every parent can come to school in the morning or after school. If there's anything that they are concerned about, they want to know, it's a message that they can just send through to each other [...] class teachers can put in images and things like that too.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Elmtree's approach with the translation technology embraced the importance of two-way communication as opposed to the one-way flow from the school to the parent, which Schneider and Arnot (2018) identified causes misunderstandings with families. Schneider and Arnot's (2018) research was aimed at migrant families with

communication needs, which caused a lack of understanding by teachers of pupils and family circumstances. Elmtree and Ivywood addressed these issues through their inclusive approach to building relationships and celebrating the diversity in their community. Leelah explained the usefulness of raising an awareness of the differing languages spoken within the school:

We also have here every month the language of the month in the school. A couple of months ago, it was Somali, so every class had different words of Somali, and they needed to translate. That broke a lot of barriers, and it helped the parents as well as the teachers to understand and interpret as well.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Family support worker Fiona at Ivywood similarly explained the importance of embracing the differing cultures within the school:

Me, myself and some of the parents we're going to do a big Eid party, not just for the children but for the families. Some music, some Mehndi, some nice foods and beautiful clothes because we do lots and lots for the customs.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

Fiona further emphasised the importance of informal meetings with parents to remove barriers:

It's about ensuring that everybody meets everybody. Say, "I'll have open classroom, a nice cup of tea, a couple of nice biscuits, and you meet the teacher so that next year, you're not going to think, "I can't speak to him about Joe's homework." Because you don't know me.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

Elmtree and Ivywood's approaches reinforce Torres and Murphy's (2016) assertion that it is the school's responsibility to facilitate and set up communication systems to forge trusting relationships. Leelah attributed the change in approach at Elmtree to the new headteacher, Heidi's leadership decision to recruit staff from the local community to encourage two-way communication. Leelah explained:

Well, we've got loads of Slovaks parents here and children here. We've got Leoš who translates a lot for them [...] For the Somali, they've got me. Punjabi, there's a teacher here. [...]. Sometimes we do like a three-way conversation, where somebody that speaks Arabic, or somebody that speaks Somali and you've got me, I'll translate for the Somali person to tell the Arabic person.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Leelah further highlighted that whilst there were staff to translate for parents, Heidi's ethos of inclusion was evident in how she would strive to communicate with all parents:

Heidi, for example, makes them feel so welcome to everything. Sometimes, they don't even need me to translate because she will break everything down tooth and nail for them to actually understand.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Heidi's approach illustrates the notion of ethical leadership (Leithwood, 2021) by being responsive to the differing communities, ensuring that all parents are listened to and understood. This inclusive approach appeared embedded and echoed the assertion of Khalida et al. (2016) that school leaders, when determined and culturally responsive, can create welcoming spaces for students and their families. However, Heidi's apparent ease in successfully creating a welcoming space for all contrasted with Khalida et al.'s (ibid.) finding that it is challenging to achieve this within a diverse and marginalised context. Heidi's determination appeared to have overcome perceived barriers to creating positive relationships with families categorised as diverse and marginalised. Leoš highlighted how Heidi had been a force for positive change:

Heidi made lots of changes to the school. Also, that I'm, as a part of the community, that makes a lot of difference for the kids so they can go on the trips as well and the support that the families have interacting with the school more often than they would in the past. I would say that's a really big bonus for the school as well.

(Leoš, Elmtree)

Leelah also explained that Heidi's personality and manner removed barriers:

A lot of them [families] sometimes are worried about things, and they think not to ask, or they don't want to come and ask, but she's always got a smile on her face, doesn't she, Heidi? Yes. They always could just come here and just ask for any help or extra support whenever they need it.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

Elmtree's and Ivywood's success reflects Braun and Maguire's (2020) conclusion that leadership/headship style, rather than any other contextualised factors, can

significantly affect policy interpretation and enactment within primary schools. This supports the findings of Torres and Murphy (2016) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018) that culturally responsive leadership can improve school-parent relationships regardless of socio-economic factors. In contrast, the discourse of many Government policies positions parents in a deficit model due to their socio-economic circumstances, placing the onus on parents to adapt to the school system. However, the evidence in this study from Elmtree and Ivywood highlights that communication barriers can be removed with an ethos and culture that embraces the wider family regardless of perceived categorisation.

7.5 Attendance and parental engagement

The above themes have sought to highlight and challenge policy discourse in relation to families from specific socio-economic groups. In some cases, the headteachers challenged these labels, creating an ethos of respect and understanding within their school communities. Attendance is often viewed as an issue for schools with high levels of deprivation. This was reflected in the schools in this study.

Attendance is considered an important aspect of a child's success in school. This area forms the basis of increasing Government policy focus. The DfE (2015) states:

Good behaviour and attendance are essential to children's educational prospects. These measures are permissive and it is for individual governing bodies and local authorities to decide whether to use them.

(DfE, 2015, p.4)

Attendance statistics are also used to hold school to account, with low attendance figures being a mechanism that can trigger an Ofsted inspection and result in a poor judgement (Ofsted, 2021). Attendance is a key part of the home-school agreement (School Standards and Framework Act, 1998). Parents who fail to send their child to school may receive a penalty charge from the Local Authority of £60 per day (DfE, 2015, p.10). If the payment is not made, the cost will increase and can result in parents being prosecuted (ibid.). This authoritarian approach by the Government reinforces Tickell and Peck's (2002, p.389) notion of neoliberal 'social and penal

policymaking', which is concerned specifically with the socialisation of individual subjects via the disciplining of those that are non-compliant (ibid.).

Ashfield and Oakdale had lower statistics than Elmtree and Ivywood for persistent absences, regardless of the perceived poorer relationships with families. In contrast, Elmtree and Ivywood, with a more inclusive approach to families, had higher rates of persistent absences. This situation reflects Government policy discourse concerning schools in deprived areas with attendance issues (Taylor, 2012; DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2014b; DfE, 2015; DfE, 2016a; Ofsted, 2021). Elmtree's and Ivywood's approach to reducing persistent absences resulted in many policy initiatives to try and solve the issue. Diane, the deputy headteacher at Ivywood, explained that the school used the penal fine system, stating she managed to be 'both good cop and bad cop' when issuing the fines. However, Ivywood was working more closely with parents to understand and solve the issues of attendance, as Fiona, the family support worker, explained:

"I don't want to go to school, let's stay at home," that's when the attendance drops. For some people, that might not mean anything, but in our society, you're liable to end up in court for non-attendance. Many don't understand that because this is new. It is culturally different [...] You need to find out what that family is. It could just be that the child is absent every Tuesday because they don't want them [the child] to go swimming.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

A similar approach to understanding and working with families concerning attendance was a new initiative at Elmtree. Heidi acknowledged 'we have quite a few issues in terms of encouraging good attendance where attendance figures suffer'. But rather than using parental fines, the school was actively working with children and parents to create positive relationships to improve school attendance. Leoš, the learning support assistant, explained the current initiatives:

What we do now in the mornings with Fearne, she's the support worker. We're picking up the kids as well in the morning, which changed recently almost six weeks ago. We started to do that after the Easter holidays. Now we are picking up kids on the minibus, those that attendance wasn't great. Thanks to the minibus, attendance is getting much better, because they're in school on time and they get the marks so it's quite good. Helping them a lot.

(Leoš, Elmtree)

In Leelah's interview, the introduction of the minibus was also discussed, and she highlighted the improvement in attendance, along with other initiatives such as attendance awards and a breakfast club:

Yes. Also, now we've got the breakfast club. [...]. They will get free bagels, cereals, and a drink, and it's completely free. From eight o'clock in the morning, all the children come in and have their breakfast there, or if parents need to go somewhere.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

The use of a free-for-all breakfast club was also part of Ivywood's approach to ensure that children were in school and ready to learn. The use of breakfast clubs in the school connects the complex relationship between disadvantage and learning (Ridge, 2013; Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018). The interview discussions concerning attendance were complex. The discussions linked various aspects of schooling with attendance, such as parental engagement, learning and attainment figures. These aspects echo West et al.'s (2011) notion of the multifarious neoliberal accountability mechanisms in education. These aspects reflect a neoliberal narrative that has become the norm within education. Leelah described how attendance is used in relation to learning:

The message that we will take to parents is, "The more your children come to school, the more they learn." We put that on the website. I said it in Somalian, somebody else said it in Arabic, somebody else said it in Slovakian, somebody else said it in Hindi. There, it's in all different languages, so that it was all to boost up all the attendance and make sure the more the children come, the more they learn.

(Leelah, Elmtree)

In addition, attendance as an accountability mechanism was linked to the fear of an Ofsted inspection (Bradbury, 2019). Fearne highlighted the area of attendance as a key issue to address within her role:

I also have a finger in attendance because attendance is massive on Ofsted [...] We've got the Government sitting on our heads saying, "Your attendance has got to be 95% or 94%."

(Fearne, Elmtree)

Fearne further explained her role that, whilst poor attendance may trigger a home visit, this did not create a negative relationship with the family:

If attendance is down, it triggers - I often go out home-visiting. I love going out and doing that, and that's just lovely. I went out home-visiting the weekend of Diwali. I was dragged into the house and fed.[...] if we've got the parents engaged, if we can sort out the parents' problems, then the children are more settled in school, the attendance is better, and then we're looking good.

(Fearne, Elmtree)

As with the wider values of the school, Elmtree's approach to improving attendance was to engage with the families. With the situations described, many parents could have been fined, which may have created further barriers to engagement. Yet the successes in increasing attendance at the school continually demonstrated effective alternative approaches to Government penal policies. Elmtree's approach reinforces McLeod's (2017, p.45) perception of the historical teaching profession based on '[n]otions of duty, obligation, service, responsibility as well as care'. McLeod (2017) asserted that these notions should be considered within the purpose of education beyond the performativity discourse. However, these aspects of performativity, obligation and care have become entwined concerning attendance, whereby increased attendance is expected to improve learning and attainment. These increased pressures on the headteacher add to the burden of the position, which could result in further responsabilisation of the position.

7.6 Challenging the discourse of parents within policy

Throughout the interviews, it therefore became evident that the school-parent relationships were more nuanced than the discourse presented in Government policies. This section seeks to challenge the binary discourse which positions parents as valued, or not, in the education system, with middle-class values being idealised and embraced (Reay et al., 2008; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Ule et al., 2015; Creasy and Corby, 2019). The discourse reflects the neoliberal version of education in which parents hold schools to account (DfE, 2016a), are responsible for their child's achievements and support wider learning opportunities outside school (Vincent and Maxwell, 2016). In contrast, families from lower socio-economic groups

are positioned as hard-to-reach, having low expectations and low aspirations for their child and not being involved with the school or education (De Benedictis, 2012; Jensen and Taylor, 2012; Humphreys, 2017).

As the literature suggested, this binary position fails to address areas of inequality, prior educational experiences, and language barriers of families, and how they engage with their child's education. The research in this thesis did identify the representation of parents with these binary positions. Ashfield represented the discourse of middle-class families as the neoliberal consumers of education. In Oakdale, both binary positions were evident, with some families positioned as middle-class and discussed positively, while families experiencing deprivation were viewed as hard to reach and disengaged. However, the evidence and analysis from this research highlight that there is a third type of family not represented in Government policy discourse. Elmtree and Ivywood demonstrated that families from deprived areas and those with English as an additional language can be engaged with the school and recognise the benefits of a good education for their children.

Therefore, rather than there being a binary positioning of parents, I suggest that there is a further discourse that needs to be included in discussions of school-parent relationships. Elmtree and Ivywood's family cohorts represented families with aspirations for their children, and many maintained good relationships with the schools. This reinforces Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) findings, which noted that a positive outcome of the reduction in public services was that schools created stronger and more supportive relationships with families (the wider support of the families will be explored further in Chapter 9). However, whilst I agree with Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) finding, the stronger and more supportive relationships at Elmtree and Ivywood reflected the ethos and culture generated by the headteachers. Both headteachers demonstrated their strong ethos of social justice and inclusion, evident through many policy interpretations and enactments (Braun and Maguire, 2020). This leadership conviction resulted in the headteachers' values embedded throughout the schools.

The headteachers at Elmtree and Ivywood did not replicate the deficit model discourse when discussing parents, regardless of the challenges with attendance and communication. Throughout the interviews, there was no sense of 'them' and 'us' when discussing parents. Instead, the schools' approach was to work with the families positively, which appeared to remove barriers to creating positive parent relationships. This contrasted with the school culture and ethos of Ashfield and Oakdale, which were child-focused. Elmtree and Ivywood embraced the whole family within the school community and removed barriers to foster good communication and trust. I argue that Government policy discourse reinforces the notion of a deficit model, which has become the norm when discussing parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This appears to create further barriers for some schools and can create a blame culture. The removal of a binary narrative within policies may help in the development of positive school-parent relationships for all.

7.7 Summary

To summarise, the school-parent relationship is complex and multi-faceted regarding policy and the individual experiences of schools and families. Government policy discourse is based on valuing middle-class parents for being actively involved and engaged in their child's education. The dominant discourse was, in part, representative of Ashfield and Oakdale. The Government binary discourse that middle-class parents were engaged with their children's education, whereas parents experiencing deprivation were not, was clearly expressed within Oakdale. The school had a mixed cohort described as split between the two polarised groups. However, whilst Government discourse promotes the notion of good parenting via middle-class parental values, which should result in an active partnership with schools, the impression of the school-parent relationship in Ashfield was more reflective of the notion of the parent as a consumer of education. Parents at Ashfield were described as only passively supportive of the school. Whilst the parents at Ashfield demonstrated the characteristics of active choosers and consumers of education, this did not appear to meet the neoliberal expectation that situating parents as consumers will act as a mechanism for improvement.

The perceived lack of active engagement at Ashfield and Oakdale further impacted the teacher-parent relationship, with the impression that teachers did not feel trusted by parents. This further resulted in notions of poor communication between the school and the parent, in which notions of blame appeared on both sides of the relationship. The two schools, whilst having differing cohorts and reflecting the opposites in terms of the binary discourse, were experiencing the same issues regarding positive engagement with some families. This resulted in a 'them' and 'us' discussion and underpinned a lack of trust from some parents. School-parent relationships were further compounded by parent social-media groups, which appeared to create further barriers between home and school, which the schools appeared powerless to address.

In contrast to the literature and Government discourse, Elmtree and Ivywood, with cohorts experiencing high levels of deprivations, did not describe their parents as disengaged or lacking in trust. Furthermore, these schools did not reflect Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) finding that parents from ethnic minority groups with language barriers found it difficult to engage. Both schools actively sought to engage parents and build trust, reinforcing the analysis of Boutte and Johnson (2014) and Torres and Murphy (2016) that it is the school's responsibility to forge trusting relationships and create a strong community. Parental involvement and engagement resulted from positive school leadership, particularly from the headteachers, in developing and embedding a culture of inclusion within the wider school community. Many initiatives were implemented to ensure two-way communication in which both parties could be understood. Even in the case of persistent absences, for which schools are held to account, these two schools sought to work with parents to address the issues. There were limited issues of blame, or a 'them' and 'us' culture, with respect and understanding given to families.

A key finding of this research is to question the usefulness of the binary discourse used within policy documents, which has become the norm in wider discussions of the school-parent relationship. The binary narrative is not reflective of some of the schools' experiences within the research, suggesting a third discourse of engaged but requiring support, which needs to be addressed and acknowledged within

Government policies. There needs to be recognition of families with high aspirations for their children and value education but lack the middle-class access to resources and cultural capital to forge positive relationships with the school. A more nuanced and understanding discourse in policy could challenge the deficit model used when discussing families experiencing deprivation or with English as an additional language.

The next chapter will focus on discussions of teaching and learning concerning recent policy changes and how a child-centred focus is maintained. There will be discussions concerning schools within areas of deprivation and how they seek to provide an equitable educational experience. In addition, the final section will consider the child's broader welfare and how the schools create conditions for the children to learn.

