The views and experiences of school leaders implementing whole school relational approaches in a single secondary school: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA, Braun & Clarke, 2021a) was utilised to explore the views and experiences of school leaders (SLs) implementing whole school relational approaches.

Evidence indicates relational approaches have more positive outcomes for all children and young people (CYP), including pupil well-being, behaviour, and academic outcomes (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Avery et al., 2021). Despite this, a behaviourist-informed approach still appears to be the most dominant approach used in schools to manage behaviour (Nash et al., 2016; Oxley, 2021). The current societal context, including the '*collective trauma*' experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brown, 2021), has seemed to encourage policymakers to strive for whole school change and encourage a focus on wellbeing and mental health (DfE, 2022a; 2022d; 2022e; Tawell et al., 2020), a focus aligned with whole school relational approaches (Oxley, 2021).

For this current research, six SLs, working in a mainstream secondary school, within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), were interviewed. The aim being to explore their views and experiences regarding the implementation of whole school relational approaches.

Using RTA, four themes were developed: 'environmental conditions enabling the approach', 'school staff enabling the approach, 'it's their school as much as ours' and 'the reality of relational'. All four themes informed the key findings of this research, building on the existing literature. Within the discussion, these key findings are presented as key enablers and barriers to whole school implementation of relational approaches. Reflecting on key enablers, such as the underlying ethos and culture of Redwood High School, and key barriers, including lack of time and resources. The impact of these relational approaches, as interpreted by the researcher, is then deliberated.

After outlining these key findings, the strengths and limitations of the research will be explored, whilst considering the positionality of the researcher. Conclusions and implications will be outlined, reflecting on the possible implications of this research.

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Glossary of terms

The researcher will now provide descriptions of some of the key terms that are referred to within this thesis, based on current understanding of the literature.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	ACEs refer to stressful or traumatic experiences that occur during childhood that can have negative effects on individuals' physical and mental health (Merrick et al., 2018). These experiences are associated with wide-ranging negative long-term outcomes, including, mental health disorders and an increase in the likelihood of risk-taking behaviours (Hughes et al., 2017).
Attachment-aware approaches	Attachment aware approaches (AAS) utilise a framework developed to help promote the social and emotional wellbeing of all pupils. AAS aims to do so by helping to create an ethos and culture, which helps promote positive relationships both within school, and amongst the wider community (Rose et al., 2019; Kelly 2020; Fancourt, 2019).
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)	COVID-19 is a virus that caused a global pandemic from March 2020. It caused national government-imposed lockdowns in the UK, from March 2020 to April 2021 (WHO, 2019).
Inclusion	Although there is no agreed definition of inclusion (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Farrell et al., 2007), Allen et al. (2018) completed a meta- analysis of the literature exploring the differing definitions, the following was the most consistently used: *'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, and supported by others in the school social environment'* (Goodenow and Grady 1993, p. 80).
Information power	Malterud et al. (2016) argue information power is the relevance and amount of information the participants can provide, to the research question. Therefore, insinuating, the more relevant and comprehensive information the participants can provide, the more information power the study has.

Multi Academy Trust	A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a group of academies or schools that work together under a specific governing body (DfE, 2023).
Relational approaches	Relational approaches recognise the value of relationships, both within '*dyadic inter-subjectivities'* (Billington, 2022) and the wider systems around the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Bilington, 2022; Hickey et al. 2022). Relational approaches are based on theoretical underpinnings, such as attachment theory (Bomber, 2007) and the 'Relationships Window (Vaandering, 2013).
Restorative practice	Restorative practice prioritises repairing relationships rather than taking a punitive approach aiming for a safe and supportive school environment. RP emphasises the importance of all school staff, and the wider community, take accountability for their relationships (Thorsbourne & Blood, 2013; Brown, 2017; Drewery, 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).
School leader	A school leader (SL) holds a leadership position within school and is responsible for the management and improvement of the school, as a whole (Gurr et al., 2018), as well as creating change (Cuban, 1988).
Trauma	Complex trauma refers to prolonged, ongoing, or multiple traumatic exposures, which can impair the development of an individual across their life span (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). Research highlights the impact trauma can have in all areas of a child's development, including immune system functioning, impacting health, social and emotional mental health, learning, behaviour, and relationships (Teicher & Khan, 2019; Perfect et al. 2016; Cook et al., 2017; Cohen & Baron, 2021). Trauma can impact both the CYP themselves and the educational staff working with them (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Trauma-informed approaches	Trauma-informed approaches involve recognising the prevalence of trauma, and encourage the creation of supportive and safe environments, to help meet the individual's current needs, as well as helping support their future development (Katz et al., 2021; Chafouleas et al., 2021).

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Focus and rationale

Behaviourist approaches have been used to manage behaviour, within educational settings, since the 19th century (Scarlett et al., 2009). They are still the main approach used in schools (Nash et al., 2016), as advised by past and current government guidance (DfE, 2016; DfE, 2022a). Researchers, particularly recently, have called for alternative approaches to managing behaviour (Oxley, 2021), as outcomes for children and young people (CYP) in schools utilising behaviourist approaches are not always positive (Morgan et al., 2015; Stearns & Stearns, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on education globally (Brown, 2021; Middleton & Kay, 2021) and within the UK (McDonald, 2023; Jopling & Harness, 2021), increasing mental health issues, for CYP and their families and wider communities (McDonald, 2023). This has resulted in the government, and educational settings, needing to re-think their priorities, as this '*collective trauma'* indicates the attainment agenda should not always take priority (Brown, 2021). Secondary schools have been evidenced to have the most difficulty with this conflict between the attainment agenda and inclusion agenda (Thompson et al., 2021), well-being and mental health sometimes not being prioritised, due to schools feeling the need to focus on attainment (Runswick-Cole, 2011; Pascoe et al., 2020).

Recently, alternative approaches to managing behaviour have been recognised (Oxley, 2021). Relational approaches (for example, trauma-informed approaches, and restorative practice) have been argued to have more positive short-term and long-term outcomes for all CYP (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Avery et al., 2021). Regardless of these outcomes, research indicates these approaches are still not utilised in most schools within the UK (Nash et al., 2016; Oxley, 2021).

Whilst exploring the literature, it became evident that the focus of this study should be regarding the implementation of *whole school* relational approaches, due to this aligning best with the way relational approach is conceptualised within the literature (Billington, 2022; Hickey, 2022; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Moore, 2019), as well as whole school relational approaches being likely to have the most positive outcomes (Avery et al., 2021; Thomas et al. 2019). There has been limited research into this whole school implementation (Chafouleas et al., 2021; Zakszeski and Rutherford, 2021) and potential enablers and barriers to this, particularly regarding the views of school leaders (SLs), whom, it has been argued, play a central role in implementation (Sparling, 2021; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba,

2018). Due to SLs', for example, influence over decision-making and establishing the underlying ethos and culture of the setting (Bush & Glover, 2014; Warin, 2017).

This current research aims to explore SLs' views and experiences, regarding the use and implementation of relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school.

1.2 Stakeholders

This research occurred in the local authority (LA) in which the researcher works as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). The LA expressed an interest in learning more about relational approaches, setting up a research and development group, to explore the implementation of these approaches. The group being previously set up to inform future LA guidance (for example, guidance around working with CYP with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs). The findings of this current study will be fed back to this group, and to the wider LA educational psychology team, with the hope of implications for practice within the LA.

Other parties that could be considered as stakeholders, are the participants themselves. Participants within the study expressed an interest in the research, asking for the findings to be shared upon completion of the thesis. The findings of this research will also be shared in the university context, with university professionals being other key stakeholders for this research.

1.3 Research Approach

The current study conducted semi-structured interviews with six SLs, working in a mainstream secondary school, implementing relational approaches. A Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach was utilised (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), to generate insights into the views and experiences of SLs, whilst acknowledging the role of the researcher within data collection and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher completed a 'reflexive diary, of which excerpts can be found in appendix P. This is to ensure clarity is given, regarding decision-making and the researcher's positionality. The researcher's motivation and positionality are also outlined in the next section.

1.4 Personal and professional interest and motivation

I have written this section in first person, as I have for the 'reflexive diary' logs (see appendix P), writing this in first person allows the reader to understand my perspective without the separation third person writing can bring (Archer, 2007).