CHAPTER 8. CONTEXT OF LEARNING

8.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter 7 discussed the complexities and challenges in the school-parent relationship. Each school had a different approach to building relationships with families, with varying degrees of success in engagement. It has been evident in the findings so far that the headteacher's personal ethos and values in the interpretation and enactment of policies can shape the experiences of each school. The influential role of the headteacher is also relevant within this chapter, which will focus on teaching and learning practices and wider initiatives that support the child, in particular those in disadvantaged areas. The chapter discusses three sub-themes: policy versus values in practice; enrichment of the curriculum; and creating conditions to learn, reflecting the analysis of the codebook (Appendix 6).

The chapter will discuss teaching and learning practices within the four schools. The Government states expectations as follows:

- *Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based¹ and which:*
- *promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and*
- *prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.*

(DfE, 2013, p.5)

Whilst only two of the schools in this study were state-maintained, all four adhered to Government policies for the National Curriculum and the wider school curriculum. The interpretation and the enactment of these policies were unique to each school, reinforcing the findings from Chapter 6. In particular, the findings in relation to how the school ethos and culture shape the school. Each school's ethos was evident throughout the interpretation and enactment of various policies that affected teachers within their practice and the pupils.

8.2 Policy versus values in practice

There has been extensive research on the changing nature of teaching as a profession over the decades since the Education Act of 1988, which reflects a neoliberal ideology (Apple, 2006; Carr, 2016; Ball, 2017). The effects of a neoliberal approach are considered to have intensified over this period (Done and Murphy, 2018; Ball, 2017; Humphreys, 2017; Rudd and Goodson, 2017). There has been an ever-increasing focus on schools and teachers being required to meet Government accountability measures (ibid.). Throughout the interviews, demands arising from Government policy changes were a key issue expressed by several teachers. Daisy, the deputy headteacher and a reception teacher at Ashfield, expressed the impact of the changes in her career over many years:

Yes, it's definitely become harder. When I first started teaching, it was quite a long time ago, we were quite autonomous in our classrooms [...] What's gone, our part of children's social, emotional development, their physical development, all of those things have gone. We can feel a bit like schools are factories, just reproducing, I think.

(Daisy, Ashfield)

Daisy's comments echo the sentiments of Hutchings' (2015) research entitled *The Exam Factories?* in which several primary school teachers used similar metaphors to describe their feelings about teaching. Hutchings (ibid.) also commented on the loss of creativity and the decline of personal relationships due to the increased pressure of delivering the new curriculum and the new, more challenging, SATs tests. These findings align with the interviews with other teachers. Tara, a year six teacher, expressed the impact of recent policy changes:

What other challenges do we have? About just juggling the curriculum and those ridiculous demands that the Government keep throwing at us, I suppose, but everyone's going to say the same.

(Tara, Ashfield)

The sentiments concerning the challenges of the curriculum were also discussed in the interviews at Ivywood:

The curriculum's become more challenging. Just when you think you've got children where they need to be, you're then told, "Well, now you need to know this."

(Lisa, Ivywood)

These comments note the many changes in recent years, identified by Lupton and Thompson (2015, p.23) who argued that 2010-2015 had been a 'remarkable period which had altered the landscape' in education. In addition to discussing changes to the National Curriculum and SATs, teachers also explained the previous way of reporting pupil progress in the form of levels had been removed. These changes were experienced as a further pressure on all the schools to determine how to implement a system of their choosing, which could be used consistently. These many changes appeared to present a personal challenge for some of the teachers, aligning with Ball's (2003, p.222) conclusion that a performativity culture results in 'inauthentic practice and relationships'. This assertion echoes Daisy's earlier quotation likening schools to factories, and in the comments of Toni, a foundation stage teacher at Oakdale, on the pressures to reach her targets:

My target is to get at or above the national level for a good level of development. You're pushing these children all the time even though, in your heart, you know that they're not ready. Then they've got to be ready because if they're not ready in our class when they get to year one, they're going to struggle.

(Toni, Oakdale)

Toni's comments encapsulate the extensive research into the effects of neoliberal school policies, which are considered to shape teaching practices to ensure quantifiable outputs (Apple, 2006; Buchanan, 2015; Hutchings, 2015; Ball, 2017; Fuller, 2019; Bradbury et al., 2021). These policy changes act to induce conduct as a technology of the self, intimating Perryman et al. (2017, p.746) notion that teachers influence 'themselves and each other in subtle ways' via practices that make them complicit with policy. These comments also concur with Carr's (2016, p.28) argument of teachers having to put aside personal values to demonstrate 'professional competence for which they are held accountable' due to a 'regime of governance' (ibid.). Yet, Toni did not appear to put aside all her values in aiming to achieve her targets:

These poor children, you think, "You're only four." [...]. "Sit down, do this, do that." It's really hard. Keeping that in a play-based environment is tricky, too. It is quite hard to do all of these different things. [...] You have to be so skilful at doing it in a fun way and a playful way.

(Toni, Oakdale)

Toni's comments intimate Shuayb and O'Donnell's (2012) point that primary education has contrasting influences between an emphasis on standards and a child-centred approach. These comments imply that teachers need to demonstrate a wide variety of skills within their practice, echoing McLeod's (2017, p.48) definition of a good teacher's work, which includes an 'overwhelming repertoire of responsibilities'. These attributes combine being responsible for learning, well-being, classroom management, good results and ensuring children's future success (ibid.). Toni's remarks encompass this view, with a split narrative between meeting accountability measures and maintaining a child-centred approach. This split narrative aligns with Sturrock's (2021) argument that teachers have succumbed to neoliberal education. However, there was still a 'persistent commitment to child-centred primary education which acts to dislocate the discourse of the neo-liberal teacher' (ibid., p.1,234). Sturrock's (ibid.) argument was evident in many of the interviews, with accounts of the persistent challenge of meeting accountability demands, whilst staying true to a child-centred approach and the wider ethos of the school. Daisy expressed the challenges:

That's the greatest challenge that I face as a teacher these days, is to ensure that children do reach the expected levels or as best as they can, but not at the expense of everything else. That leads to a sort of rich and broad and worthwhile experience at school, and that battle is hard.

(Daisy, Ashfield)

During Daisy's interview and many others with the teachers, there was a dual conversation concerning accountability and performativity pressures, and protecting their own values in education. The discussions often aligned with Braun and Maguire's (2020, p.2) argument that there are 'ideological and moral dilemmas' with primary schooling. Throughout the interviews, the neoliberal discourse in relation to children's learning was entwined with a child-centred approach. Heidi's comments best encapsulate the two discourses:

If you've got a challenging aspect of the curriculum, we try and look at our children and how they learn best and then tailor it towards that.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

The approach taken by Heidi was also present in Ivywood, where the challenges of the new curriculum were tailored to the children:

That whole idea of retrieval. [...] We're going for it on the curriculum, but we're doing it properly. We're visioning in the autumn term. Because if we don't get the vision right, you're just in danger of pulling something off the shelf [...]. It's about what is best and what we need for our children.

(Hila, Ivywood)

In the interviews with Hila and Diane, the focus on tailoring the curriculum to the children's needs was discussed in detail. Many initiatives were highlighted, from ensuring that the reading books represented each child's culture and interests to simplifying the mathematical language to ensure that a lack of English did not impact mathematical knowledge. The approaches by Elmtree and Ivywood in their interpretation of the new curriculum echo Forde and Torrance's (2017, p.22) findings that motivated school leaders can remove barriers to 'create conditions for effective learning'. The relationship to ensure that the children achieve in both Elmtree and Ivywood underpinned the school's ethos, the need for social justice, and the Government's wider aim of education to ensure social mobility (DfE, 2017). Diane further emphasised this in relation to their approach to the interpretation of the curriculum:

It talks about cultural capital and the intent of your curriculum. [...] How do we drill it down and condense it to get the best curriculum now? How do we capture it in that nutshell so that if we were inspected in that framework, or when a visitor comes in, you can just-- This is it.

(Diane, Ivywood)

The approach to the interpretation and enactment of the National Curriculum within the interview discussions reinforce Ball et al.'s (2012) point that policy enactment is concerned with a competing set of values and ethics, which includes social values and social justice, which are 'referred to outside of, or beyond, policy' (ibid., p.10). Whilst the schools and teachers were conforming to neoliberal policies, the ethos and

values of the school and individual teachers maintained a child-centred focus. Therefore, the evidence presented suggests that the schools' interpretation and enactment of recent policy changes were bound within the wider ethos of the school and the individual teachers' values.

8.3 Enrichment of curriculum

The previous section highlighted teachers' perceptions of the demands of recent policy changes, whilst trying to maintain their own values. Each school conformed to the demands of the new National Curriculum, yet at the same time each was keen to ensure that all children could access wider opportunities. The schools seemed to embrace the requirements of offering 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum' (DfE, 2013). Across the interviews in Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale, broader teaching practices and interpretation of the wider curriculum beyond assessments formed a large part of the discussions. These three schools had groups of children experiencing deprivation, with many at Elmtree and Ivywood having EAL. It was within these interviews that each school's ethos and values were demonstrated to be reflective of the needs of their cohorts. Hila stated the importance of going beyond the standard curriculum:

Maths and English is not going to do it for them. They need a rich diet of experiences here. Curriculum experiences, residential experiences, visits.

(Hila, Ivywood)

All three schools sought to address disadvantages through differing interpretations of curriculum experiences. The differing schools' approaches reinforce much research into school leaders mitigating disadvantage through a strong sense of social justice (Roffey, 2013; Matthews et al., 2014; Khalida et al., 2016; Forde and Torrance, 2017). At Oakdale, Holly explained their investment in training three staff in Forest schooling and building a pond. Holly described other motivating approaches such as:

reward days [...] it's off the curriculum, it's a bit different, but it means that the children get something nice to look forward to and to work towards.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Elmtree's approach to inclusion to address language barriers was via art. Heidi explained that every afternoon all the classes focused on creative projects as a good level of English was not required. Similarly, in Ivywood, wider educational opportunities were provided in which good levels of English were not required. Diane explained:

We also do a large fix on playing an instrument and swimming. That's a big commitment for our school. You don't necessarily need a lot of English to be able to do that.

(Diane, Ivywood)

Elmtree and Ivywood's use of wider learning experiences embraced their ethos of inclusion beyond student performance (Keddie et al., 2018). The schools' thinking beyond Government performativity measures intimates Keddie et al.'s (2018) assertion that school leaders are responsabilising themselves for supporting student equity. Ivywood's approach to music and swimming went beyond the National Curriculum requirements. All the children went swimming once a week, and all Key Stage 2 children were learning to play a brass instrument. Hila explained the advantages:

I think it creates a culture of persistence. Because there's something about taking part in music. What we learned very quickly was that you gotta wait. Some of it is boring. You've got to listen and respect the people who are playing. If you're performing, you're there with your instrument. [...]. There's something about the whole discipline around music, I think. It takes practice. It doesn't just happen to get better at it. You practise and the staff too.

(Hila, Ivywood)

The headteacher's approach to wider learning activities within the school day aims to achieve inclusion. All participants at Ivywood explained that the teaching staff were learning a brass instrument alongside the children and taking the grade exams too. This inclusive approach echoes Roffey's (2013) findings that learning, achievement, and behaviour can be positively addressed within schools in disadvantaged areas by creating an inclusive culture. Everyone learning together embodied the school's ethos of inclusion and a wider aim to positively influence attitudes to learning. Lisa further stated, 'since we incorporated the Music Club into our curriculum, the effect that has

had on the children has been fantastic'. Hila further explained the wider benefits to the children:

It's given those children who struggle within the class another chance to excel somewhere else. Even those children who don't struggle, the confidence in them is incredible. We've got children that are very, very quiet and yet will put a hand up and say, "Yes. I'll do a solo."

(Hila, Ivywood)

Hila sought to mitigate the focus on attainment with learning experiences, in which children could gain confidence and a sense of achievement. The focus on wider learning opportunities in all three schools aimed to create positive learning environments and experiences. The headteacher appeared to embrace James et al. (2006, p.90) assertion that primary school headteacher's work was 'underpinned by very strong educational values, beliefs and ideals' in which the 'sense of obligation and responsibility'. The leadership approach, particularly at Ivywood, aligned with Keddie et al.'s (2018, p.15) research that school leaders 'responsibilise themselves' via a form of social entrepreneurialism beyond student performance, with the need to support students in a variety of ways.

Keddie et al.'s (2018) notion of school leaders' responsibilising themselves was further evident as schools sought to address disadvantages via extracurricular activities and school trips. Hila explained Ivywood's approach:

After school [...] picking up some of those children that are really exceptional. It's about spotting the kids and then either signposting them on or making provision for them at Ivywood. [...] We know who the great swimmers are. We go often to swimming galas and things like that. It's about a culture of vigilance, knowing who's good at what and being really open to that.

(Hila, Ivywood)

Lisa supported Hila comments by expressing what was available after school:

I've never seen so many clubs in Ivywood. It's unreal. It's brilliant. The opportunities are obviously incredible

(Lisa, Ivywood)

Lisa further explained that they were always looking to add more to reflect the children's passions and interests. Fiona considered the need for the school to offer wider activities due to the funding cuts 'the difficulty is because of Government cuts is abominable fact. The Government cuts so there's no playing centres. There's no youth centres'. These comments echo Ridge's (2013) argument that the loss of activities for children from low-income backgrounds. The use of wider opportunities to mitigate disadvantage was similarly discussed in Oakdale. Holly expressed:

it's trying to give pupils the top-up of experiences that perhaps they're not getting.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly's ethos for the school was to ensure wider experiences for the children. Again, this approach sought to mitigate aspects of disadvantage and promote social justice (Roffey, 2013; Forde and Torrance, 2017). In Oakdale, the focus was day trips and outings. Holly explained that Government funding was helping the school to do this:

We get quite a lot of Pupil Premium money. I think we got something like £85,000 Pupil Premium money. So, because of our funding, we can afford to do some really nice things.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Goldie, the parent governor and PTA member, expressed that the trips were funded by money raised via the PTA. The school organised trips that were not available to many children, such as to the theatre or the seaside. The lack of opportunities for children from low-income backgrounds aligns with Ridge's (2013) findings. Ivywood and Elmtree also used the Pupil Premium funding this way: both schools discussed visits to London to see a show or taking the children to a farm, as many had never seen farm animals. Participants at Ivywood further explained they had taken the children's whole families to the seaside. The evidence from the schools reinforces Lupton and Thompson's (2015, p.20) report of Coalition policy changes and the reduction in benefits to low-income families having shifted responsibility for ensuring more equal outcomes 'firmly in the direction of schools'. The evidence shows that the schools' child-centred approach went beyond raising academic attainment. The

schools were using their funding to provide wider learning opportunities and outings to enrich the school experience, which could mitigate aspects of social disadvantage.

However, Government Pupil Premium funding should be used to close the attainment gap. As Ofsted (2014, p.4) states, '[t]he strongest governing bodies take strategic responsibility for ensuring that the funding improves teaching and support for eligible pupils in the school'. The term support appears open to interpretation as the schools used the Pupil Premium funding for activities to enrich the school experience. Headteachers are accountable and need to demonstrate how they spend the Pupil Premium funding to raise attainment (ibid.). Nonetheless, during the research interviews, none of the headteachers commented on linking the funding to attainment. The autonomy for schools to manage and justify their spending appears to create a space for headteachers to actively negotiate 'the extremely dilemmatic terrain' of education policies (Jeffrey and Troman, 2010, p.5). The schools' approaches to providing experiences appeared in contrast to the limited overt focus on raising attainment, with the headteachers seeking to address wider social disadvantage.

This focus on allocating resources for learning beyond attainment was demonstrated in Oakdale and Elmtree by addressing behaviour issues at lunchtime with the investment in lunchtime training of supervisors in play and the employment of sports coaches for positive playtimes, along with Lego clubs. The diverse response to addressing disadvantages within each school aligns with Passy and Ovenden-Hope's (2020) argument that there is little policy recognition of local challenges within disadvantaged schools. Instead, the headteacher's response is to be creative in the solutions for their school community to address issues of social justice (ibid.). The notion of the headteacher using creative responses was abundantly evident within Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale. However, the need to be constantly innovative to address wider issues of social justice could further responsabilise the headteacher in managing their school.

The approaches taken with these three schools appeared not to be needed in Ashfield, where only a few children were eligible for free school meals. This research shows that the schools with high numbers of Pupil Premium students and those in

more deprived areas offered additional activities beyond the classroom. The schools' ability to provide these extra opportunities reinforced the headteachers' desire for social justice. The headteachers' autonomous position as a result of neoliberal education policies enabled them to use their budgets in this way. However, headteachers also needed to be creative in addressing issues of disadvantage in their communities. The schools wanted to ensure that the children received a wider school experience beyond the prescribed subjects of the National Curriculum. However, as already stated, for headteachers in disadvantaged areas, this results in further responsabilisation of the headteacher to ensure social justice for their pupils.

8.4 Creating conditions to learn or meeting the child's basic material needs

The notion of the responsabilisation of headteachers and teachers in primary schools was multifaceted and could be seen across many differing aspects of school life. A crucial element of this was creating appropriate conditions to learn though providing basic material needs for the children beyond teaching and learning. The previous section considered how schools with disadvantaged cohorts sought to address this through various initiatives to enrich the children's school lives. Another area of discussion prevalent in the schools with cohorts experiencing disadvantage was ensuring that the children were ready and able to learn. Here, the three schools (Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale) continued to demonstrate their child-centred approach in response to emotional and physical development.

Whilst supporting children's wider development is part of the curriculum (DfE, 2013, p.5), for Elmtree, Ivywood, and Oakdale, this resulted in further financial investment, training, and creative approaches. There were some discussions on addressing children's emotional and behavioural development in Ashfield. However, these appeared as isolated cases and did not warrant a whole-school approach, as evident in the other participating schools. Therefore, the following is based on the data from Elmtree, Ivywood, and Oakdale.

The headteachers' approaches in the three schools sought to ensure the children attended school by working with the parents. This was more evident in Elmtree and

Ivywood (as discussed in Chapter 7). In conjunction with this, once the children were in school, there were many initiatives to ensure that the children were ready and able to learn. Dora, the deputy head teacher at Oakdale, most eloquently expressed the reason for doing this:

So, it's getting the initial conditions right first, and then we can focus on the teaching and learning, which, of course, does happen. But it's, actually, you have to take a first step back before you can start.

(Dora, Oakdale)

Diane echoed this notion of ensuring children were able to learn at Ivywood:

That emphasis [...] about the emotion health and well-being, it's wider than that, would that child be ready to learn. We know children aren't going to concentrate all morning if they're hungry. That's why the Breakfast Club came about. It's not just about childcare. It's making sure they've got a decent breakfast inside them, and making sure we've got that snack, and the fruit and milk are available, [...]. There's lots of that well-being.

(Diane, Ivywood)

Diane's comments align with wider research that notes children who grow up in food-insecure homes experience poor development and lower education outcomes (Frank and Cook, 2008; Harvey, 2016; Loopstra et al., 2019). Each school had a different approach to creating the initial conditions for learning in response to the differing needs of their cohorts as a means to address social injustice (Forde and Torrance, 2017). The responses reflected the context of each school and aimed to mitigate the effects of disadvantages unique to their cohort. The discussion in relation to creating conditions to learn partly aligned with the Government's discourse on school readiness, whereby children should start primary school having acquired basic skills to learn (Field, 2010). However, Fearne at Elmtree highlighted issues within the Government's discourse, stating that children were less ready to learn due to funding cuts to services aimed at parents:

If you've read the most recent report, Ofsted is saying children are now coming through the doors into the nursery. The nappies and everything. We[Sure Start] would have done all that. They [children] could cut paper. They could recognise letters, and we'd done all the pre-stuff with the parents and things like that. That's a crying out need again [...] We used to have a Sure Start Centre next door [...] but that is closed completely. The parents in this area, really there's nothing for them [...]. That's another Government cutback, isn't it?

(Fearne, Elmtree)

Fearne's comments align with Ridge's (2013) and Hanley et al.'s (2020) findings on the effects of funding cuts on families with children. As a result, children entering foundation stage are not always ready to learn, and extra support is required. This created increased pressure for foundation-stage teachers. This was echoed in the finds at Oakdale. The cuts to services for schools in deprived areas added to the burden on the schools and teachers to who were responsabilised for child development milestones usually achieved before starting school.

Creating conditions to learn was linked to children's having their basic needs met. Discussions in Elmtree and Ivywood were related to changes in the benefits system from Tax Credits to Universal Credit and cuts to other benefits. Fiona and Fearne highlighted that many families were not eligible for free school meals as families on low incomes and receiving Working Tax Credits were not eligible, impacting the children. These comments echo Ridge (2013) and Lupton and Thompson (2015), with many low-income families experiencing poverty due to cuts and changes to benefits. Heidi explained that, prompted by wider family circumstances, the school provided free lunchtime meals along with breakfast for all the children. The changes to the calculation of family benefits also impacted the school's Pupil Premium funding, as Heidi explained:

The way that the Pupil Premium funding is allocated is based on household incomes. It doesn't take account of what you've got. If you have six people living in a house and one person works in McDonalds, you wouldn't get free school meals. So, we feel that that provision is underrepresented by that figure, but it's a highly deprived area.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

The need to meet pupils' basic human needs, seen in Elmtree, was also evident at Ivywood. The findings from the two schools echo those of Hanley et al.'s (2020) and Lambie-Mumford and Sims (2018) research, whereby schools were addressing hunger arising from poverty due to austerity policies. This could further responsabilise the school staff due to the rising number of families experiencing poverty and struggling to meet their children's basic needs (CPAG, 2017). On my first meeting with Heidi, she explained the effect of austerity measures on their families, which resulted in the school having to purchase and collect various items of uniform as many families could not afford them. The headteachers choosing to address these wider-reaching needs intimates Peeters' (2013, p.585) notion of 'obligated citizens', whereby Government funding cuts have created the space for headteachers to be increasingly responsible for children's welfare beyond teaching and learning. This further implicates the school as being responsabilised for child welfare, thus shifting any blame for failure from the Government.

Mitigating the effects of deprivation was also discussed in Ivywood. On the initial school tour with Diane, I made the following research journal entry:

I was surprised to see long trough-style sinks in the corridors. Diane explained that there was a high level of tooth decay because of poverty, so all the children brush their teeth twice a day together in school. The school provided toothbrushes and toothpaste. Also, all the children washed their hands together after brushing their teeth to improve hygiene.

Diane further explained the link between teeth and learning. Due to the children losing their teeth too soon, they could not make the phonics sounds, which was impacting their phonological and reading development.

(Research Journal, March 2019)

The detail of thought to removing barriers to learning at Ivywood reflected Matthews et al.'s (2014) assertion that outstanding primary school leaders, with a strong sense of social justice and a child-centred approach, can remove barriers to achievement. However, the example here entwines areas of welfare with neoliberal notions of

performativity. This resonates with Done and Murphy's (2018, p.149) assertion that 'care is increasingly bound up with processes of systematisation, quantification, comparative measurement and accountability' in schools. Therefore, this could responsabilise headteachers and staff in the broader welfare of the children to ensure they succeed in school.

The child's emotional well-being was also a consideration for Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale, reflecting Humphreys' (2013) premise that schools are expected to proactively support their pupils' emotional well-being. The Government has positioned schools as able to 'play an important role in promoting wellbeing as well as helping to prevent and identify mental health issues' (DfE, 2016, p.97). This requirement was further expressed by the DfE (2018c, p.6) in the non-statutory guidance document *Mental health and behaviour in schools*, which advises schools to develop 'approaches tailored to the particular needs of their pupils'. Measures were already apparent in Ivywood, as Lisa explained:

We've got a lot within the school that focuses on children's emotional health now, which is a really positive move. We've got Place2Be, which is invaluable because they do seem to be more children that struggle.

(Lisa, Ivywood)

Diane explained that Place2Be was a children's mental health charitable organisation working with Ivywood three days a week, partly funded via their Pupil Premium. Diane further discussed the benefits:

Lots of those low-level niggles that are nipped in the bud, a place to talk which is a very open-- The child can self-refer. They come along with their friends. They might have had a fall-out on the playground, or there was arguing at home or something. They've gone, and then that's resolved, which means then the teachers' time is freed up a little bit for teaching.

(Diane, Ivywood)

The family support worker, Fiona, explained that the parents could also use the service. It was noted that parents at Oakdale were experiencing increased mental health issues, which were considered to be impacting the children, as Dora explained:

I think we've got a lot of parents, like I said earlier, with mental health problems. I think the impact on their children is quite significant, so we've got a lot of children that perhaps are also showing their own mental health problems.

(Dora, Oakdale)

Ivywood and Oakdale's experiences highlight an area overlooked by the DfE (2018c) in their statutory guidance into behaviour in schools, whereby parents are considered partners in supporting their children's mental health and well-being. However, the parents' experiences could be exacerbating the children's mental health, increasing pressure on the schools (Saltman, 2014; Reay, 2017). Therefore, schools are positioned by the Government as being responsible for the provision of mental health support. This point was recognised by Dora:

We're not specialists in mental health. We're not specialists in social care, and yet it's becoming more and more our job.

(Dora, Oakdale)

This perception of teachers needing to be mental health specialist or social care workers can simultaneously make them responsible for the failure of children's mental health in line with the notion of politics of blame (Thrupp, 2009; Done and Murphy, 2018).

Moreover, the research also suggests that children experiencing food poverty have poorer mental health and an increase in behavioural issues (Ridge, 2013; Harvey, 2016). Food insecurity was highlighted as an increased issue within the three schools and could have contributed to the need for mental health support. This notion was echoed in the findings by Hanley et al. (2020), who noted that teachers were responding to high levels of distress from pupils and parents (School support for families will be discussed in Chapter 9). Hanley et al.'s (ibid.) findings suggested a perceived increase in emotional labour by the teachers responding to various well-being issues. However, this emotional labour appeared to be mitigated within the three schools with specialist roles such as family support workers. Oakdale employed and trained an Emotional Learning Support Assistant (ELSA) to work specifically with the children. Eoin explained of his training:

Yes, it's quite an intensive course of finding out children's emotions and the needs and the barriers, and the volcano or rather build up and how they get angry. It's lots of different [...] I do enjoy it, and the kids enjoy having that room there, it's a bit like a comfort blanket, but also, you've got to make sure that they don't become completely dependent on it.

(Eoin, Oakdale)

Eoin further explained how the ELSA role worked with children:

Teachers do recommend, but also, children know that I go outside at break time and dinner time, and they can come and approach me. We can work on some self-confidence. We can even do simple things like read a Warriors book, just help them. We do some Lego groups to teach children to be a little bit patient and understanding of other children's needs and that they have to work as a team.

(Eoin, Oakdale)

Using Lego as a tool with the children was also discussed with Fearne, who similarly worked with children on various behavioural, emotional and well-being issues. Heidi further explained the use of wider staff members:

We've got one of our sports coaches from the area. He's a really positive male role model, a previous behaviour mentor, he's a high-level teaching assistant, and he's brilliant with the kids. She [Family support worker] will also act as a behaviour mentor because, quite often, these issues go hand in hand.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Elmtree and Oakdale's approaches to improving well-being and promoting positive behaviour reflected an interpretation of the requirement of the DfE (2018c). The discourse by the Government is for schools to address well-being and behaviour to ensure children are 'resilient and knowing how to persevere, how to bounce back if faced with failure' (DfE, 2016a, p.94). The DfE (2018c) also noted that children from deprived backgrounds were more at risk of poor mental health and challenging behaviour. The three schools other than Ashfield all had high levels of deprivation, contributing to the increased need to address issues in relation to mental health and behaviour. This situation increased the schools' responsibility to address broader societal issues and their impacts on children.

The Government positioning schools as increasingly responsible for mental health and challenging behaviour, without consideration for the causes, correlates to Peeters' (2013, p.585) argument that 'government does not make citizens 'responsible', in the sense that the state steps back and lets citizens deal with societal problems themselves'. However, here it is the schools that must deal with the effect of wider societal issues on the children. Furthermore, the schools are responsabilised by neoliberal governmentality to create resilient citizens who persevere (Saltman, 2014).

8.5 Summary

This chapter has presented discussions concerning differing perceptions of teaching and learning and broader initiatives to support the child's wider development. Recent Government policy changes impacted teachers by increasing pressure to meet accountability and performativity demands. It was evident from the participating teachers that they were conforming to neoliberal policies whilst aiming to be congruent within their practice. The traditional child-centred approach associated with primary school teaching was still evident. Policy enactment within the schools reflected their ethos and values, including that of social justice (Ball et al., 2012). This was apparent, particularly within Elmtree and Ivywood, in their interpretation of the National Curriculum and the enrichment of the school experience with wider educational opportunities.

The headteacher's autonomy enabled a creative response to the challenges their cohort was experiencing, with Pupil Premium funding used for wider activities beyond closing the attainment gap. There appeared further challenges for Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale with issues relating to well-being and behaviour, which the schools addressed by employing specialist staff. The schools were responsabilised by neoliberal governmentality for ensuring more equal outcomes for all children, regardless of the impact on families of Government cuts to benefits and services. Elmtree and Ivywood's approach to social justice encompassed meeting the child's basic material needs to create conditions in which they would be able to learn. The

schools continuously demonstrated a caring ethos within the enactment and interpretation of policies to provide equity of experience for their pupils.

Building from this analysis of the material existence of these schools and how they seek to work around policy for the health of their children, the final discussion chapter will discuss how schools are providing support to families. Such support is a direct response to the impact of Government austerity measures. There will be a focus on the effects of the wider cuts to social services and schools being responsabilised for providing increased support for children and families. This will emphasise the points made here about how schools create conditions to learn.

CHAPTER 9. RESPONSIBILISATION OF THE SCHOOL FOR THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

9.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the challenges schools and teachers experienced concerning policy changes. The teachers expressed increased pressure to meet the accountability and performativity demands required, in order to conform to neoliberal policies. However, the teachers still aimed to maintain a child-centred approach. Furthermore, an area of focus for this research was how the schools in areas of high deprivation were addressing the child's wider development. This was achieved in many creative ways by providing enriching learning experiences. In addition, the evidence highlighted that the schools were increasingly made responsible for the provision of addressing the children's basic needs so that they were ready and able to learn.

This final discussion chapter will develop this contextual analysis, to focus on the impact on schools of the Government's austerity measures, which resulted in wider funding cuts to benefits and services. These discussions were prominent in the schools with a more significant proportion of their pupils experiencing deprivation, namely Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale. From the evidence gathered, Ashfield did not appear to be affected by wider cuts to Government services. This could be due to Ashfield's lower-than-average number of pupils eligible for free school meals and Pupil Premium funding, indicating a more affluent school cohort. The findings are reflective of the codebook (Appendix 5.1-5.4) and reflect in this being a short chapter. During the interviews, all the headteachers and deputy headteachers were asked how Government policies were impacting their schools. It was here I was expecting discussions in relation to the National Curriculum and SATs. However, the conversations were much broader and covered issues concerning the wider Government funding cuts to services and benefits were affecting the children's whole families.