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), undertaking research within the LA Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Before starting the EP doctorate, I worked as an assistant EP in a different LA. This previous role primarily involved delivering 6-week interventions with CYP with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs, using CBT-informed or motivational interviewing techniques. Most of the work consisted of working with Y8/9 boys with SEMH needs, that were on the brink of exclusion.

I will now give an example of a CYP I worked with, who attended an academy within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), which added to both my personal and professional motivation to undergo this research. A Y9 CYP I worked with was excluded; an experience I found challenging. The CYP attended a secondary school in which a '*zero-tolerance*' behaviour policy was utilised in the school. When initially observing this CYP, he was asked to go to an *'isolation'* room by a member of staff, this was before he entered the classroom. As Sheppard (2020) argues, exclusion is the final point of the sanction pathway, which seemed the case for this CYP.

I have given this example because it represents why I have a personal interest in exploring differing approaches used to manage behaviour. I have worked in schools that feel warm and safe on entry, which should be a primary goal for educational settings, to ensure the pupils' basic needs are met (Maslow, 1943).

I am aware that behaviourist approaches are still used in most settings within the UK. Having previously worked as part of a staff team in a primary school, as a teaching assistant, I know that my default was also a behaviourist approach, due to that being the whole school approach used within that setting. I am expressing this to acknowledge how challenging educational settings can be to work in, and the 'ease' a behaviourist approach can sometimes bring, in resource and time-stretched settings.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I was aware of this potential bias, towards relational approaches, and tried to ensure neutrality during both data collection and analysis, as explored further in my 'reflective diary' excerpts, in appendix P.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter overview

This literature review will include two main sections, the first being a narrative literature review and the second a systematic literature review (SLR). This current study is focused on

exploring the views and experiences of school leaders (SLs) regarding the implementation of relational approaches in a mainstream secondary school.

Firstly, the history and socio-political background of the approaches used to manage behaviour will be considered. Behaviourist approaches, as the most frequent approach used in educational settings (Nash et al., 2016; Oxley, 2021), will then be critically evaluated. The current context of society will be considered, regarding the use of relational approaches, reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increase in mental health difficulties in schools (Creswell et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2021; Ashikkali et al., 2020). Relational approaches themselves will then be discussed, reflecting on how they are currently being conceptualised within the literature and educational settings (Billington, 2022; Hickey et al., 2022; Babcock, 2020). Theoretical underpinnings will be outlined, including theories such as the 'Relationships Window' (Vaandering, 2013). The components of whole school approaches, and their implementation will then be deliberated. An SLR investigating the experiences of educators regarding the use of whole school relational approaches, in UK secondary schools, will then be carried out, with one research question emerging.

2.2 Narrative Literature Review

2.2.1 History and socio-political background of approaches used to manage behaviour.

Since the 19th century, there has been an ongoing debate regarding how to manage children's behaviour (Scarlett et al., 2009). Managing the behaviour of CYP in schools has previously been, and still is, largely influenced by a behaviourist model (Nash et al., 2016; Oxley, 2021). A behaviourist model is one based on rewards and punishments (Skinner, 1953). Researchers suggest behaviourist approaches have a greater focus on extrinsic motivation (i.e., rewards) which may reduce levels of intrinsic motivation (i.e., completing the task for inherent satisfaction, Kohn, 1993), Regardless of these criticisms, most UK schools still have a primary focus on rewards and sanctions when managing behaviour (Nash et al., 2016; Oxley, 2021), as government guidance still recommends (DfE, 2022a).

SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, 2003) is a programme developed as a whole school approach to promote social and emotional skills, promoting positive emotional health and wellbeing to everyone attending and working in educational settings (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, DCSF, 2007). The SEAL programme highlighted the importance of relationships and emotional literacy (DfE, 2005), and emphasised the importance of children recognising and regulating their behaviour, rather than

relying on teachers' sanctions and rewards. The intention of SEAL was for these ideals to be embedded in schools, providing a whole school approach. However, the SEAL approach was discarded in 2010, researchers argue this may have been because of de-motivated staff, whole school approaches take time, therefore staff did not get the immediate feedback they were hoping for (Humphrey et al., 2010).

Bennett (in DfE, 2017a) completed a review of behaviour in schools and developed recommendations based on the findings. The recommendations included strong leadership and a highly consistent approach, as well as ensuring reasonable adjustments are made for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, as Emerson (2016) argues, what is meant by 'reasonable adjustments', and how to apply them to behaviour policies within schools, is a challenge. The government guidance: '*Mental health and behaviour in schools'* (DfE, 2018), linked the presenting challenging behaviour with underlying mental health difficulties, discussing the importance of a graduated approach when the behaviour may be a result of an unmet need (DfE, 2018).

Regardless of this guidance schools are still more likely to suggest and implement more behaviourist approaches (O'Brien, 2020; Nash et al., 2016). This may be due to previous government guidance having sanctions and rewards as the focus (DfE, 2016). The most recent guidance (DfE, 2022a) has moved towards emphasising the importance of a whole school culture, which will be discussed further in Section 2.2.2. However, there has been no significant change to the range of appropriate sanctions, and although the use of language has changed (i.e., 'seclusion/isolation rooms' has been replaced with 'removal from the classroom') fundamentally, a behaviourist approach is still advised within this government guidance.

The reasoning behind this could be the tension between the attainment agenda and the inclusion agenda (Tod & Ellis, 2014), schools may be adopting approaches that they deem most likely to 'control' children's behaviour, so they can achieve these results.

This section has provided information regarding the history and socio-political background of managing behaviour. It will now be important to consider the *current* societal context and discuss how this may be influencing, or beginning to influence, the approaches presently used to manage behaviour.

2.2.2 Current context

There are numerous factors which might be contributing to an increase in social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) and wellbeing needs of CYP. NHS Digital (2020) discussed an increase in prevalence of SEMH needs, for example, in 2017 one in nine 5–16-year-olds were likely to have '*probable mental health disorders*' (p. 1), this was found to increase to one in six in 2020.

Numerous factors may be contributing to an increase in SEMH needs of CYP, including socio-economic status of families. Gutman et al. (2015) argue CYP from families with the lowest incomes, or workless families, are most likely to experience SEMH difficulties (Gutman et al., 2015). Recent austerity has caused the families facing economic challenges to increase, the 'cost-of-living crisis' significantly impacting wages, low pay, and poverty (Etherington et al., 2023). Elliot and Crerar (2022) argue current austerity in the UK may be the '*biggest hit to living standards on record*' (p. 1). These economic challenges, in turn, may be contributing to the increase in prevalence of SEMH needs of CYP (Underwood, 2022).

Another contributing factor to this increase in SEMH needs may be the increase in social media use (Young Minds & Children's Society, 2018). Some researchers have argued the use of social media can have positive impact on CYPs' social connection (Antoci et al., 2015), overcoming barriers to connecting with others such as distance and time, and resulting in a strengthening of offline relational networks (Antoci et al., 2015; Hall, 2018). However, recently, there has been research to suggest social media may be negatively impacting mental health. For example, Shakya and Christakis (2017) completed a longitudinal study which suggests a negative correlation between the use of Facebook and subjects' well-being over time. Ra et al. (2018) also found a statistically significant link between the use of social media and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD, Ra et al., 2018). There has been limited conclusive evidence which suggests the use of social media decreases mental health functioning and well-being or decreases the number of real-life interactions (Berryman et al., 2018; Hall, 2018). However social media is an important factor to consider, within the current societal context, when exploring increases in mental health needs in CYP.

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) had an unprecedented impact on education globally (Brown, 2021; Middleton & Kay, 2021; Jopling & Harness, 2021). Research indicated exacerbation of CYP and parental mental health issues (Creswell et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2021; Ashikkali et al., 2020), as well as disrupting mental health services (Waite et al., 2020).

Within the UK, during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were closed to most pupils from March to July 2020, and January to March 2021 (McDonald et al., 2023). The COVID-19 still currently impacting on CYPs' attendance levels (McDonald et al., 2023). McDonald et al. (2023) suggest attendance now being particularly difficult for children with special educational needs and/or pre-existing anxiety problems. The researchers argue the value and importance

of home-school communication and relationships, when overcoming this sudden increase in attendance issues (McDonald, 2023). It should be noted that McDonald's (2023) research has some limitations, the sample consisting of predominantly White British families, therefore not being representative of differing ethnic groups, which should be considered when reviewing these findings.