9.2 Family support and the management of cuts

The management of the three schools' management has different approaches to acknowledging and addressing the impact of wider cuts to services. As previously stated, Elmtree and Ivywood both employed family support workers. However, the two roles differed. In Ivywood, Fiona was the family support worker. Deputy headteacher Diane explained Fiona's role:

Her remit isn't necessarily safeguarding. It is about support. That can be with all kinds of things. It could be, "I'm trying to get in touch with the council to get my fire repaired, and I can't do it or don't know how to do it." They help with lots of work around transition, so filling in forms. There can be lots of work around benefits and claims. It can just be a conversation that they're lonely or how to help with parenting. She's doing a lot of signposting in that way.

(Diane, Ivywood)

Fiona also explained that she was at the school gates every morning and afternoon as a friendly face to offer support to families. Fiona had lived locally for many years and was an integral part of the local community, which also helped to remove barriers to families' engagement with the school (as discussed in Chapter 7). Elmtree also employed a family support worker, Fearne, from the local community. Fearne had previously been a foundation stage teacher at the school for many years. The roles and responsibilities of the family support role had increased, with headteacher Heidi explaining: 'You know that funding is reduced for social services and what they can offer as universal services are limited.' Heidi described Fearne's many and varied responsibilities as a result of the cuts:

The full-time family support worker basically fulfils an early help-type role. She supports families with benefits applications free school meals applications. She goes to court if there's a housing issue. We've had families who are homeless, where she's actually worked with the council to get them-- written the letters of support for housing. She's helped to get people to access and support for those suffering DV [domestic violence]. She's really, really crucial.

(Heidi, Elmtree)

Both schools' explanations of the remit of the family support worker encompass the schools' responsibility to fulfil necessary safeguarding requirements as set out by the DfE(2018b). These additional positions within the schools go beyond teaching and learning and suggest that the primary school has become a place of wider social

support for families (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Towers, 2022). In contrast, Oakdale did not have a specialist role to address the potential needs of the families. Instead, headteacher Holly was the safeguarding lead and liaised with families. Holly explained of the many additional pressures of this aspect of her role:

If I just did teaching and learning. I wouldn't be doing 60-hour weeks. I'll be doing what normal people should be doing, but unfortunately, we deal with what comes through the door. Try and patch it all together. Sometimes, I phone housing up. I phone whoever I think might help this family. None of it's necessarily - has anything to do with me. That's what we're doing. We're almost like the Citizens Advice Bureau here. I've phoned doctors to get hospital appointments with parents to get mental health. [...]. I referred them to a food bank.

(Holly, Oakdale)

The schools having to provide these wider services evidenced in this research reinforces Hanley et al. (2020, p.4) finding that due to austerity measures, schools were going beyond 'stereotypical roles and responsibilities associated with schools'. Furthermore, echoing Hanley et al. (ibid.), the research participants made several references to food poverty and insecurity. The issue of food insecurity for the children was discussed in Chapter 8 and is seen here as a problem for the whole family, which the schools were addressing. Ivywood had created its own school food bank to provide for families in need. Moreover, both Elmtree and Oakdale reported taking families directly to food banks or supplying food bank vouchers. Fearne noted that the increased need for the local food bank was impacting the availability of supplies:

I've taken the family to the food bank. [...] I went on Friday with her, and there was literally nothing on the shelves. The food bank said they're just inundated now. That's frightening, isn't it?

(Fearne, Elmtree)

Fearne further explained how the economic situation had worsened for low-income families:

Although it was a tough environment out there, it wasn't like it is now. I can't ever remember anyone coming for food vouchers, being desperate for money. I must hand out school jumpers every single day of the week to children that just haven't got them. Or they haven't got the money to buy them.

(Fearne, Elmtree)

These comments echo Ridge's (2013) research findings that the impact of austerity measures on children in low-income families is more pronounced. Fiona at Ivywood echoed Fearne's sentiment regarding the increased need for help due to cuts to benefits:

The food bank that's been a new need because of the benefits, because of the cuts and rollover from Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Sure Start, and Universal Credit.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

These various discussions in the interviews suggest the schools had become responsible for wider social justice for their communities. The schools recognised that families were experiencing stress related to benefit cuts, which had detrimental effects on the child's home environment (Frank and Cook, 2008; Harvey, 2016; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Loopstra et al., 2019; Hanley et al., 2020). Ultimately, food insecurity affected the children's readiness to learn (ibid.). The extreme circumstances were a cause of worry and stress for the headteachers and staff, as Holly explained:

Why they're coming to us and asking for help, it worries me really that we're already a little bit-- it's quite a lot of stressed families. I would say when they're angry, generally that's because they're anxious about things or stressed about something. If you're powerless, you can come into school and have a bit of a shout and a rant and actually. Yes, and when you get somebody angry about something, you think, "Well, what's actually behind all this?" It's generally money, or it's generally mental health, or it's some things.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly's comments echo Davidson and Carlin's (2019, p.486) assertion that inequalities penalise individuals who are most in need and that austerity measures compound the issues. These comments were echoed across all three schools, suggesting that parents in need had no other place to go. Fiona explained additional provisions the schools were offering parents:

I know when it's weather like this and, it's hard to dry the sheets and things like that. If you've got to, you can bring them [laundry] to school and get them washed and dry, then do so. We'll support you with that. Everybody needs

somebody at some point. It's about making the parent realise that, as I said again, we're not here to judge you. We are here to help and support you.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

Fiona consistently embodied the school's ethos of not judging parents for their situation and providing a safe space for all. Austerity measures were identified by Saltman (2014) to work as an extension of neoliberal governance by dismantling the welfare state. The school appeared to be the only place for parents left to go when in need. Fearné expressed this sentiment:

You've got - our other families that are in crisis, they're so grateful that there is somebody here they can turn to. Where do they start? Where do they start, when the other agencies won't touch them?

(Fearné, Elmtree)

Fearné further explained issues relating to housing, including the effects of the bedroom tax placing difficulties on families, along with housing instability:

When you think that some of our families, probably more of our white British-- I've got three or four of them are on the verge of eviction because of cutbacks in benefits. They've got into rent arrears and things like that and stuff. That's their everyday norm.

(Fearné, Elmtree)

The evidence aligns with Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) research on schools assisting families due to the reduction in services from the Government and other agencies on which parents would have relied in the past. The findings of this research further reinforce Hornby and Blackwell's (ibid., p.117) assertion that schools provide 'specialist support to parents and families so that children can gain the most out of their education'. Elmtree and Ivywood were taking this a step further as they started to run initiatives to educate the parents on accessing support. Fearné advised:

The need is great. It really is great. One of our targets is to get the parents empowered to be able to do some of the stuff that they come in and ask me to do, for themselves. You've got to train them to be able to do that. You've got to give them that self-esteem and that confidence to be able to do that. That's not always easy without running something for them to come to do that.

(Fearné, Elmtree)

The specialist support and education for families may ultimately benefit the child within their education, yet this further places the school as responsible for the wider family due to Government funding cuts.

Although, as was noted by Lupton and Thompson (2015), schools' budgets were not affected in real terms by austerity measures, they were affected by providing additional support. The research findings reinforce Ball's (2017) findings that cuts to Local Authority services impacted schools' budgets. The cuts have disproportionately affected low-income families, increasing child poverty with the result that 'education came to bear an even greater equity burden' (ibid., p.175). This equity burden was clearly evident in three out of the four schools within the study, and, for the school leadership in each, decisions were an attempt to address this for their students.

The schools raised further concerns when the children transitioned to secondary school. All schools, including Ashfield, report that parents were still returning to the primary schools for advice and support, which was not available in the same way from the secondary schools. Government education rhetoric encourages families to take responsibility for their child's education (Oria et al., 2007; Ule et al., 2015; Reay, 2017). However, here, the school assumes responsibility for the family and the child, which goes beyond performativity discourse. All the schools could be considered as assuming moral agency by choosing to support the wider family. This echoes Keddie et al.'s (2018, p.15) argument that school leaders could 'responsibilise themselves' via social entrepreneurialism to address student equity, well-being, and inclusion. I argue that due to the ever-increasing pressures of austerity cuts, headteachers are responsibilising themselves to support the family and wider community. The neoliberal rhetoric assumes individuals are responsible 'to produce the conditions of one's own independence – ideally by becoming a "hard-working" individual or family' (Clarke, 2005, p.45). Yet, as demonstrated in Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale, the current austerity measures limit the circumstances for families to create their own independence. The headteachers and school leadership were committed to the wider family's welfare. This approach reinforces the enduring discourse of responsibilisation, moral agency and caring values within the teaching profession, which goes beyond the measurable outputs of neoliberalism.

9.3 Safeguarding and cuts to social services.

As demonstrated above, the schools were assisting families due to wider funding cuts, with many families in vulnerable positions. The section discusses further issues the schools faced due to funding cuts to social services. The interviews at Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale, with senior leaders and family support workers, all discussed the safeguarding policy in the context of funding cuts. The new safeguarding policy was introduced in 2018 (the same academic year the research data were gathered). The DfE (2018b) *Keeping Children Safe* is a statutory guidance document that schools and local authorities must legally comply with (DfE, 2014e). The DfE (2018b, emphasis in original) states that the 'welfare of children is **everyone's** responsibility'. Each school managed the safeguarding policy differently, with various senior leaders on the safeguarding team. Elmtree had a specialist for safeguarding in Fearne, a family support worker. In Ivywood, the family support worker was part of the safeguarding team but was not a specialist, with the remit to liaise with families.

The three schools expressed an increased workload due to the loss of wider social services and the changes in thresholds for support. Fearne explained:

It's a full-time job now as well because of government cutbacks. The services that used to take these things on, if we go back, I've always been involved in safeguarding as every member of the staff is, but I remember years back anything we had that we deemed as safeguarding thing we would phone straight through to social services. Then, they would run with it.[...] The cutbacks now are that they haven't the capacity to do it. Their threshold has gotten higher and higher, so very much what we would have just phoned through and they would run with now won't meet their thresholds.

(Fearne, Elmtree)

Diane echoed Fearne's sentiments concerning the increased responsibility for safeguarding due to funding cuts.

The other thing we find ourselves doing in terms of safeguarding is a lot of work with agencies. Where you'd think social care would have engaged or spoken to different agencies, a lot of the time, we are doing it.

(Diane, Ivywood)

While not a direct safeguarding issue per se, Dora, the deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), raised her concerns in relation to the lack of support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):

I feel quite let down, to be honest, by CAMHS. She [a student] was referred to CAMHS, and they said that-- I mean, from what we see in school, she really is in need of a lot of support. She's self-harming, and CAMHS said she doesn't meet their thresholds. It's very frustrating not being able to get that support, very frustrating. The threshold is ridiculous. It's so high. Goodness knows who they do see because if they don't see this child, I can't imagine what sort of child they are seeing.

(Dora, Oakdale)

The schools appeared to be experiencing multiple pressures due to the threshold increases in wider services for support, which the school were having to address.

The level of increased personal support was described by Eoin. He explained how Holly had previously supported him, before being a staff member, with social services:

Holly used to come to a lot of groups with me to do with my son because he was under the Child Protection Act, from his mum, who suffered from mental health and had a lot of issues. [...] I got to her know quite well that and she had quite a lot belief me [...] I then volunteered, and I've stepped up, and then I've ended up for this job.

(Eoin, Oakdale)

Here, Holly, as the safeguarding lead, was physically attending social services meetings to be in line with the safeguarding requirements. The experiences at the three schools were reflective of Done and Murphy's (2018, p.148) point that schools and teachers are 'charged with enacting discourses of social justice within a context of diminished funding and against a wider discursive backdrop of national economic priorities'. While all schools have always safeguarded children, this was previously achieved by working with the LAs and other agencies. The DfE (2018b), p.9) advise that the school safeguarding lead is responsible for 'liaising with other agencies and setting up an inter-agency assessment as appropriate'. Fearne explained the difficulty in enlisting help:

Our role in school now is very much that early prevention and getting in, doing all of the early ground works, and very often, it then doesn't even get to social

services because the threshold is so high. The Government will tell you that they've put a service in called early help, which is what is supposed to be the first rung on the ladder, but early help is being cut back to a degree now that their threshold is higher or very often you'll ring early help and what you've already told the parents to do is what they would have told the parent to do.

(Fearne, Elmtree)

The three schools expressed that they were responsible for providing higher levels of support for the children due to the changes in the thresholds. Fearne also expressed increased workloads and pressure in relation to safeguarding:

Obviously, we're going to report on if it is needed, but they [parents] often will engage with us better than with the social services. Consequently, that means our workload is enormous because you think I've got this case, I'm going to ring through for some advice, and what they're telling you is what I've already told the parents, and they're not going to take it on. Then, it becomes our job.

(Fearne, Elmtree)

She further noted that changes from the Government had made the school increasingly responsible for the children:

What they implemented within the last two years was for schools to write a [...] We have to write our own early help offer now, and so in that, all the services that we will offer and - we have to submit that online. So that's basically us doing the Government's job, really.

(Fearne, Elmtree)

The evidence indicates how the Government have made schools increasingly responsible for child welfare (Ball, 2017; Tower, 2018). Whilst the aim of neoliberalism is to reduce state intervention in the lives of individuals, vulnerable children still require safeguarding. Braun and Maguire (2020, p.2) pose the question of primary education: 'what is its purpose and whose needs should it serve?' This question could be extended to include the extent to which schools are required to support the welfare of children and their families. Ivywood had further extended its responsibility for safeguarding to include the parents, as Fiona explained:

Well, our Place2Be, what we've recently done, this is a school, and we safeguard children. Sometimes, it's the adult, the parent, that needs the safeguarding. We have done our own adult safeguarding procedure now between Place2Be and myself where to refer, whether it be for mental health. It

can be all different things, but it's enabling them to come and let us know we have a counselling service for the parents.

(Fiona, Ivywood)

The schools' approaches to welfare for children and their families further demonstrate a position of obligation (Trnka and Trundle, 2014). Trnka and Trundle (ibid., p.145) advise responsibility and obligation 'require a switch between neoliberal logics of self-responsibility [...] and other forms of interpersonal responsibility and obligation', which was evident in the schools due to their safeguarding of the whole family. The safeguarding structures and procedures that each implemented were an acceptance of this position of obligation, which made the schools increasingly responsible for providing support. In this, Elmtree and, even more so Ivywood reflect Foucault's (2007) notion of governmentality. However, instead of the family governing itself, the school had assumed responsibility for governing the family.

The management structure for safeguarding differed at Oakdale. Holly, the headteacher, was also the safeguarding lead. She recounted typically receiving weekly calls from social services concerning cases of domestic violence affecting pupils, with many children in the school considered vulnerable. Oakdale had increased requirements for social services due to the situations of some of the families. Holly explained that there were multiple and wide-ranging issues that required additional services:

I know that my big issue here is social service involvement and it's related to drugs, for example, and domestic violence, that's where I've got to focus my efforts.

(Holly, Oakdale)

As with Fearne, Holly also noted the threshold for social services intervention had increased, resulting in children's situations being disregarded by other services. Holly explained an incident of not being able to access the required support for a particular child:

The worst things I found, the worse things are social care things where I refer, and they said, "It doesn't meet the threshold or we don't think it's--" Then I sit, and I do worry about it sometimes. I've had ones where I phoned up for one. It

was coming up to the six-week holiday, and I phoned them and I said, "I don't think these children will get fed if we don't put something in place." [...], they said to me, "What we'll do is we'll drop in twice during the week to make sure there's food on the shelves."

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly identified neglect, which 'may involve a parent or carer failing to: provide adequate food, clothing and shelter' (DfE, 2018b, p.15). Subsequently, she followed the correct procedure in raising her concerns. However, Holly explained that school staff in the local area had taken responsibility for feeding the child during the summer holiday:

That, to me, said that child's going to be fed because they might not be allowed access to that food. When I came back in after the summer, two of our parents that work here had been feeding that child over the holiday. That's when you feel let down by the system and also that child being hungry. That's not right.

(Holly, Oakdale)

It appears that the school staff felt obligated to feed the child due to the failure of Government services. The intervention by staff reflects Peeters' (2013, p.585) notion of 'obligated citizens'. The neoliberal Government have taken a step back but simultaneously makes citizens responsible for solving societal problems (ibid.). In addition, the experiences at Oakdale reflect Hanley et al.'s (2020) finding that teachers are increasingly required to do more emotional labour. This emotional labour was evident in Holly and affected her well-being as she worried about the children:

As a teacher, you have to go to bed at night and think, "Have I done all that I can for the children? If you think I'm still worrying about that particular one child that stands out, we've all had them. We've all got them in every class, I'm sure.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly explained her frustration and her feelings of being let down by the Government following a meeting:

We went to a headteacher's meeting with Nicky Morgan when she was the Education Secretary for the country. She did this talk. Then she said, "Have you got any questions?" I said, "I go to sleep at night worrying about some children. I get to the summer holidays, and I'm worried about how they're going to be." I

said, "What would you recommend to do?" She said, "Write to your local MP." I thought, "That won't do any good, that won't do any good for these children, what a waste of time."

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly clearly felt let down by the safeguarding system and the Government. Whilst the DfE (2018b) advise the 'welfare of children is **everyone's** responsibility', this statement did not appear to apply to the Education Secretary, who tried to pass the issue on to the local MP.

While not a direct safeguarding issue per se, Dora, the deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), raised her concerns in relation to the lack of support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):

I feel quite let down, to be honest, by CAMHS. She [a student] was referred to CAMHS, and they said that-- I mean, from what we see in school, she really is in need of a lot of support. She's self-harming, and CAMHS said she doesn't meet their thresholds. It's very frustrating not being able to get that support, very frustrating. The threshold is ridiculous. It's so high. Goodness knows who they do see because if they don't see this child, I can't imagine what sort of child they are seeing.

(Dora, Oakdale)

Dora's experiences echoed Holly's in relation to the frustration of not being able to access the required support.

Holly seemed to bear the brunt of the pressures and worries for safeguarding the children. There was no evidence of a wider safeguarding team to support her, as was evident in Elmtree and Ivywood. Support for headteachers should also come from the board of governors, with the Governance Handbook (DfE, 2020c, p.10) stating, 'Governing boards should also have regard to the need for the Headteacher to be able to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance, and, through their strategic role, should provide support and challenge to help reduce unnecessary burdens'. However, the example given in the Handbook in relation to reducing burdens was related to data requests (ibid.). At Oakdale, Holly appeared to take sole responsibility for safeguarding the children. Goldie, a parent governor, identified that teachers were effectively 'social workers', stating 'what is involved in the running of a school has

changed'. Within the school, it appeared there was a lack of emotional labour support for the staff (Hanley et al., 2020). I noted in my research journal:

Following the interviews at Oakdale I felt that the participating teaching staff appreciated the time and the space to discuss their issues. There was a sense of the participants feeling unburdened at the end of the interviews.

This was also my impression from the interview with Holly, which lasted over two hours. She appeared to value the space and time to discuss the wider issues the school was experiencing and provide a more personal response in relation to the many areas covered.

The Government policies place much emphasis on school leaders achieving social justice and ensuring children's welfare. However, there is little regard in policies for the challenging circumstances of some individual schools or the welfare of the staff and the headteachers.

The school leaders at Elmtree, Ivywood, and Oakdale used their leadership to provide a safe, caring environment for the children and families of their school community. Although Ashfield did not have the same experiences of vulnerable families or families experiencing deprivation, Hattie was similarly committed to the safety and welfare of the children. The approaches to interpreting and enacting the safeguarding policies aligned with McLeod's (2017) and Hellowell's (2018) notion that care and responsibility were bound within the teaching profession. The findings from the research reflect Hellowell's (2018, p.179) assertion that responsabilisation can exist in a dialogical relationship with the responsibilities arising from compassionate care. These caring values were upheld despite Government austerity measures affecting the wider services the schools had previously relied on. The schools demonstrated their moral agency and caring values that went beyond teaching and learning, seeking to ensure that the child's welfare and safety were met.

9.4 The unequal and unseen experiences in schools

The previous section highlighted the schools' experiences in safeguarding pupils and the increased demands to achieve this due to the Government austerity measures. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that each school had different experiences with regard to the welfare and safeguarding of the children. However, neoliberal accountability judges all schools on measurable outputs. This suggests that much of the work schools undertake in areas of social justice and equity goes unseen.

The literature highlighted that there has always been a strong association between disadvantage and low attainment at all stages of schooling (Field, 2010; Ridge, 2013; CPAG, 2017; Ball, 2017; Reay, 2017; OECD, 2018; Hanley et al., 2020). The Government recognise this, with many policies, guidance documents and initiatives all aimed at closing the attainment gap. These Government documents responsabilised three of the participating schools for wider student welfare to enable the children to achieve within education. All four schools were judged as Good by Ofsted, which suggests that the attainment across all the schools was similar regardless of the disadvantages experienced via the differing cohorts. The evidence indicates that each school's leadership, in particular the vision of the headteacher, was the driving force to ensure student equity. Yet, in doing so, the schools appeared to bear a heavier burden when compared to Ashfield with its middle-class cohort. The evidence has highlighted the unequal experiences and additional work undertaken at some primary schools.

In contrast to the experiences of the three schools, Ashfield did not comment on the Safeguarding policy in the same way. Instead, Hattie noted that the new statutory guidance had required a new porch for the school to meet health and safety regulations. These differential demands highlight the radically-differing experiences and priorities within individual primary schools. The difference in priorities and responsibilities within each school can be attributed to the socio-economic context, with low-income families the worst affected by Government austerity measures (Ball, 2017; CPAG, 2017; Reay, 2017; Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018). Therefore, schools with a higher proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are

bearing the brunt of supporting the children and their families. Pupil Premium funding, intended to close the attainment gap, along with school budgets, was being used to fund staff and services for families in need.

Heidi explained that employing the family support worker meant the loss of learning assistants in the classroom reinforcing the findings of Webster (2018) and Ravalier et al., (2021). In addition, school budgets were spent in many diverse ways, further responsabilising the school and staff for the wider welfare of families. This wider support from the schools appeared almost expected by the Government in its discourse of education being a means of ensuring social justice. Government neoliberal policies create a complicated narrative for school leaders to unpick concerning disadvantaged children, with much work on policy interpretation needed to go over and above teaching and learning. Therefore, there is an unequal experience for schools in areas of deprivation. This final quotation from Holly suggests that schools feel they will continue to bear the brunt of wider changes in society affecting families:

I think the social care bit is a big part of it, and the fact that, with austerity, quite a lot of our parents are struggling. It worries me that as Brexit happens and the finances get tighter, so, say, shopping bills go up, some of our parents are going to start choosing between food and fuel.

(Holly, Oakdale)

Holly's comments here are portentous as, since the interview, there has been the COVID-19 pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis, particularly impacting low-income families. This comment suggests that schools with cohorts in deprived areas are likely to have had to increase their support for children and their families. This could put increasing pressure on schools to continue to meet the required accountability and performativity measures due to increased numbers of disadvantaged children. Therefore, there is an unequal experience and unseen workloads for schools and their staff in areas of deprivation.

9.5 Summary

This final analysis and discussion chapter has highlighted how the schools became responsibilised for the welfare and safeguarding of their children and families. This responsibilisation occurred due to the Government's austerity measures, which resulted in funding cuts to benefits and services affecting families. Whilst school budgets were ringed fenced from austerity measures, the schools were responsibilised for supporting families and children beyond teaching and learning.

The research demonstrated that each school had a different structure to manage the wider needs of families and the additional level of safeguarding required due to funding cuts. Elmtree and Ivywood employed family support workers to enable wider provision and reduce the impact on teachers. The experiences at Elmtree and Ivywood with regard to safeguarding and the support of families highlighted that staff appeared more able to cope with the increased demands and that the burden was shared. However, in Oakdale, the headteacher, Holly, seemed to bear the burden and worry of safeguarding the children.

The research has highlighted the differing experiences between the schools depending on the socio-economic backgrounds of their cohorts. This resulted in increased workloads and pressures beyond teaching and learning to enable conditions of equity and social justice for their primary school children. Therefore, the schools were responsibilised for enabling student equity. All the primary schools' interpretation and enactment of policies strongly demonstrated traditional values of duty and ethics of care for the welfare and education of the children. Drawing on this analysis, a key issue is whether it is possible to make authentic and meaningful recommendations for schools and policymakers.

CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter revisits the research aim, which was to provide *A critical evaluation of the impact of Government neoliberal policies on leadership and experiences in English primary schools*. It will address the research objectives and questions detailed in Chapter 1.7. A discussion of methodological considerations and limitations of the research will follow. Next, the conclusions drawn from the research findings are explained, and the contribution to knowledge is expressed. Specific recommendations regarding policy and practice will then be discussed. Finally, there will be an indication of potential future work that could be developed from the results of the thesis.

10.2 Summary of findings

My overall aim was to explore and evaluate the everyday experience of primary school actors, the challenges they face and how Government neoliberal policies either contribute to or alleviate these issues. This was achieved using an interpretivist paradigm with data gathered from four primary schools with various actors from the schools' communities. The answers to the study's research questions were determined through a thematic analysis of data gathered from the 26 participants' in-depth and semi-structured interviews. By answering the original questions of the research, I will elucidate the study's main findings.

10.2.1 How are education policies interpreted and enacted or resisted in the everyday experiences of primary schools?

I have argued that my findings indicate that headteachers' and teachers' personal values and beliefs affect how education policies are interpreted and enacted, or resisted, in primary schools. Government policy advises that headteachers have the responsibility to set the ethos and culture of their school, which was evident in the schools studied. The schools' ethos and culture reflected the headteachers' beliefs, and it was evident in their management that there were competing ideals in relation to policy interpretation and enactment. The policy interpretation partly conformed to neoliberal rhetoric accountability, yet there was an overriding belief that it was essential to maintain caring values.

There was similar evidence in relation to teachers' interpretation and enactment or resistance of Government neoliberal policies. There was evidence that recent Government policy changes to the National Curriculum and SATs had impacted teachers by increasing accountability and performativity demands. The participating teachers were conforming to these neoliberal policies whilst aiming to be congruent within their practice by maintaining a child-centred focus. Headteachers and teachers alike sought to protect children from the pressures of SATs by ensuring that the experiences for the children were engaging. Yet the pressure on the teachers to achieve was evident.

Government neoliberal policies created space for headteachers to assume autonomy in running their schools. At the same time, this autonomy appeared to responsabilise the headteachers in relation to maintaining a caring approach to staff, children and their families. The headteachers' autonomous approach to enacting policies enabled creative responses by the schools, especially for cohorts experiencing deprivation. Policy enactment demonstrated the schools' commitment to social equity by interpreting the National Curriculum and using Pupil Premium funding to enrich children's school experience. It was evident that schools in deprived areas worked harder, with the headteachers reflecting increased responsabilisation to mitigate social injustices. The research highlights that faced with increased Government demands, primary schools still maintain traditional caring values.

10.2.2 How do Government neoliberal policies impact the school-parent relationship with primary schools?

The school-parent relationship is considered instrumental to a child's school success. Many Government education policies address the school-parent relationships and the difficulties in engaging some parents. Neoliberal policy discourse values the middle-class parent as an active chooser and consumer within education, with parents experiencing deprivation or language barriers described as lacking in high aspirations and hard to reach, thus creating a binary narrative. The interviews in this research demonstrated the complexity and challenges of the school-parent relationship, which at times did reflect the Government binary discourse. However, I argue the evidence

highlighted a more nuanced understanding of these relationships. The presence of middle-class parents did not always result in a positive school-parent relationship. Instead, parents, as consumers, used the school more as a service and were not always active partners with the school. The notion of the neoliberal ideal parent driving up standards was not evident but appeared to result in discussions of blame, lack of trust and a 'them' and 'us' culture.

My findings revealed that the use of parent-to-parent social media groups further complicated the school-parent relationship. However, in contrast, there were positive experiences of two schools in deprived areas with many families with English as an additional language. Both schools' ethos of inclusion was evident in their working with parents to ensure that the school was approachable and parents were not viewed within a deficit model. The schools worked in multiple ways to establish two-way communication without evidence of a 'them' and 'us' culture. Therefore, I argue this illustrates there are opportunities for all schools to consider the type of communication used with parents to ensure a two-way flow. In addition, clear expectations of positive school-parent relationships need to be established.

10.2.3 What is the significance of the Government's wider policies on leadership decisions in primary schools, with particular reference to issues of learning and welfare?

My findings indicate that schools in deprived areas were experiencing significant challenges due to Government austerity measures. The three participant schools needed to support children and the wider family due to the adverse effects of the cuts to services and benefits. The many initiatives employed by each school were essential to meet children's basic material needs in order to create conditions for children to engage with their learning. These initiatives and wider family support lay beyond the scope of education. Whilst austerity policies did not directly affect school funding, each school funded various mechanisms for support, including recruiting specialist staff to address issues relating to wider Government cuts.

The impacts of austerity policies increasing child poverty were especially evident in Elmtree and Ivywood. To alleviate some aspects of poverty, the schools implemented

free breakfast clubs and after-school activities. In addition, issues related to well-being, behaviour and attendance were increased in these schools, and were addressed through the employment of specialist staff and services. The schools' approaches to mitigating children's circumstances demonstrated a caring ethos within enacting policies to provide equity of experience for their pupils. However, whilst funding was ring-fenced for education, I illustrate that Government austerity policies effectively depreciated the school's budgets. While there is Pupil Premium funding for pupils from low-income backgrounds, this is intended to close the attainment gap, not to fund wider welfare support.

My research revealed that cuts to social services and the increased thresholds for support impacted the three schools with cohorts experiencing deprivation. Each school had a different approach to working with support services and families in need. Elmtree and Ivywood employed family support workers to help and support families with difficult circumstances. The schools had become responsabilised for the welfare and safeguarding of their children and families. They also highlighted that families had no place to go for support and provided various services beyond the scope of teaching and learning within the primary schools. The schools were supporting families so they could support the child.

Moreover, the safeguarding structures at Elmtree and Ivywood sought to protect teaching staff from these additional burdens by employing specialist staff and a wider team. The evidence suggests this structure aided staff in the ability to cope with the increased emotional labour of safeguarding. However, in Oakdale, the headteacher bore the burden and worry of safeguarding the children as the safeguarding lead. My research highlighted the different requirements of schools reflecting the context of their cohorts, resulting in increased workloads and pressures beyond teaching and learning. I assert that schools were responsabilised for enabling student equity and safety for the children and their families. The primary schools' interpretation and enactment of policies strongly demonstrated traditional values of duty and ethics of care for the welfare and education of the children.

10.2.4 How do Government policies impact the everyday experiences of primary school actors, with particular reference to issues of learning and welfare?

The three research questions, as detailed above, have answered this overarching question and the original aim of the research. Having answered these research questions, I can now address the overarching question of how Government policies impact the everyday experiences of actors within a primary school community. Whilst the research did not address any specific Government policies, the impacts of education and wider policies were evident throughout each school. I have demonstrated that the interpretation and enactment of policies reflected headteachers' values and beliefs in conjunction with understanding the context of their school cohorts. The headteacher as the school leader was integral to the school's identity through the format of the school's ethos, values and culture. I have highlighted that each primary school was unique, with all participating schools having different approaches to running their schools. This demonstrates that there are opportunities within policies for schools to interpret, enact or resist policies depending on their circumstances. However, all the schools were judged as good, which may have afforded them more scope to interpret policies.

I have demonstrated that some Government policies, such as devolving power from the LAs, created an opportunity for governing boards and individual headteachers to take direct control of their schools. This space for headteachers to be autonomous within their leadership was evident within each school. However, this autonomy also made some headteachers increasingly responsabilised for social justice within the school and the wider community, specifically within areas of deprivation. Whilst all the schools were autonomous, this created a feeling of isolation for the schools and their staff. Differing management structures in some schools enabled a self-supporting system, with some schools not affected by the increased demands of emotional labour related to the child's welfare. I have asserted that all the schools have sought to maintain a child-centred approach and demonstrated caring values throughout all aspects of the school.