Brown (2021) expands on McDonald's (2023) point, regarding the importance of relationships, particularly within the current societal context and argues a movement towards a more relational way of working: *"Given the collective trauma caused by COVID-19 global pandemic, it is more important than ever that schools look for ways to create safe, trauma-sensitive, and restorative learning environments"* (Brown, 2021. p. 1) UK-based researchers have adopted a similar view, Jopling and Harness (2021) argue the importance of considering well-being before learning. This movement, towards having a greater focus on well-being has also impacted the government agenda (Tawell et al. 2020).

Most recently, the white paper (DfE, 2022e): *'Opportunity for all – strong school with great teachers for your child'* discusses the importance of children's safety and wellbeing. As will be discussed in 2.2.5, a focus on relationships will be vital in ensuring this physical and mental wellbeing. The white paper (DfE, 2022e) emphasises the importance of understanding the *'issues underlying behaviour'* (p. 26), rather than penalisation the behaviour itself, building on the ideas outlines in previous government guidance: *'Mental health and behaviour in schools'* (DfE, 2018). The most recent green paper: *'SEND review paper: right support, right place, right time'* (DfE, 2022d) also emphasises the importance of inclusion, setting out plans for an inclusive system; for example, aiming to improve mainstream provision by offering early identification of needs and high-quality teaching. This government guidance (DfE, 2022a; 2022d; 2022e) implies movement away from the more traditional behaviourist approaches and another push towards a relational way of working. This will, hopefully, provide a rationale and incentive for SLs to instigate the same movement towards more inclusive approaches, within their settings.

Behaviourist approaches will now be critically evaluated, before moving onto the conceptualisations of relational approaches.

2.2.3 A critique of behaviourist approaches

As noted, although there have been some changes within government guidance, the DfE (2022a) guidance remains largely based on behaviourist approaches, still referring to the

use of sanctions and rewards. Therefore, it will be important critically evaluate behaviourist approaches.

Research evidence suggests overreliance on this approach may not have the best outcomes for CYP in schools (Oxley, 2021). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) argue the evidence-base regarding zero-tolerance policies and adopting behaviourist approaches is weak. Morgan et al. (2015), discusses the impact of behaviourist approaches, explaining that *'punitive behaviour management can be demeaning for young people'* (p. 9). Stearns and Stearns (2023) support this view, arguing using punitive measures, such as isolation rooms, when children display negative behaviours, is utilising a shame response which can have damaging effects on CYPs' development (Stearns & Stearns, 2023).

Data from the DfE National Statistics (DfE, 2022c) also shows the number of exclusions within UK schools indicates the failure of these approaches, for some children (DfE, 2022c). 'Fixed period' and 'permanent' school exclusions, were introduced by The Education Act (1986) for children deemed as deviating consistently from the school's behaviour system (DfE, 2017). The most recent figures provided by the DfE National Statistics (2022c) are for the academic year 2020/2021, there were 3,900 permanent exclusions (this figure was 5, 100 the previous year). It must be noted that the impact of COVID-19, as children were not attending school for most of the year.

Statistics show that it is the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children that are at the highest risk of exclusion (DfE, 2022c): those with SEN, those entitled to free school meals; those from certain ethnic minority groups (Black Caribbean and White Caribbean, Gypsy Roma, Traveller of Irish Heritage). The SEN Policy Research Forum (2019) argue that disability is still the primary cause of educational exclusion. Those children designated as having special educational needs on (SEN) support were five times more likely to be permanently excluded, and 2.5 times for those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP, DfE, 2020).

The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions (DfE, 2022c; Oxley, 2021) in the UK indicates that these behaviourist approaches do not support a positive behaviour change for all children. The statistics raise questions about the reasoning behind the lack of inclusion of these most vulnerable groups. Exclusions have been found to have a negative long-term impact on CYP, including the risk of poor educational outcomes (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2017; Martin-Denham, 2020a; Martin-Denham, 2021b), and both short and long-term detriments to mental health and wellbeing and that of their wider family (Martin-Denham, 2021a; Martin-Denham, 2021b). Martin-Denham (2020b) also completed research linking exclusion to anti-social behaviours, such as increased drug misuse, her future work

argues the need to explore possible alternatives to school exclusion, suggesting the need for more inclusionary 'systems, structures, and practices' (Martin-Denham, 2021c, p. 3). Exclusion has been argued to be the final step on the sanction pathway (Shephard, 2020), suggesting the significance and value of exploring other, more inclusive, approaches to managing behaviour.

In the next section, how 'relational approaches' are being conceptualised will be considered, to reflect whether they could be an alternative approach to more behaviourist approaches (Oxley, 2021).

2.2.4 How are 'Relational Approaches' currently being conceptualised?

2.2.4. 1 How are 'Relational Approaches' being conceptualised within the literature?

There does not seem to be a discrete definition of relational approaches in the literature. Howe et al. (2018) argue this lack of clear definition may: *"reflect the nature of the terrain, which is rich and diverse and may always be hard to pin down to a simple formula"* (p. 10). Researchers have suggested relational approaches have been characterised as *"ways of being"* (Gus et al., 2015), rather than being a discrete approach that is easily definable.

For this research, it is important to consider how relational approaches are being conceptualised. Baker et al. (1997) suggest relational approaches are those that: "*foster the development of caring relationships among children and teachers at school as the means of affecting children's intellectual, social, and emotional growth.*" (P. 586). Here, Baker et al. (1997) emphasises the importance of relationships within education and highlights their significance when considering the holistic development of a child.

More recently, researchers have contributed to this conceptualisation of a 'relational approach' describing it in its broadest sense (Billington, 2022; Hickey, 2022). Billington (2022) discusses a move away from solely exploring the '*dyadic inter-subjectivities'* of student-teacher/student-student relationships and emphasising the importance of: *"the networks of support that can be mobilised across communities, homes and schools"* (Billington, 2022, p. 97). Billington (2022) explains the value of acknowledging the *"fast-changing and interconnected global, environmental and technological circumstances"* (p.97) when defining relational approaches.

Billington's (2022) research aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which focuses on: the *"interrelationship of different processes and their contextual variation"*

(Darling, 2007, p. 203). The ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) consists of five systems, see figure 2.1, the model reflects on the interrelationship between differing developmental processes (cognitive, social, biological), as well as considering the dynamic nature of family relationships (Hayes & O'Toole, 2022).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues for an interplay between an individual and these different systems, as presented in figure 2.1. Billington (2022) agrees, suggesting working relationally involves more of a *'dynamic understanding'* of how an individual is interconnected within these systems. Whilst understanding the importance of these 'systems' around the child, Darling (2007) reminds us to not forget the '*person in the centre of the circles'*, valuing their voice and perception of their reality being crucial (Darling, 2007)

Figure 2.1.

A figure to show Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory framework.
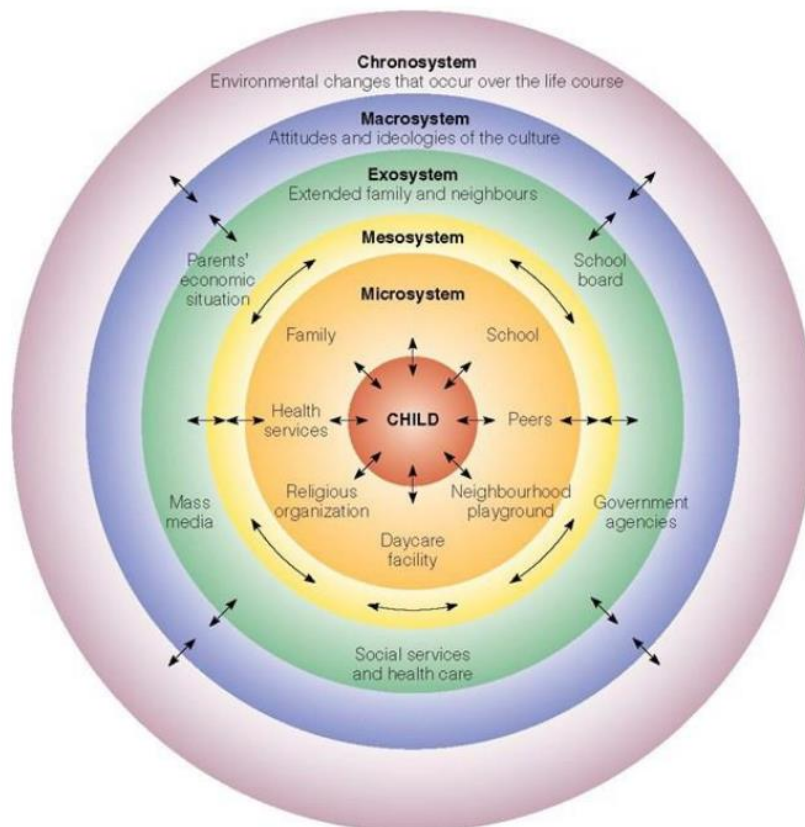
The final alteration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory was the addition of the 'Chronosystem', which considers changes over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this could include, for example, significant life events and transition.