10.3 Limitations of the research

In this section, I acknowledge how aspects of the research may have limited the overall quality and outcomes. Some of these limitations were highlighted throughout this thesis at times when they addressed discussion relating to the impact on the project.

10.3.1 Access to participants

The original aim of the research was to gather data from multiple actors within a school community and to be more immersed in two primary schools to collect data from a lived experience perspective to answer the research question. However, whilst there was initial agreement from the headteachers at Ashfield and Elmtree, more in-depth access to the day-to-day life of the schools did not materialise. Whilst I did have access to parents that were known to me at Ashfield, I could not gain access to the parents at Elmtree due to the headteacher being the gatekeeper. This result is a re-evaluation of the project and an increase in the sample size from two to four schools. However, adding more schools created a rich data set, enabling more in-depth comparisons within the data analysis. Whilst the original aim was a lived experience, the data's richness provided a solid understanding of the experiences within each of the four schools.

10.3.2 Data collection

There were some limitations to the study due to the data collection methods. These are related to the sample limitation of access to wider school community members. The original aim was to use focus groups in conjunction with semi-structured interviews to enable triangulation and reliability of the findings. However, the data collection was via interviews only. The interviews were both in-depth and semi-structured, which produced a rich data set for analysis.

A connected limitation was the lack of access to parents within three schools. Therefore, the data presented a one-sided view of the school-parent relationship. However, due to the diverse experiences across the four schools, the finding on the school-parent relationship was still illuminating. In addition, I aimed to conduct a

specific policy analysis in relation to the interview data. This form of analysis was not applicable as the exploratory nature of the interviews did not refer to a specific policy or policies impacting the school. The validity of the findings was demonstrated through rigorous data analysis, ensuring an audit trail, member checking, and reflexivity.

10.3.3 The role of the researcher

Within any interpretivist research, the research findings are an interpretation of the researcher. I set out my ontology, epistemology and positionality in Chapter 5.2 to acknowledge that my worldview could influence the findings. Throughout the research journey, I continuously aimed to be reflective on the research aimed to suppress my personal, subjective beliefs and values to maintain objectivity and reliability throughout all aspects of the research. Throughout the process, I faced many dilemmas requiring a constantly flexible approach to the project and challenging elements to ensure I could gather data from participants. As a novice researcher, staying positively connected with the project was sometimes a personal challenge. However, it was via the interview data that I could maintain a connection with the research, as I held a strong belief that the experiences of the schools needed to be shared with a broader audience.

A further impact on the project was a prolonged interruption due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in a one-year gap with only minimal engagement with the research. However, the rigorous approach to the initial coding of the data and the use of a research journal enabled a continuous and reliable process of constructing the code book, which informed the writing of the findings, analysis and discussion chapters. The interruption further suppressed bias as I was focused on the data gathered instead of the memory of the events. The anonymisation process additionally aided with reducing my bias as I worked with the aliases, helping with the objectivity of the data collected and the resulting findings.

10.4 Contribution to knowledge

The core contribution of this research has been identifying and questioning the usefulness of the binary discourse in Government documents referring to parents and

education (see DfE 2014c; DfE2014d, DfE2015; DfE, 2017a; DfWP, 2017; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Within these various documents, middle-class parenting values are upheld as the ideal to ensure their children's education success, via: the parental ability to be more knowledgeable in relation to choosing the best schools (DfE, 2014d); and, having the wider understanding to support their child (DfE, 2017a; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). This positive discourse compares negatively with parents experiencing deprivation or having English as an additional language, who are placed within a deficit model (House of Commons, 2014; DfE, 2015; DfWP, 2017; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). My analysis highlighted the limitations of this binary discourse, as the schools with a majority of middle-class parents had barriers within their communication and involvement of parents. In contrast, some of the participating schools in areas of deprivation with large cohorts of English as an additional language reported strong relationships. In schools with a binary discourse, this appeared to create further barriers. I therefore suggest a third discourse of engaged but requiring support, which should be included within Government policies. I argue the need for a more nuanced understanding of the school-parent relationship and challenge the use of the deficit discourse for some families. These changes could result in creating positive school-parent relationships.

A connected contribution has been to identify the wider social service support that schools are now offering families. I have identified that the neoliberal ideology of austerity has impacted experiences in schools. Services previously provided by local authorities and social services no longer exist, which has positioned the school as the only place for support for many disadvantaged families. Therefore, school's remit has had to evolve to counter the effects of funding cuts to these services, which have significantly impacted schools in areas of deprivation. My research illustrates that some primary schools support disadvantaged families in diverse ways beyond the scope of teaching and learning. Individual school leaders recognise the importance of the whole family's well-being as central to the child and their development. The schools employing staff that support families placed pressure on the school's budgets and the reduced teacher support staff. Therefore, my research has demonstrated that the impact of austerity measures has expanded the schools' remit beyond education and the primary school as a fourth emergency service for many families.

This research exposes the increased emotional burden for school staff, especially for the headteacher, in child welfare and safeguarding areas. The increased thresholds for social welfare intervention further responsabilised the school and staff members for wider child welfare beyond teaching and learning. The schools with a larger cohort of deprivation worked much harder to support children and their families, suggesting an unequal workload and experience reflecting the different contexts of each school. The teaching profession has always evoked a duty of care. However, this notion of duty has gone beyond the school gate and the remit of teaching the child. I assert that maintaining a caring ethos has made schools and, particularly, headteachers as the school leader increasingly responsabilised for social justice within the wider community.

10.5 Recommendations of the Research:

The finding of this research has revealed a number of recommendations for policymakers and schools.

10.5.1 Recommendations for policymakers

I recommend that policymakers acknowledge and address the reality that whilst education budgets were ring-fenced from austerity measures, these cuts impacted school budgets in the wider support schools were providing families. Policymakers must address the increased thresholds for social services for children and the impact this has on schools. Funding for schools must include supporting the welfare of the wider families with specialist staff, which would, therefore, not impact teaching and learning. Free school meals should be extended to breakfast clubs as schools provide these services, funded with existing school budgets.

There needs to be opportunities for school leaders to share best practices and ideas, specifically in relation to supporting children and families within schools of similar cohorts. The current fragmented system does not support the coming together of school leaders. Whilst the headteachers themselves did not suggest that they wish to come together to discuss issues that they may face. The evidence from the interviews and the perception of the researcher was that a space for headteacher to

come together may facilitate discussion concerning teaching and learning but also provide a space of support for headteachers. Further consideration should be given to supporting the wellbeing of all school staff, specifically in schools with cohorts in challenging circumstances. This would recognise their additional work on social justice.

Policymakers must challenge the binary narrative in relation to parents' values within education policies based on social class. This has created a deficit model for parents from disadvantaged backgrounds or with English as an additional language, which schools can remove when applying an inclusive approach. Policymakers need to support schools to remove barriers with all families with a nuanced understanding of the school-parent relationship. In particular, guidance document to schools should include the importance of creating a positive two-way communication, which effects meaningful dialogue between the school and families. This approach should include the importance of the accessibility of communication with families with English as an addition language, which may require technology support for translation into multiple languages.

10.5.2 Recommendations for schools

The research was conducted within four differing primary schools. Each school had individual responses to their cohorts. Here, I make recommendations that could help schools to address issues. However, creating a space for schools to share best practices would benefit all.

Schools need to consider how to share their best practice approaches. The three schools with cohort experience deprivation each had creative approaches to be embedded into the daily curriculum as a means of inclusion. The inclusion of a wide range of activities should reflect the individual cohorts, whose responses also addressed social equity. I recommend school leaders gain a strong understanding of their local context and the families' experiences to maintain a child-centred approach to enacting policies.

Schools must address their school-parent relationship to avoid a 'them and us' discourse, which creates barriers. I recommend schools build two-way communication with parents rather than information-passing communication to build meaningful relationships. Schools must develop clear approaches to the expectation of a school-parent relationship, which may remove barriers. This should also include expectations of parent-to-parent social media platforms.

I recommend schools consider their management structures for safeguarding. If safeguarding is an issue within the school, having a team that can support the challenges appeared to mitigate the emotional labour and the added pressures concerning the issues raised. Schools could also consider the employment of specialist family support workers, which would facilitate not only the protection of teachers' time but also foster positive school-parent relationships.

10.6 Future Work

The exploratory nature of this study has provided much insight into the experiences of actors within primary schools. This thesis could be the basis for further research in many different areas. Below, I highlight areas for future research.

Future research into differing types of primary schools to understand headteachers' influence on school culture when part of a MAT. Three participating schools in this study were standalone, and one was part of a small local academy chain. Therefore, the headteachers in this study were able to demonstrate their autonomy in the running of their schools. However, in contrast, large MAT might not encourage or facilitate headteachers in their schools to develop an ethos and culture from a personal perspective which responds to the local context.

Further research might usefully focus on headteachers' personal beliefs about the purpose of education and where the boundaries lie between the school, family and Government policy. Three participating schools in this study were standalone, and one was part of a small local academy chain. Therefore, the headteachers in this study were able to demonstrate their autonomy in the running of their schools. However, in contrast, large MAT might not encourage or facilitate headteachers in

their schools to develop an ethos and culture from a personal perspective which response to the local context.

Finally, due to the impact of COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, further research is required into how schools support children's welfare and that of their families. Understanding the pressures placed on primary schools and the additional emotional labour is required of staff to support children and families in challenging circumstances. The focus here could be on schools with large cohorts of disadvantaged children. To understand how schools approach providing this support. This research could result in recommendations for policymakers on how best to help schools and, therefore, families.

10.7 Concluding Thoughts

Since the original data were collected in 2018 and 2019, many societal changes have affected families, especially those from low-income backgrounds. There are increasing reports of the detrimental, long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21 and the UK cost-of-living crisis, which escalated in the spring of 2022 and continues at time of writing in 2023. Post-pandemic, the Government's focus for schools was to fund initiatives to 'catch up' on lost learning due to school closures. However, there was no regard for the wider impacts of societal challenges having pushed many more children into poverty than when the research was conducted. I return to my introductory citation of Farnsworth and Irving's (2018) argument that neoliberalism had not only survived but was reinvigorated due to austerity; this point has never been more relevant than in current times. Furthermore, Atkinson et al. (2013) asserted that at the beginning of the austerity ideology, family life had been stratified, and the effects had been damaging to schools. The evidence of this research indicates that over the intervening four years, social disadvantage, and the impacts on families and schools, have been exacerbated.

In conclusion, I surmise that primary school leaders and staff will feel responsabilised to for bearing the burden of these adverse effects, in order to support the welfare of more children and their families. The evidence of this research demonstrates that many headteachers and school staff will likely continue to prioritise children's welfare,

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reflecting their values and child-centred approach. However, this raises many questions pertaining to how much more headteachers and staff can endure, whilst remaining congruent within their practice, to provide for children's education and welfare without Government support and recognition.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Schedule

Interview questions Headteacher:

- Length time approx. as a teacher
- Length time approx. headteacher and how long in the current school
- What is your perception of being a head teacher?
- How would you describe your school community?
- How has the school community changed over time?
- How have parent expectations of the school changed over time?
- What are the main impacts of Government policies currently within the school?
- How are government education policies interpreted and embedded into school policies? What is the process?
- How do you think these Government policies impact on their school community?
- What is your perception of the relationship between teachers and pupils and parents/carers as a result of policy changes?
- What data does the school collect and why?
- Additional question - Explain the effects of social media on the school community?

Interview questions - Family Support Worker

- Can you tell me about your position within the school?
- How would you describe your role?
- How would you describe your school community?
- How has the school community changed over time?
- How have parents' expectations of the school changed over time?
- What are the main impacts of Government policies currently within the school?
- How do you perceive the relationship between teachers and pupils and parents/carers?

Interview questions – Teachers / Learning Assistant / Other job roles:

- Length time approx. as a teacher [job role changed in relation to participant]
- Tell me about your role of as a teacher?
- How would you describe your school community?
- How has the school community changed over time?
- What are your expectations of the parents / wider school community?
- How have parent expectations of the school changed over time?
- What are the current challenges for the school?
- Does this impact on the school community? If so how?

- What is your perception of the relationship between teachers and pupils and parents/carers? Does this change as a result of policy changes?
- What data does the school collect and why?

Interview questions Ashfield parents:

- How many children do you have in primary school?
- What years are they in?
- How did you choose your primary school?
- How would you describe your school?
- How would you describe the role of the school?
- How would you describe the role of the parent to children at school?
- How would you describe your school community?
- Do you use any other facility supplied by the school? Morning or Afternoon clubs etc? If yes what?
- What do you feel is the importance of the school community?
- What do you perceive as the current challenge with the school?
- How do you think this impacts the wider community?
- The school is having a change of headteacher. How do you think this will impact the school & the community?
- How do you feel about the pressure on schools to succeed via SATs & Ofsted reports?

Appendix 2. Key for participant aliases

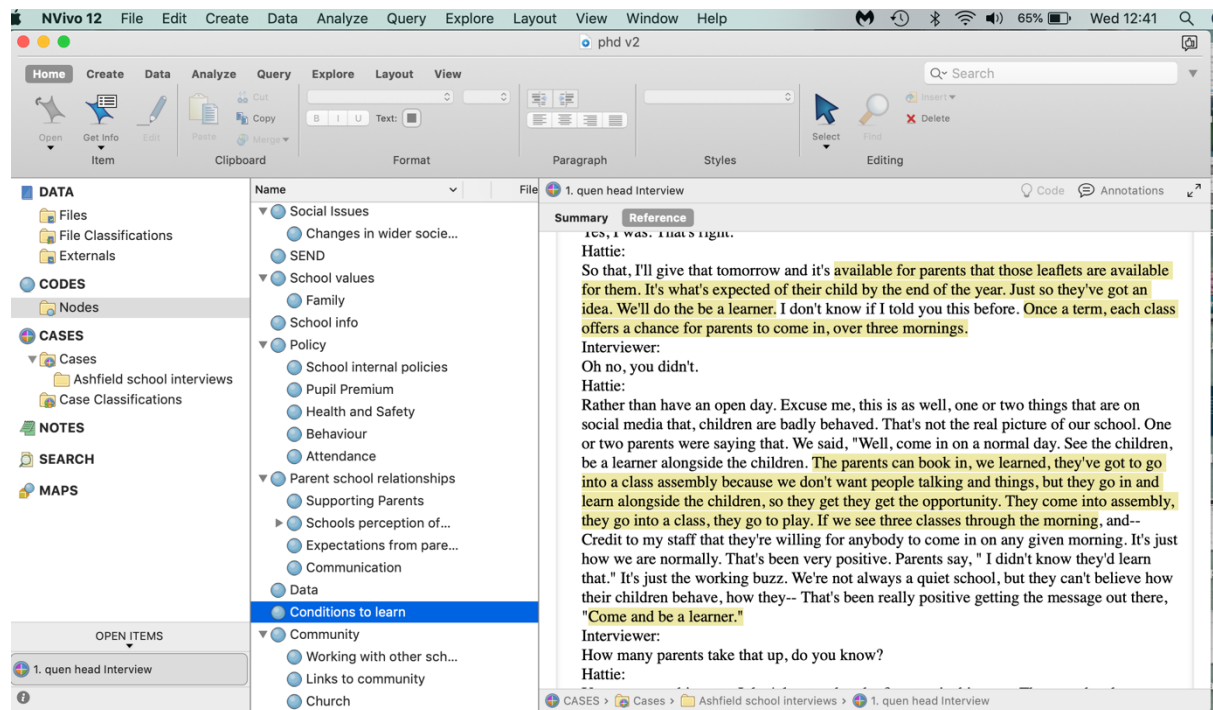
The first letter of each alias refers to the role, e.g., 'H' for headteacher, and the second letter refers to the school, e.g., 'a' for Ashfield. Therefore, Hattie, the headteacher at Ashfield primary school or Fiona is the family support worker at Ivywood primary school.