Numerous transitions occur throughout CYPs' education, this could be a child moving out of one school system and into another (i.e., from a primary setting to a secondary setting), or a transition occurring within the same setting (i.e., transitioning from one year group to the next), as Evangelou et al. (2008) explain. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) 'Chronosystem' considers how situations and events can change over time, and the impact of this, when considering the interplay of CYPs' differing systems.

Research emphasises the importance of CYP having supportive and positive relationships during this time (Toole et al., 2014; Mumford & Birchwood, 2021). Toole et al. (2014) use the bio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to undergo research reflecting on the transition process, using the research design person-process-context-time (PPCT) model, which is based on the differing levels of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model. Conclusions and initial recommendations included pre-schools and schools to continue to *'provide and further develop extensive supports for children experiencing educational transition',* due to the emotional impact school transition can have. This research indicates the importance of having consistent, key relationships, and developing '*extensive supports'* for children when undergoing transition.

Hickey et al. (2022) discuss the complexity of educational settings as well as the importance of the individual student-teacher relationship and the context in which this relationship is. *"Working from a relational perspective means recognising this complexity and taking time to establish the parameters of the relationship and the contextual dynamics that influence the encounter and the learning that proceeds. (p. 296)".* Here, Hickey et al. (2022) acknowledges the importance, and time-consuming, nature of building relationships in complex systems. This is especially important when considering the 'Chronosystem', which emphasises the importance of those key relationships with children over time. Hickey et al. (2022) here acknowledges the time it takes to establish and maintain such relationships, research indicating the value of these relationships for CYP, especially at more challenging times (Toole et al., 2014).

The focus of this research is understanding the views and experiences of SLs, regarding the implementation of relational approaches, in a secondary school. For this research, when defining relational approaches both Billington's (2022) and Hickey et al.'s (2022) conceptualisations of relational approaches will be embodied. Approaches will be drawn on which emphasise the importance of relationships, both at a more individual level

(with the consideration of the complexity of the context) and at more of an organisational and systemic level (Billington, 2021). Taking these conceptualisations into consideration, whole school relational approaches will be the main topic of focus in this study. How professionals working in schools are conceptualising relational approaches will now be considered, before reflecting on the theoretical underpinnings of such approaches.

2.2.4.2 How are relational approaches being conceptualised by professionals working in schools?

Relational approach guidance has begun to be developed by local authorities (LAs). For example, both the, *'Guidance for Developing Relational Practice and Policy'* (Babcock, 2020) and *'Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy'* (Brighton and Hove City Council', 2018). An example of how 'relational approaches' are being conceptualised within these guidances will now be explored.

Babcock and Devon County Council developed *'Guidance for Developing Relational Practice and Policy'* (2020), drawing on theory and research from the fields of Neuroscience, Attachment, Trauma, Adverse Childhood Experience, Intersubjectivity and Restorative Approaches, utilising the following government guidelines and research (DfE, 2018; DfE, 2019 EEF, 2019).

Figure 2.2.

 A figure to illustrate 'The Relational Approach' (Babcock, 2020).

Babcock (2020) developed guidance which described a relational approach to teaching and learning. Within this guidance helping establish a relational culture and ethos of the school is outlined, as well as using these approaches within everyday learning and more targeted support. Consistent thinking amongst the staff body, and beyond, around the underlying values and beliefs was deemed invaluable, as well as continuing professional development (CPD), and having systems and provision in place to help support these beliefs. The guidance (Babcock, 2020) suggests three key components of a relational approach, as indicated in figure 2.2. These involved:

- 'Developing Relationships', to ensure CYP feel safe and secure within school, and have a developed sense of belonging.
- 'Responding and calming', which has more of a focus on everyday interactions and the importance of co-regulation.
- 'Repairing and Restoring', which emphasises the importance of clear boundaries and expectations, as well as placing value on restoring any relationships that do break down.

2.2.5 Relational approaches: Theoretical underpinnings

Numerous theoretical underpinnings on which relational approaches are based will now be explored, including attachment theory (Bomber, 2007), the 'relationships window' (Vaandering, 2013) and Maslow's 'Hierarchy of needs' (1943).

2.2.5.1 Attachment in the classroom

This current research is based on understanding the experiences of SLs, regarding the implementation of relational approaches. As discussed within the varying conceptualisations of relational approaches in section 2.2.4, relational approaches are based on both '*dyadic inter-subjectivities*' between children and teachers, as well as the wider *'networks of support'* around the CYP (Billington, 2022), relationships being at the centre of both. Research regarding attachment styles will now be reflected upon, as these attachment styles have often been used as a basis to help understand CYP, and their ability to form bonds with others (Bomber, 2007).

Holmes (2014) explains how infants develop an internal working model of attachment, which acts as a basis for future relationships. Bomber (2007) describes attachment as *'our pattern of relating to 'significant others'* (p. 26), each child having different ways of responding

to educators, depending on their attachment style (Main & Solomon, 1986). For example, a child with an avoidant attachment style may have difficulty accepting help and forming and maintaining relationships (Bomber, 2007). Geddes (2006) argues that most classrooms are likely to have children that have experienced trauma or loss and abuse which could result in an insecure attachment style, indicating the prevalence of children having difficulties forming and maintaining relationships with those around them. This emphasises the importance of educational settings helping CYP develop these skills they need to form and maintain such relationships.

Attachment theory has numerous criticisms (Lee, 2003), regarding the emphasis placed on the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver, not considering other relationships the child may have formed. The theory also assumes the child's primary attachment is with their mother, which is not always the case. However, approaches developed based on an understanding of these attachment styles have been found to be successful, such as the Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) programme (Rose et al. 2019), suggesting potential accuracy in the theory on which AAS is based. The AAS programme, and descriptions of other relational approaches, will be discussed further in section 2.2.6.

2.2.5.2 'Relationships Window' (Vaandering, 2013)

McCold and Wachtel (2003) developed the 'social discipline window', more recently developed into the 'relationships window' (Vaandering 2013, see figure 2.3). Wachtel (2008) developed the window to give a visual representation that people: '*are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things with them rather than to them or for them*' (p.2).

Figure 2.3.

A figure to show the 'Relationships Window' (Vaandering, 2013).
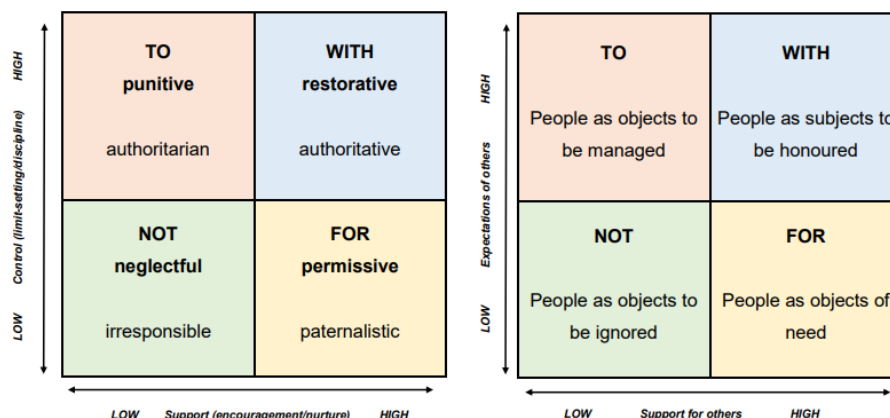
Relational approaches emphasise the importance of the relationship and working 'with' CYP. As Hickey et al. (2022) explain, taking a: "*relational perspective means recognising this complexity and taking time to establish the parameters of the relationship"*, this explains the collaborative nature of a relational approach. Morrison and Vandaaring (2012) argue CYP thrive in contexts of social engagement, rather than social control, social engagement and collaboration being at the heart of relational approaches (Hickey et al. 2022). This may explain why behaviourist approaches, in which punitive measures are usually adopted, may not result in positive behaviour change, as they depend more so on social control (Morrison & Vandaaring, 2012).

2.2.5.3 Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)

Maslow (1943) argues feeling included is a basic need for CYP. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs outlines a pyramid structure (figure 2.4) ranging from basic physiological needs to higher needs at the apex. It highlights the significance of CYP feeling secure and safe, and having a 'sense of belonging'. Utilising a relational approach can help achieve this, professionals focusing on developing relationships within the 'dyadic inter- subjectivities' Billington (2022) referred to, as well as building relationships within the CYPs' wider systems, helps the CYP feel safe and secure within these relationships, and in the wider educational setting.

Figure 2.4.

A visual representation of the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)
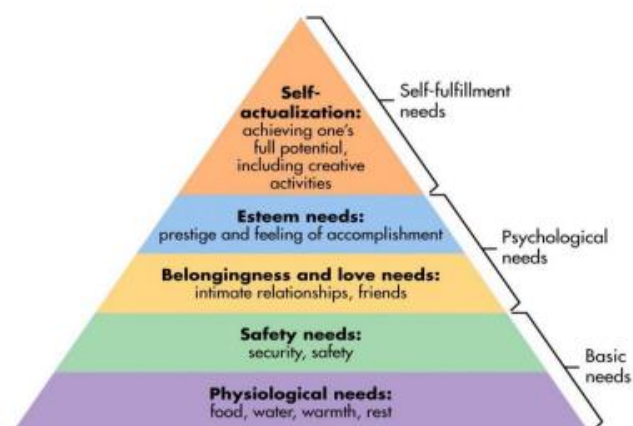
2.2.6 Relational Approaches: Description of approach and outcomes

A variety of relational approaches will now be considered, and outcomes explored. The approaches discussed in this section align with how the current study is conceptualising relational approaches (as outlined in section 2.2.4). These approaches have also previously been defined as relational approaches within the literature. For example, Morrison and Vaandering (2012) placed restorative practice (RP) within the framework of relational theory. The researcher acknowledges this section does not describe an exhaustive list of relational approaches, these approaches, however, align best with how relational approaches are being conceptualised here. Definitions of each of these approaches can be found in the glossary.

2.2.6.1 Restorative Practice

Restorative practice (RP) embodies both a reactive strategy to conflict, as well as a more proactive one, promoting positive relationships within the school or wider community (Thorsbourne & Blood, 2013; Brown, 2017; Drewery, 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Hollweck et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of the focus on building and maintaining relationships, stating *'At its core, restorative justice is about relationships…'* (p. 249). There has been a plethora of research completed into RP in schools, Zakszeski and Rutherford (2021) completed a systematic review regarding research completed into RP. The review identified 71 articles reporting the outcome data related to school-based RP implementation between 2000 and 2020. In this review, most studies reported positive outcomes for RP, including improvements in school climate, staff mindsets, social and emotional outcomes,

reduction in exclusionary practices and reduction in disciplinary practices (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

However, there is not an undisputed view that restorative approaches are effective. For example, within the review, some studies provided negative effects (e.g., Acosta et al., 2019; Leach & Lewis, 2013; Standing et al., 2012). Zakszeski and Rutherford (2021) also argue that there is an insignificant amount of this research that evidences the effectiveness of this approach according to established educational evidence standards; they highlighted gaps in research regarding outcomes for implementation and regarding implementation fidelity.

The literature also indicates how educators are conceptualising 'restorative' is not clear, which could also be impacting the efficacy of outcomes of research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Recently researchers have focused more on this definition, to help overcome this barrier to efficacy (Procter-Legg, 2021; Whitby, 2018).

2.2.6.2 Attachment-Aware Approaches

Attachment-Aware schools (AAS) have been developed around the understanding of children's attachment needs (Rose & Gilbert, 2017; Rose et al. 2019). In these schools the whole staff team has a responsibility and understanding of the impact of attachment needs on a students' behaviour. Research into these attachment -aware programmes, have found a positive impact on both behaviour and learning (Rose at al., 2019). The AAS project included 200 participants from 40 schools in the UK. They found significant improvements in the students' academic achievements in reading, writing and maths, following the intervention (Rose et al., 2019). There were also significant decreases in sanctions, exclusions, and overall difficulties. It must be noted, this research was on a relatively small scale and further exploration is needed.

Researchers also suggested a shift in the overall school ethos when such approaches were implemented, Fancourt (2019) describing an ethos of care and consideration, and staff being more empathic with each other. Kelly (2020), regarding research around the AAS project, reported a shift in ethos for 77 of the school participating in the study, emphasising a shift across the whole school community, aligning with Billington's (2022) conceptualisation of relational approaches, being a whole community endeavour.

Dingwall and Sebba (2018) completed an evaluation of the AAS programme and suggested several recommendations for future practice, one important factor being: *"Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation was crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and it having an impact on the school.*" (p. 5) Emphasising the importance of

SLs in the implementation of such programmes, the importance of the SLs and their influence when implementing whole school approaches will be discussed further in section 2.2.9.

2.2.6.3 Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP)

Researchers discuss the purpose of trauma informed practice (TIP), when used within education, the approach acknowledges the prevalence of trauma, and attempts to reduce the impact of this trauma (Katz et al., 2021). To do so, TIP aims to create safe and supportive environments for CYPs, by adapting all aspects of the settings systems, including approaches and policies used (Katz et al., 2021; Bateman et al., 2013).

Chafouleas et al. (2021) completed a systematic review of the use of TIP and found a recent growth in understanding trauma and the impact it can have in education settings, Spence et al. (2021) arguing it is educational settings that can have the most impact on CYP that have experienced trauma, through early intervention. Avery et al. (2021) completed a systematic literature review looking at the outcomes of TIP, finding predominantly positive outcomes. The review indicated a growing body of research regarding TIP, however very few robust students explicitly focusing on the whole-school implementation, which evidence suggests is the most effective way to implement a new approach within an education setting (Avery, 2021; Thomas et al. 2019).

Within this literature review, only two studies completed with the UK and Ireland were found, regarding the whole school implementation of a trauma-informed approach (Barton et al., 2018; MacLochlaiin et al., 2022). Both studies highlighted the positive impact trauma informed approaches have in educational settings within the UK, MacLochlaiin et al., (2022) arguing with only minimal training, staff show more favourable attitudes to trauma informed training, and are also therefore less likely to experience burnout (MacLochlaiin et al., 2022).

It should be noted, researchers argue, due to the subjective nature of these approaches, it is not always easy to be certain of outcomes produced (Howe et al., 2018; Gus et al., 2015), which should be considered when discussing these outcomes.

The key features of these approaches, and how they add to the researcher's conceptualisation of a relational approach will now be considered.

2.2.7 Key features of relational approaches, as interpreted from the literature.

Considering the different recognised relational approaches in schools, as explored in section 2.2.6, and the relevant literature, considered in sections 2.2.4 and 2.2.5, there appears

to be common features that could be expected to be evident in a school espousing the use of relational approaches.

All the approaches discussed in section 2.2.6 emphasise the importance of understanding the CYP's underlying needs and seeing behaviour as an expression of those needs. For example, the attachment aware and trauma informed approaches both acknowledge the impact of attachment needs and the importance of staff in understanding these underlying needs (Rose et al., 2019; Katz et al., 2021; Bateman et al., 2013), the underlying values of these approaches being based on theories such as attachment theory (Bomber, 2007; Geddes, 2006).

The literature also emphasises the value of positive relationships (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012), which was discussed within all the relational approaches outlined in 2.2.6, and the role of collaboration within these relationships (Vaandering, 2012), which is a key theoretical underpinning for relational approaches. As Billington (2022) argues, along with other researchers (Hickey, 2022), a relational approach emphasises the importance of these dyadic relationships, but also the relationships formed within the wider community (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012), and within all the systems around the CYP (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This appeared an important feature within all the approaches discussed, thinking beyond the relationships with the individual child.