Role	Interview Coded name	Interview Coded school		Name first letter	First letter of participants name equals their job role
Headteacher	Hattie	Ashfield		H	Headteacher
Deputy Headteacher	Daisy	Ashfield		D	Deputy Headteacher
Teacher year 1	Taylor	Ashfield		T	Teacher
Teacher year 6	Tara	Ashfield		B	Business Manager
Business Manager	Barbara	Ashfield		F	Family Support Worker
LSA & parent	Layla	Ashfield		L	Learning Support Assistant (LSA)
Lunchtime supervisor & parent	Maisy	Ashfield		E	Emotion learning support assistant (ELSA)
Parent Governor	Gary	Ashfield		M	Lunchtime supervisor
Parent Governor	Gareth	Ashfield		G	Governor
Parent & PTA	Pat	Ashfield		P	Parent
Parent	Patsy	Ashfield			
Parent	Paige	Ashfield		Name second letter	Second letter of participants name relates to the school
Headteacher	Heidi	Elmtree		A	Ashfield
Family Support Worker	Fearne	Elmtree		E	Elmtree
LSA	Leoš	Elmtree		I	Ivywood
LSA & Parent Governor	Leelah	Elmtree		O	Oakdale
LSA	Leanne	Elmtree			
Headteacher	Hila	Ivywood			
Deputy Headteacher	Diane	Ivywood			
Family Support Worker	Fiona	Ivywood			
LSA	Lisa	Ivywood			
Headteacher	Holly	Oakdale			
Deputy Head, SENCO, teacher across various year groups.	Dora	Oakdale			
EYFS Teacher	Toni	Oakdale			
ELSA & Parent	Eoin	Oakdale			
Lunch time supervisor, LSA, Parent Governor, Parent, PTA	Goldie	Oakdale			

Appendix 3. Thematic analysis steps

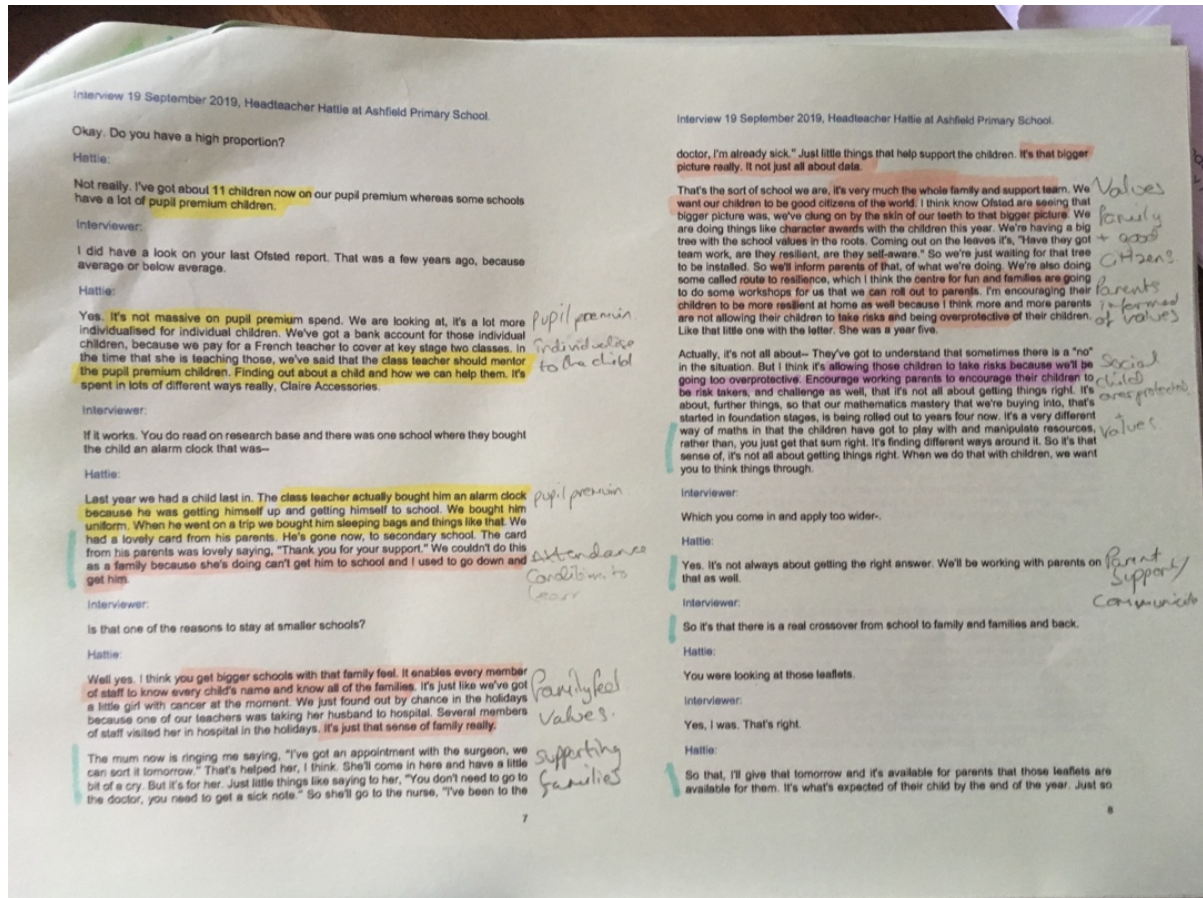
Appendix 3.1. Thematic analysis step 2

Braun and Clarke (2006) Step 2 Generating initial codes (screenshot of NVivo coding process)



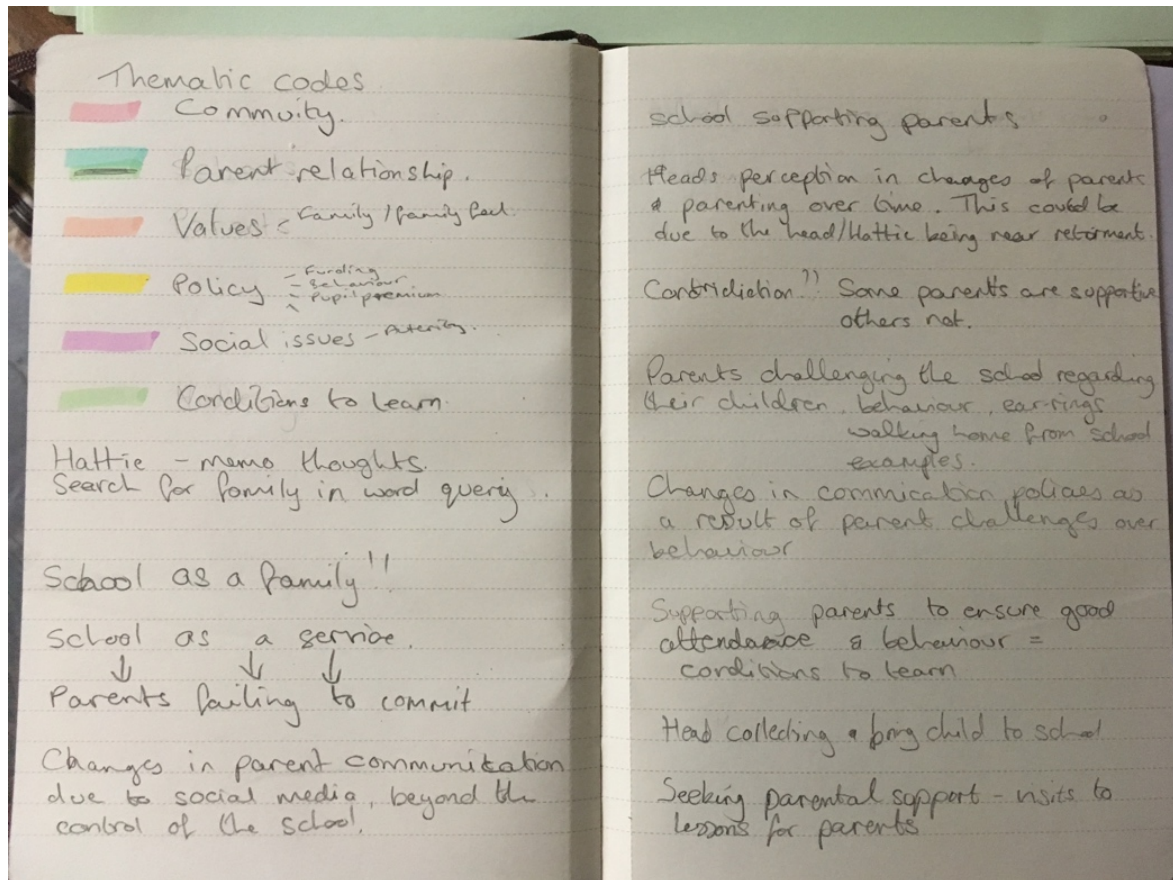
Appendix 3.2. Thematic analysis step 2

Braun and Clarke (2006) Step 2 Generating initial codes (printout of interview and the coding process).



Appendix 3.3. Thematic analysis step 3

Braun and Clarke (2006) Step 3 Searching for themes (research journal).



Appendix 4. Original codes

Original nodes /codes
The school links with the local community
Links between schools
Links with the local church
Demographic
Learning as a community
Links to community
Local area
Working with other schools
Policy
Academisation
Attendance
Behaviour
Curriculum
Data
Data - Demographic
EAL
Finance & Funding
Finance & Funding School as a business
Finance & Funding staffing
Governors
Health and safety
Leadership
Ofsted
Performance
Pupil Premium
Safeguarding
SATs
School Internal policy
SEND
Staff Training
Parent school relationship
Communication between school and parents
Expectations of parents
School as a service

Original nodes /codes
Challenging parents
PTA
Schools' experiences of parents
Supporting families
Overcoming challenges
School information
Demographic
Governing body
MAT
School challenges
Staff
School values
Inclusion
Social issues
Burden on the school
Changes to wider society
Complex issues
Cuts to services & benefits
Disadvantages
Language and culture
Mental Health Issues
Mobility
Social Services
Staff as a parent
Teaching and learning
English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Non curriculum based
School readiness
Social Media
Staff Training
Wider learning opportunities & experiences
The child
SEND
Support the child to learn
Concept of the school

Original nodes /codes
School building
Choosing a school
Church dioceses
Communication
Concerns
Engagement
Government reporting
Opinion of the school
Perceived school challenges
Opinion of the teachers
Parent teacher relationship
SEND Support
Parent school management relationship
Parent supporting learning
Parent to parent relationship
Parent info
Parent values
Concerns
Friendships
Why support the schools
Parent views
Expectations of parents
Extra-curricular activities
Perception of the school
Role of the parent
Supporting the school
Barriers to supporting the school
PTA raising funds
PTA and other parent relationships
School and PTA
PTA being taken for granted
Wider community
School community
School as a place of work

Appendix 5. Codebook

Appendix 5.1.1 Theme 1: The onus of leadership

Node / code	Sub-node / code	Definition	Examples	Code Source	Review of themes	Overarching theme	Number of participants	References	Total references
School culture and ethos and how this is perceived / experienced	School culture and ethos - the interpretation and lived experiences	How the school culture reflect the schools ethos, which appease set by the head teacher and how the values and interrelated by those with the school.	Diane - We talk about choosing the core purpose, but what is it specific to us here and now for our children, and our staff, and our community? Much as we've got the pressure of data, and much as we've got the pressure of Ofsted and accountability, this is still- we've always managed to hold on to what Ivywood is about, and that thing about family and being happy and being safe, that everybody can achieve.	Present in all schools	Headteacher seen as key in setting vaules for the school. These values reflect a care with in the school for all its members.	The Onus of Leadership	22	190	353
	Staff pereceptions of leadership	Staff pereceptions of leadership, mainly head teacher focused on the heads running of the school.	Dora - I think that Holly facilitates that sort of her ethos, she talks a lot about workload, making sure that we're not doing more than we should do. She felt very, very considerate about what she expects from us and what she doesn't. There's nothing unnecessary, that she expects of us. I think that she leads as well and that helps.	Present in all schools.	Management of the school and leadership - School culture and values	The Onus of Leadership	15	78	
	School as a place of work	Discussions relating to the school as a workplace.	Leanne - The hierarchy, the heads and deputy heads, they're very good with the staff and all this and incorporate teachers' ideas if they know it is going to work feasibly. The hierarchy are pretty good; I do like them they have spun the school around.	Present in all schools.	Inclusion, a sense of belonging often reflects the values of the school or the ethos.	The Onus of Leadership	15	59	
	Concept of the school	Differing interpretations of the role of the school	Barbara - There's just many demands on schools and teachers. They can't look after everybody all the time. At the end of the day, it's a business. I see that the school is a business. I know we're here to educate the children, but the children are our customers, parents are our customers in some ways, and I don't think that everyone sees it like that, but I certainly see that that is what it has to be now nowadays. We are here to offer a service.	Present in all schools.	Neoliberal aspects of the school as a service and what a school should offer.	The Onus of Leadership	8	26	

Appendix 5.1.2 Theme 1: The onus of leadership continued

Node / code	Sub-node / code	Definition	Examples	Code Source	Review of themes	Overarching theme	Number of participants	References	Total references
School management, policy interpretation and accountability	The impact of performance data requirements - Accountability measurements	Reference to the data collected by the school about their pupils	Holly - but it's just that if you were just a parent who's obsessed with data, you could look and compare the local schools and think that that's a fail in school. It wouldn't make sense because we've got a good Ofsted.	Present in all schools.	Management interpretation of policy - acts of resistance	The Onus of Leadership	13	80	241
	Pressures on schools due to funding and finance	Reference to school budgets and funding issues that are affecting the school budget.	Heidi - The other thing that I'd say is, cuts in funding definitely. I know the government is saying that they're giving more money in every school, that's not being realized in schools budget at all.	Present in all schools.	Management of the school. Neoliberal discourse in education.	The Onus of Leadership	13	72	
	The role of school governors in the management of the school	Reference to school governors and their responsibility with the school.	Holly - We have got one member of the community, but it's mostly parents. We don't get a lot of interest, that is a bit of a weakness for us. [...] We've got 10. We've got a couple of vacancies. We are always looking. The idea would be to get somebody that's not got children within the school because, at the moment, we're a bit heavy in that respect, around that side of things. It's a case of just getting the governors that you can, really. It's not easy to recruit people because it is quite a commitment and quite a lot of responsibility	Present in all schools.	Management of the school and leadership - Neoliberal approach.	The Onus of Leadership	8	35	
	General discussion on education policy and the impact on schools	General discussion on government policy, which does not relate to a specific policy area.	Hattie - I wouldn't say that I get emails from the government saying this is what we're looking at, which would be useful. I have to go on the DfE website and see what the latest documents are. You know, there's no list that comes out of this is what we're looking at. It's down to us to find out. Somethings they'll let you know about. I think it helps with the other local Headteachers have you seen that bit have you seen that.	Present in Ashfield, Elmtree, and Oakdale	Policy impacts on the school - Governance Leadership decisions	The Onus of Leadership	8	31	
	Ofsted inspections as part of accountability policies	Issues relating to Ofsted, the data collected and the inspections.	Leanne - we've had a bad time a few years ago with Ofsted [...]. We hit rock bottom with that. The teachers and the staff just rallied together and worked damn hard, really hard, to build it on to what it is now. I'm just amazed. I like to be here another few years to see what the next Ofsted results are.	Present in all schools.	Management of the school and leadership - Neoliberal approach.	The Onus of Leadership	8	23	

Appendix 5.2. Theme 2: Complexities and Challenges of the school-parent relationship