The literature also emphasises the value of these caring and supportive relationships, playing a role in establishing a relational ethos, which also appeared to be a key feature of a relational approach (Fancourt, 2019). Katz et al. (2021) expand on this, explaining the value of developing a safe and supportive environment when establishing a trauma informed approach within school. This also aligns with how educational settings are conceptualising relational approaches, within the 'Developing Relationships' strand of a 'Relational approach' ensuring children feel safe and secure within the environment appeared to be a priority and a key aspect of the conceptualisation of the approach (Babcock, 2019).

As discussed by researchers (Billington, 2022; Hicky, 2022), a relational approach goes beyond single relationships, other researchers have also argued that the implementation and use of relational approaches is often most successful at a whole-school level (Avery, 2021; Fancourt, 2019; Kelly, 2020), as will be explored further in section 2.2.8.

These features discussed will be used as a broad definition throughout this thesis. The researcher aims to consider any changes or addition to these features, and conceptualisation of relational approaches, throughout the research process.

2.2.8 Whole-School Approaches

This current study is focused on SLs' experiences regarding the implementation of relational approaches. As outlined in 2.2.4, previous research indicates the value relational approaches place on interlinked systems (Billington, 2022; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Moore, 2019), and it being a whole school affair. Recent government guidance, as explored in section 2.2.2, has also moved towards the emphasis of whole school culture, when considering behaviour management approaches (DfE, 2022a). Adding to the rationale to focus on a whole school approach within this current study.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1998), defines a whole school approach as encompassing the following, interrelated, components *'(i) curriculum, teaching, and learning; (ii) school ethos and environment; (iii) family and community partnerships'* (As cited in Goldberg, 2019, p. 756). Goldberg (2019) completed a meta-analysis, looking at the effectiveness of adopting whole school approaches to enhancing social and emotional development, they also suggest, for optimal impact, that a "multi-model" approach must be taken encompassing all three components suggested by WHO (1998). Each of these components will now be considered.

2.2.8.1 Curriculum, teaching, and learning

WHO (1998) argues curriculum, teaching and learning are important components of a whole school approach. Oberle et al. (2016) suggest this should encompass evidence-based programmes, modelling competencies (such as social and emotional skills) and allowing pupils to learn in everyday practices within the classroom. Recent government guidance has also begun to emphasise the importance of a whole school approach (DfE, 2022a), suggesting an introduction of a "*behaviour curriculum",* to help teach and guide children how to behave.

2.2.8.2 School ethos, culture, and environment

School culture describes a community with shared beliefs and morals, which are reflected in the behaviour of members that are part of that community (Peterson & Deal, 2011). Whereas ethos is related to the ideals that characterise the community, Roffey (2011) defines school ethos as *"the beliefs, aspirations, vision and values that underpin "the way we do things round here"'* (p. 193), other researchers definitions align with this view, such as Graham (2012) who argued ethos is felt at an experiential level, rather than a cognitive level.

A whole-school approach refers to both the ethos and culture of the school. As explored in section 2.2.6, previous researchers have noted a whole ethos shift, during the implementation of whole school relational approaches (Kelly, 2020; Fancourt, 2019). For example, when implementing a relational approach, Fancourt (2019) argues an ethos of care and consideration was established, resulting in the culture change of staff being more empathetic towards each other. It should be considered what comes first, an underlying relational ethos or the introduction of relational ideas and approaches, as the EEF (2019) guidelines suggest, the school ethos and culture needs to present prior to the implementation, as discussed further in 2.2.8.

Jessiman et al. (2022) argue that if school culture is shaped and improved, across these four dimensions (structure and context, organisational and academic, community and safety and support) students' mental health may improve. This does indicate the value of school culture, however, the generalisability of Jessiman et al. 's (2022) study is limited, due to the sample only being across three schools, and in one geographical area.

As referenced in section 2.2.4, recent researchers have also argued the importance of a whole school and community change rather than an individualistic one (Billington, 2022; Hickey et al., 2022), as will now be explored.

2.2.8.3 Family community and partnerships

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (see figure 2.1), regards the family as being the first unit children need to feel safe, impacting both psychological and social development, evidencing the value of parent-school relations when implementing whole school approaches. Goldberg et al. (2019) also explain the importance of family and community links in the implementation of whole school approaches:

"Family and community partnerships involve extending learning to the home and community contexts. Embedding families within a whole school approach reinforces the complementary roles of families and educators and extends opportunities for learning across the two contexts in which children spend most of their time. Community partners provide links with external support and mental health services in the community" (Goldberg et al., 2019, pp. 756-7).

Warren et al. (2009) also stress the significance of parental engagement, suggesting the core elements of community-based relational approaches, including an emphasis on relationship building between staff and parents. Warren et al. (2009) acknowledge that building

relationships takes time but advises educators to take *a 'patient approach',* he argues this would help the school understand more fully and meet the needs of the community. More recent research argues the value of home-school communication and relationships, particularly in the post-COVID-19 context, as McDonald et al. (2023).

Here, the multi-model approach, as outlined in WHO (1998) has been depicted, researchers emphasise the importance of all three of these components to elicit success (Goldberg et al., 2019). How these whole school approaches are to be implemented, will now be explored, and the potential barriers to this implementation.

2.2.9 Implementation of whole school approaches, and the barriers.

The Implementation Process Diagram (IPD) developed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) describes implementation as a staged process, involving, exploration, preparation, delivery, and sustainability. The IPD was developed to explore each stage of implementation and reflect on potential barriers schools may face at each stage, see figure 2.5. Within the EEF (2019) guidance, the first two 'foundations for good implementation' are to ensure schools:

- Treat implementation as a process, not an event, plan and execute it in stages.
- Create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to good implementation. (EEF, 2019, p.6)

Within the EEF guidance, the importance of getting these earlier stages of implementation 'right' before moving through the next stages is emphasised. Coleman (2020) argues that having a clear vision and embedding the values of this vision within the school environment is the biggest challenge to implementation, stressing the significance of having these foundational elements in place. It was also noted, within this guidance, that implementation can take from two to four years (Yueng, 2016; Nadeem et al., 2018).

Figure 2.5.

Implementation process diagram (EEF, 2019)
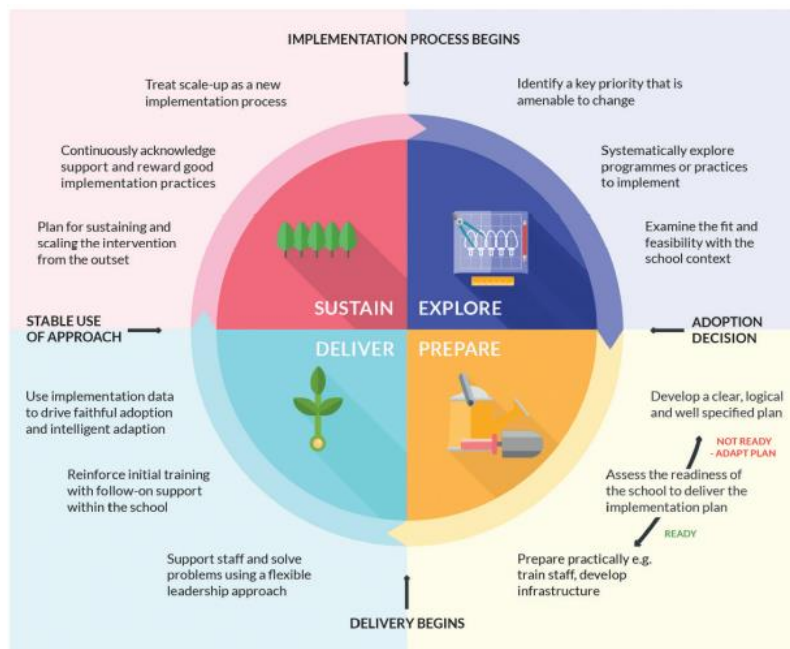
Fullan (2006) discusses 'Change Theory' which compliments the IPD, discussing seven key components needed for change, including:

1. *"A focus on motivation*

2. *Capacity building, with a focus on results.*

3. *Learning in context*

4. *Changing context*

5. *A bias for reflective action*

6. *Tri-level engagement [school and community, district, state]*

7. *Persistence and flexibility in staying the course" (p. 8)*

The 'Change Theory' has been important when considering whole school change, Fullan (2006) emphasised the value of motivation as being the catalyst for all the subsequent elements discussed. Here, Fullan (2006) also outlines the value and impact of context, persistence, and flexibility.

Some may argue there are certain 'types' of schools that have may have more flexibility and autonomy (West & Wolfe, 2019; Lane et al., 2022), which, according to the 'Change Theory', is one of the components needed for implementing change. It should be noted that this is just one element of the 'Change Theory' (Fullan, 2006) and the other components are

crucial in instigating and sustaining change (for example, the initial motivation needed to start the change process). Fullan (2006) discusses the final premise '*persistence and flexibility*' being introduced because of the complexity of the first six premises, and how challenging they are to manage over time, emphasising the importance of '*staying the course*', referring to the importance of all six premises discussed.

Reflecting on the conceptualisation of relational approaches, as summarsied in section 2.2.7, researchers emphasise key elements, for example, the value of ethos and culture of a school and reflect on the need for a safe and supportive environment to be established (Katz et al). Those features discussed can be established in all types of schools, if the school, or leadership team, have the motivation to do so, as Fullan (2006) described as a pre-cursor to the other premises.

Differing 'types' of educational settings will now be discussed, and how this may impact the ease of implementation.

2.2.9.1 Does the 'type' of school impact the ease of implementation?

This current study is focused on the implementation of relational approaches in secondary schools. In the United Kingdom, Local Authority (LA) maintained (community schools, foundation, voluntary schools, and grammar schools), academies and free schools are the most 'common types' of schools (DfE, 2023). In England, over the past decade, there has been a 'radical reorganisation' (Simon et al, 2019) of England's education system. One of the central components to this has been schools becoming academies, this subsequently has led to the growth of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). Recent statistics from DfE showed 79% of secondary school pupils attend academies (DfE, 2022b). Therefore, it is important to consider how the 'type' of secondary school may impact the implementation of whole school approaches.

Academies were initially encouraged by the government to help establish *autonomy* in schools (DfE, 2018). Researchers describe the freedoms academies have, in comparison to LA-maintained schools; academies are not obliged to follow the national curriculum, they are responsible for their admissions, and they follow their policies regarding the capability of staff members (West & Wolfe., 2019; Lane et al., 2022). These freedoms increase levels of autonomy and flexibility, which are deemed as one of the important components within Fullan's (2008) 'Change Theory' when implementing whole school change. Some may argue that academies may have more flexibility, helping the implementation process, as they are able to '*change in context*' and autonomy needed to 'stay the course' (Fullan, 2006). However, as

discussed, this does not mean other types of settings do not have these components, some argue MATs sometimes have less autonomy (West & Wolfe, 2019), as now will be discussed.

MATs are often led at a systems level, beyond the specific school or academy, by, for example a CEO or executive headteacher (Hughes, 2020; Matthews et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2012; Woods & Roberts, 2014). Due to this leadership structure, West & Wolfe (2019) argue that sometimes academies, when part of a bigger MAT have less autonomy, due to MATs seeking to standardise all the schools within the MAT, meaning that the individual schools sometimes have less autonomy than LA maintained schools (West & Wolfe, 2019). It is useful to consider this information for this research, as the 'type' of secondary school may impact the school's ability to implement whole school relational approaches, due to the level of autonomy the school has.

After reflecting on the IPD (EEF, 2019) and the impact the 'type' of school has on implementation, the role of the SLs will now be considered. Firstly, leadership will be defined, and leadership models reflected upon, then SLs' role in implementing whole school approaches considered.

2.2.10 Leadership

2.2.10.1 Defining leadership and considering differing leadership models

Within this current study, the views and experiences of SLs are being explored. In this section, 'leadership' will be defined, and differing leadership models discussed. The importance of leadership, regarding the implementation of whole school approaches will then be discussed.

The term 'leadership' has only recently been a term used in educational settings (Bush, 2008), before this 'management' was the most used term. Cuban (1988) defines leadership as:

"By leadership, I mean influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals.... Leadership . . .takes . . . much ingenuity, energy and skill. (Cuban, 1988, p. 21)

Within this definition, Cuban (1988) emphasises that the term 'leadership' aligns with ideas of 'change', this is useful when considering the importance of the leadership role

regarding whole school 'change' or implementation. As the EEF (2019) guidance depicts, creating a leadership environment conducive to change is vital.

Distributed leadership (DL) will now be outlined and considered, being one of the most reported leadership models (Gumus et al., 2018), and argued to be the most aligned with relational approaches (Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; EEF, 2018). DL focuses on collective leadership, or a group of interacting individuals (Woods et al., 2004), rather than leadership being an *'individual managing hierarchical systems and structures'* (Harris, 2008, p. 14). This model of leadership has gained popularity (Harris, 2008), and now school leadership is often distributed throughout the school (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2006), with both the headteacher and SLs being accountable for setting shared values and ensuring these values are distributed (Deal & Peterson, 1999) Leithwood et al. (2006) argue that '*School leadership has a greater influence on schools and student outcomes when widely distributed'* (p. 12).

Harris (2008) does argue the value and importance of the headteacher in ensuring this DL is '*fostered and generated'* (p. 16) The EEF (2018) guidance also refers to the value of having distributed leadership (DL) when implementing whole school changes. DL focuses on collaboration and equality, working 'with' each other rather than 'for', as Watchtel (2008) argues as being the most effective means of bringing about change, as described in the 'Relationships Window' (see section 2.2.5 for further detail).

2.2.10.2 The importance of leadership in whole school change

Researchers argue that active engagement and commitment of leadership in the implementation process can maximise the success of whole school change (Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018). This is due to SLs being able to make crucial decisions, for example, regarding school structures and resources, which are invaluable in facilitating the implementation process (Hollingworth et al., 2018; Woulfin & Weiner, 2019). Coleman (2020) argues that the following elements of leadership are needed to be bringing about whole school change:

"*Setting the strategic direction of the school; the management of people, teachers and other staff; financial management; the management of relationships with parents and the community and the leadership and management of the curriculum in its broadest sense, both the overt and the hidden curriculum."* (p. 69)

Here, Coleman (2020) refers to the overt and hidden curriculum, which could be an indication of the underlying values of the school. Some researchers argue the primary role of SLs is to help establish and influence both the climate and ethos of the school (Bush & Glover, 2014; Warin, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in government guidance focusing more on mental health in schools (DfE 2020; Tawell et al. 2020). Thompson et al. (2021) argue this may impact the priorities of SLs, resulting in them being more motivated to change policies than they may have previously. The most recent behaviour guidelines also emphasise the importance of whole school approaches (DfE 2022a).

When comparing secondary schools, and other types of provision (such as primary schools), Thompson et al. (2021) also argue secondary schools have an increase in external pressures, resulting in an often-reduced focus on wellbeing and inclusion (Tod & Ellis, 2014). Why secondary schools have been decided to be a key focus of this research will now be outlined.

2.2.11 The focus on secondary schools

Thompson et al. (2021) argue inclusion in secondary schools is the biggest challenge, due to secondary schools having more rigid rules and expectations around conformity and emphasising less on pupil wellbeing and 'belonging'. Runswick -Cole (2011) also emphasises the conflict between academic attainment and inclusion: *'the standards agenda and inclusions agenda make uneasy bedfellows'* (p.116). The higher number of exclusions in secondary schools, both fixed term and permanent, providing evidence for this struggle with inclusion (DfE, 2022b). As well as not being able to focus on inclusion, academic attainment has been argued to increase stress levels in secondary pupils (Pascoe et al., 2020).