Node / code	Sub-node / code	Definition	Examples	Code Source	Review of themes	Overarching theme	Number of participants	References	Total references
School-parent relationship	Discourse of parents	How parents are label or judge via socio-econmic group	Toni: You've got a real middle-class chunk of people who are there supporting their children. Their children are ready to learn and doing lots of nice extracurricular things. Then you've got other children who aren't supported at all.	Present in all schools.	Complex paradoxical issues in relation to schools expectations of families and vice versa.	Complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship	23	194	482
	Complexities and challenges of communication between school and parents	References how the school communicates with parents and issues relating to communication.	Leelah - They can put on there the language that you actually speak, and it translates over. It's actually been the best way of communicating both ways, because not every parent can come to school in the morning or after school. If there's anything that they are concerned about, they want to know, it's a message that they can just send through to each other [...] class teachers can put in images and things like that too..	Present in all schools.	Complex paradoxical issues in relation to how in relation to communication between school and families	Complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship	19	114	
	Schools building relationships with parents	Positive side of schools building relationship parents	Fiona - With every family, you've got to find a way to build trust, a way to respect their culture, to learn about their culture and all of that then to help them feel secure and part of the wider community. Then that slowly trickles down into-- It just helps them support the child to make sure they attend.	Present in all schools.	Removing barriers and buliding relationships or not.	Complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship	19	96	
	Families supporting the school	How families support the school, generally via the parent teacher association	Pat - There's this one friend of mine who used to go and volunteer every week once or twice a week. Going and reading, going swimming, really put a lot into it. But she ended up getting fed up because again it's not thanks but recognition that you couldn't do that without her. The school takes her for granted, just see us almost not as equal. [...] It's a case of just, "Thanks for that, bye."	Present in Ashfield, Ivywood, and Oakdale	Parent support schools and complex nature of the relationship	Complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship	8	54	
	Approaches to improving attendance	Reference to issues relating to school attendance.	Leoš - What we do now in the mornings with Fearn she's the support worker. Were pick up the kids as well in the morning which is changed recently almost six weeks ago. We started to do that after the Easter holidays. Now we are picking up kids on the minibus, those that the attendance wasn't great. Thanks to the minibus the attendance is getting much better, because they're in school on time and they get the marks so it's quite good. Helping them a lot.	Present in all schools.	Policy interpretation - on how to meet requirements attendnace requirements.	Complexities and challenges of the school-parent relationship	8	24	

Appendix 5.3. Theme 3: Context of learning

Node / code	Sub-node / code	Definition	Examples	Code Source	Review of themes	Overarching theme	Number of participants	References	Total references
Teaching and learning discussions	Teaching and learning discussions	Wide ranging in-relation to descriptions, challenges and approaches to teaching and learning	Diane - That's the greatest challenge that I face as a teacher these days, is to ensure that children do reach the expected levels or as best as they can, but not at the expense of everything else. That leads to a sort of rich and broad and worthwhile experience at school, and that battle is hard.	Present in all schools.	Reflecting individual approaches to teaching and learning. Along with opinions, challenges, and solutions.	Context of learning	16	113	291
	Wider learning experiences	Discussions in relation to the differing activities that enrich the schooling experience and the importance of these wider experiences.	Hila I think it creates a culture of persistence. Because there's something about taking part in music. What we learned very quickly was that you gotta wait. Some of it is boring. You've got to listen and respect the people who are playing. If you're performing, you're there with your instrument. [...]. There's something about the whole discipline around music, I think. It takes practice. It doesn't just happen to get better at it. You practise and the staff too.	Present in all schools.	The importance of wider learning experiences beyond the curriculum	Context of learning	15	62	
	How school use pupil premium funding.	Reference to the Pupil Premium policy, how the money is spent beyond attainment	Holly -We get quite a lot of Pupil Premium money. I think we got something like £85,000 Pupil Premium money. So, because of our funding, we can afford to do some really nice things.	Present in all schools.	Policy - Management - decision on spend and purpose.	Context of learning	6	18	
	Approaches to behaviour to support learning	Reference - to behaviour in schools as well as individual school policies in related to behaviour	Heidi - We've got one of our sports coaches from the area. He's a really positive male role model, a previous behaviour mentor, he's a high-level teaching assistant, and he's brilliant with the kids. She [Family support worker] will also act as a behaviour mentor because, quite often, these issues go hand in hand."	Present in all schools.	Policy interpretation - in relation to behaviour	Context of learning	6	16	
Wider needs of the child	Understanding the whole child and the variety of support children need within the school	Discussions in relation to the children and support that is needed and offered by the schools	Lisa - We've got a lot within the school that focuses on children's emotional health now, which is a really positive move. We've got Place2Be, which is invaluable, because they do seem to be more children that struggle	Present Ivywood, Elmtree and Oakdale	Understanding the complexities of the children and the wider support that they may need to take part in school life.	Conditions to learn	20	82	82

Appendix 5.4. Theme 4: Responsibilisation of the school for the welfare of children and families

Node / code	Sub-node / code	Definition	Examples	Code Source	Review of themes	Overarching theme	Number of participants	References	Total references
Responsibilisation of the school to support children and families with wider issues.	Responsibilisation of the school to support children and families with wider issues beyond teaching and learning.	Wider social support that schools are doing beyond teaching and learning, for children and families	Heidi -The full-time family support worker basically fulfils an early help-type role. She supports families with benefits applications, free school meals applications. She goes to court, if there's a housing issue. We've had families who are homeless, where she's actually worked with the council to get them--written the letters of support for housing. She's helped to get people to access and support for those suffering DV [domestic violence]. She's really, really crucial	Present in all schools	Responsibilisation of head teacher taking the decision for the school to support wider social issues not only for the child but the family too. Changes to the role and function of the primary school	Responsibilisation of the school for the welfare of children and families	10	140	232
	Safeguarding and linked to the child and wider social services	Schools experience with social services and other related agencies.	Holly- We have encompassed phone calls regularly. We usually get one of those a week where the police have been called out to a domestic situation, so we get a phone call. It should be within 24 hours but it's generally within the first two days. Also, we get those every week. After holidays, we usually get a couple of two or three to pick up straightaway. There's quite a lot of vulnerabilities the children deal with.	Present in Elmtree, Ivywood and Oakdale	Schools experiences with social services and cut backs to these services - Implications as the school made more responsible for supporting the child and family with wider social issues.	Responsibilisation of the school for the welfare of children and families	11	92	

Appendix 6. Ethics approval



HLS FREC Ref: 3117

27 June 2018

Angie Sibley-White

PhD Candidate

Dear Angie,

Re: Ethics application – A critical evaluation of the impact of neoliberal governance on the lived experience of school communities in UK primary education (ref: 3117)

I am writing regarding your application for ethical approval for a research project titled to the above project. This project has been reviewed in accordance with the Operational Procedures for De Montfort University Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee. These procedures are available from the Faculty Research and Commercial Office upon your request.

I am pleased to inform you that ethical approval has been granted by Chair's Action for your application. This will be reported at the next Faculty Research Committee.

Should there be any amendments to the research methods or persons involved with this project you must notify the Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee immediately in writing. Serious or adverse events related to the conduct of the study need to be reported immediately to your Supervisor and the Chair of this Committee.

The Faculty Research Ethics Committee should be notified by e-mail to hlsfro@dmu.ac.uk when your research project has been completed.

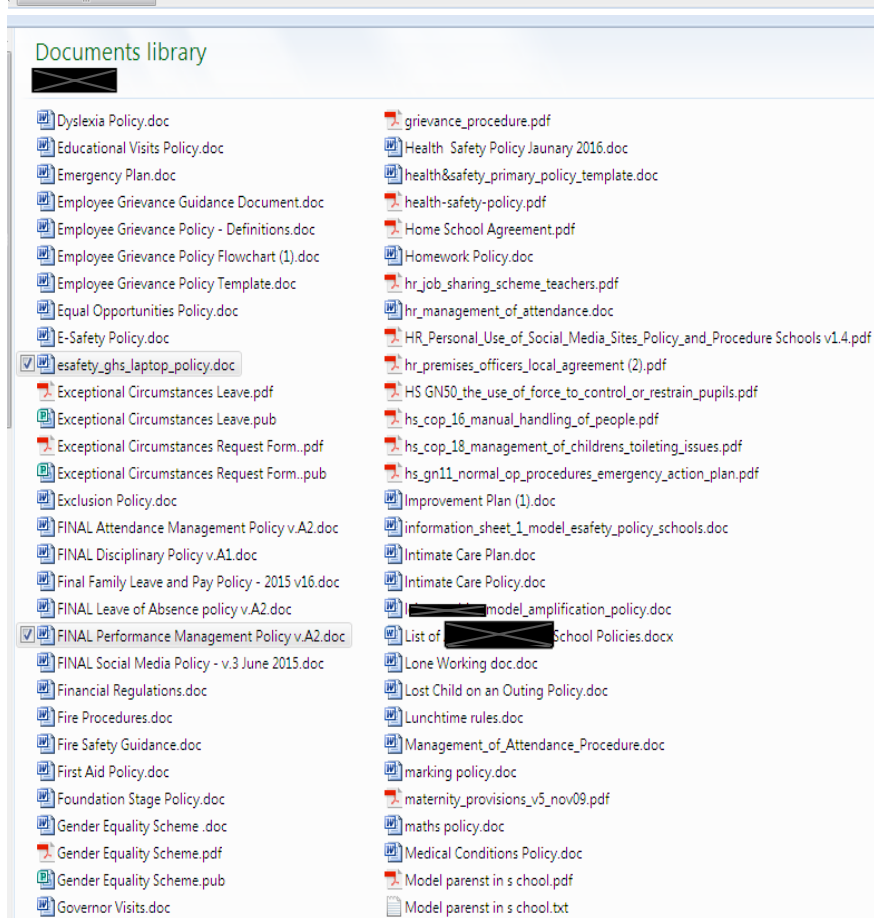
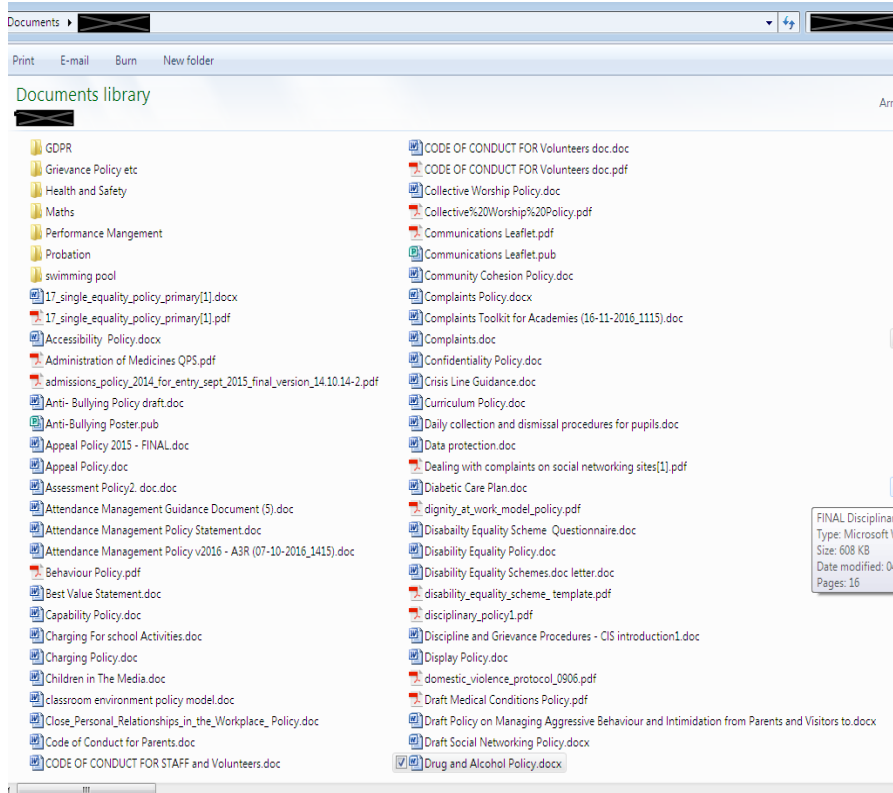
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Grootveld".

Professor Martin Grootveld
Chair
Faculty Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Health & Life Sciences
De Montfort University

<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/research/ethics-and-governance/faculty-specific-procedures/health-and-life-sciences-ethics-procedures.aspx>

Appendix 7. Ashfield policy documents



Documents library

- Model Whistleblowing Policy.doc
- model_acceptable_use_policy_primary_letter.doc
- Model_Appeals_Procedure (All staff).pdf
- model_capability_procedure_teachers_feb07.doc
- model_des.doc
- model_esafety_policy_may_2010.doc
- ModelFluPlan.doc
- Monitoring & Evaluation Policy.doc
- NewandExpectantMothersRA2.doc
- No Smoking Policy.doc
- Organisational Change Policy for Academies 2014 v.9.doc
- Parents Care Plan.doc
- Parents Code of Conduct Leaflet.pdf
- Parents Code of Conduct Leaflet.pub
- Parents in School.doc
- Pay Policy end consultation.pub
- Pay Policy for Teaching Staff_2012.13.doc
- PEEPS blank copy-revised.doc
- PerfMan Forms.doc
- Performance Management Policy.doc
- Physical Restraint.doc
- Physical Restraint.pdf
- Portakabin Contingency Plan.pdf
- Prevent Policy.docx
- Probation.zip
- probation_procedure_guidance_support_staff_final_f_.pdf
- pub204.tmp
- pub218.tmp
- pupil voice policy(draft).doc
- attendance policy final docx.docx
- Behaviour Policy.doc
- Health and Safety.doc
- admissions-policy (1).doc
- CE Primary School. RE Policydoc.doc
- CE Primary School.Single Equality Policy.docx
- Church of England Health Safety Policy Jaunary 2015.doc
- Financial Procedures.doc
- Church of England PS Medication Policy May 2016.doc
- Race Equality Action Plan.pdf
- Race Equality Action Plan.pub
- Race Equality Policy.doc
- RACIAL HARASSMENT INCIDENT FORM.doc
- Risk Assessment Policy.doc
- Safeguarding Policy Sept 2018.docx
- Safeguarding Policy Sept 2018.pdf
- Scheme of Delegation.doc
- Scheme_for_Financing_Schools_Dec_2015.pdf
- School Ethos.pdf
- School Ethos.pub
- School Rules.pdf
- School Rules.pub
- Schools Attendance Management Guidance.doc
- Schools Disciplinary Guidance.doc
- Schools Disciplinary Policy.doc
- SEN Policy.doc
- sen-policy-2016-17.docx
- sen-policy-2016-17.pdf
- Severe Weather Policy .pdf
- Severe Weather Policy .pub
- Sex Education Policy.doc

Print E-mail Burn New folder

Documents library

- Sex%20Education%20Guidelines.pdf
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- shorter_model_acceptable_use_policy_for_primary_pupils_2010.doc
- Single Equality Policy.doc
- Single Equality Duty Action Plan.docx
- smsc.doc
- Spiritual_Policy.pdf
- Staff Induction and Exit policy.pdf
- Statement of Internal Control.doc
- Statutory_guidance_on_supporting_pupils_at_school_with_medical_conditions.pdf
- STEP Teachers Model Pay Policy 2014-15 [redacted] version v3.doc
- Supporting_pupils_with_medical_conditions_-_templates.docx
- Teachers Model Pay Policy 2014-15 v3.doc
- Teaching and Learning Policy.doc
- The_Constitution_of_Governing_Bodies_of_Maintained_Schools_Stat_Guidance....pdf
- Transition Policy.doc
- Volunteers in school policy.docx
- volunteers-in-school-policy-2015.doc-copy.pdf
- Whistleblowing Policy.doc
- Whole_School_Performance_Management_Policy.pdf
- Work Place Alcohol Policy.pdf
- Working at Height.doc