As Thompson et al. (2021) argue secondary schools tend to have less of a focus on inclusion and wellbeing, having more of a focus on academic attainment. The pressures placed on pupils to achieve good grades, has been argued to have a detrimental impact for both pupils themselves and teaching staff (Pascoe et al., 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Ongoing stress being related to more ongoing mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression (Maes et al., 2013), as well as adversely effecting academic achievement (McArdle et al., 2014). This suggests a move away from an attainment agenda, and towards an agenda focusing more so on mental health, could have positive effects for both pupil wellbeing but also academic achievement (McArdle et al., 2014). As described in section 2.2.6, relational approaches have been argued to have a positive impact, for both physical and mental health of pupils, as the focus is shifted away from focusing on behaviour (Thompson, 2021 et al.,

2021). This is especially applicable within the current context of post-COVID-19, influences, for example, such as a move to online learning, had been found to be decrease secondary student well being even further, during this time (Walters et al., 2022).

Moore et al. (2019) completed an evidence-review around 'Improving behaviour in schools' and found, out of 73 studies, only 2 were situated solely within secondary schools, calling for more research regarding behaviour management and approaches used within secondary educational settings. Although this current study is not focusing solely on behaviour management, exploring SLs' views of the use and implementation of relational approaches within a secondary school, will help add to the knowledge base regarding alternative whole school approaches to managing behaviour. Within Oxley's (2021) research, which focused on alternative approaches to managing behaviour, it was suggested a possible next step within research could be exploring the views of those working in schools with 'good practices' that avoid the use of more punitive approaches.

2.2.12 Why this research important to Educational Psychologists (EPs)

In 2011 there was a move towards the role of EPs contributing to more whole-establishment interventions, to support inclusion (DfE, 2011), rather than working at the level of the individual child (Scottish Executive, 2002). The final report of the National Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Review (DOH, 2008) also included reference to the wider responsibilities of the EP such as therapeutic work, training, and behaviour management. Recent government guidance has discussed a bigger emphasis on whole school practice (DfE, 2022a; 2022d; 2022e), this will also have an impact on EP practice.

This emphasises the importance of the role of the EP in working at a whole school level, working with schools to create and implement differing behaviour policies to ensure the inclusion of all CYP. EPs have already spent time developing and implementing relational policies. For example, both the, *'Guidance for Developing Relational Practice and Policy'* (Babcock, 2020) and *'Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy'* (Brighton and Hove City Council', 2019) were written and developed by EPs.

Understanding the enabling factors, and barriers to, the implementation of whole school relational approaches will help EPs understand more fully how to support schools in overcoming these barriers. EPs can utilise, more effectively, process consultation skills, and draw on strategic psychological approaches, by having a more in-depth understanding of the perspectives of SLs that have already implemented such approaches (West & Idol, 1987).

Previous research indicates the role EPs can play in supporting the implementation of whole school relational approaches. For example, Sparling (2022) completed research into evaluating an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)-informed whole school development programme. The programme itself was developed and implemented with the support of EPs. Sparling (2022) discussed EPs being well-positioned to bring theory and knowledge about evidence-based interventions. For example, for this ACE-informed programme, the EPs developed three sessions: '*the first one outlined research about ACEs, the following two sessions focused on attachment, developmental trauma, resilience, behaviour management strategies and approaches such as emotion coaching',* showing how their knowledge and theory can be applied in developing a relational way of working (p. 61, Sparling, 2022). Other researchers, including Ruttledge (2022) also emphasised using the skills of EPs to help develop and facilitate a relational whole school programme, drawing on psychological theory and practice across a range of paradigms.

Sparling (2022) argues EPs are also well placed to help schools with implementation at a organisational level (Fallon et al., 2010). For example, within Sparling's (2022) research, EPs were well placed to encourage educational practitioners to have a clear implementation plan and encourage careful consideration around the use of resources. Ruttledge (2022) also found EPs to be useful in helping support educational settings in the implementation process, using skills such as consultation skills and application of psychological problem solving.

2.2.13 Summary

This narrative review aimed to explore the differing conceptualisations of relational approaches and understand what is already known about these approaches and their outcomes. It could be argued, from this narrative review, that relational approaches are more inclusive, in comparison to more behaviour approaches, leading to better outcomes for all CYP (Chafouleas et al, 2016; Howard, 2019; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021), although research has indicated these approaches can sometimes be challenging to measure (Howe et al., 2018; Gus et al., 2015).

The review also reflected on relational approaches at a whole school level, and the implementation of these approaches (EEF, 2019), research suggesting relational approaches can be more effective when implemented at a whole school level (Avery et al., 2021; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Goldberg et al., 2019). Other factors influencing whole school implementation, such as the vital role of leadership (Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018; Coleman, 2020) and the 'type' of school, were also deliberated.

The literature discussed within this narrative review has highlighted some gaps within research regarding the use and implementation of relational approaches (Thomas et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al., 2021; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Avery et al., 2020). For example, Avery et al. (2021) argue the immediate need for more research into the use of relational approaches: '*future research is urgently required to understand the interaction between core elements of a trauma-informed approach, teaching pedagogy and organizational factors that support the embedding, use and transferability of school-wide approaches.' (p.1).* Here, Avery et al., (2021) refer to the need to understand the conceptualisations of such approaches, as well as future research needing to explore use and implementation, specifically referring to '*organisational factors',* which could influence this successful implementation.

This need for further research was also highlighted in other SLRs, such as Chafouleas et al. (2021) arguing a gap in the literature regarding how TIP should be implemented at a whole school level; a similar argument came from Zakszeski and Rutherford (2021) regarding RP. They describe a lack of research into the measurement of the success of implementation and fidelity of the implementation measures used.

Within this narrative review, were also very few papers have been completed regarding the use of relational approaches within the UK education system. For example, in Zakszeski and Rutherford's (2021) review, 57.75% of studies had been conducted in the United States, with 5 being completed in England, and the majority of which took place in primary schools. Through this review only two trauma-informed whole school relational approaches were identified, that were based within the UK and Ireland (MacLoachlainn et al., 2022; Barton et al., 2018),

From this narrative review, the researcher found gaps within the knowledge base around the use of relational approaches, especially within the UK education system, and within secondary educational settings. This *narrative* review has provided rationale for a *systematic* literature review to take place, to identify if there are any further gaps in research, regarding the use of relational approaches in the UK, as will now be further explored.

2.3 Systematic Literature Review

2.3.1 Definition and Purpose of Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The purpose of an SLR is to provide a comprehensive and structured synthesis of a specific topic area (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006). SLRs are designed to minimise bias and

maximise rigour, by identifying, evaluating, and synthesising all relevant studies on a specific research question or topic (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006; Evans et al., 2004). This synthesis of the existing literature can help prevent any duplication (Chalmers & Glasziou, 2009) and help the researcher understand more fully what is currently known about the topic, revealing areas that require further examination (Gough et al., 2018).

2.3.2 Background and review question

The narrative review highlighted the importance of understanding the use and implementation of relational approaches in secondary schools within the UK, as well as potential current gaps within the knowledge base. The focus of this SLR is to explore research studies, conducted within the UK, which focus on gaining the views of educators regarding relational approaches. This SLR aims to gain a clearer picture regarding *who*, amongst education staff, have already been asked to express their views around relational approaches, as well as *how* these views have been collated. It will also be useful to explore *what* these views have already told us about educators' experiences working in a secondary educational setting, that is implementing relational approaches. In addition to this, the SLR aims to facilitate further identification as to where there may be uncertainty in the research or what further research should focus on (Gough, 2007).

Therefore, the research question for this SLR is:

What is known about educators' experiences, regarding the use of whole school relational approaches, within UK secondary schools?

Although SLs are a key aspect of this research, with scoping the literature, there was not enough research on SLs' views and experiences specifically. Therefore, the views of educators and school staff, in general, were sought.

2.3.3 Search Method

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken, using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA, Moher et al., 2010). The databases ERIC, Web of Science, Scopus, and OVID were systematically searched in August 2022. These databases were chosen due to their relevance within psychology, and because of their use in other, similar SLR topics (Avery et al., 2021; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

2.3.4 Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria comprised of:

i)   Primary research published between 2012 and 2022

ii)   Studies conducted within the UK, written in English

iii)   Qualitative data collected directly from educators/ school staff

iv)   Studies within mainstream secondary schools that were implementing relational approaches (as defined in the introduction) at a whole school level

The timescale 2012-2022 was chosen, due to the increase in research and understanding of relational approaches during this time (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Avery et al., 2021). For further rationale regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria refer to appendix A.

2.3.5 Search Strategy

To address the variety of terms used to describe relational approaches, the following search terms were utilised. Studies were selected by combining terms using 'AND' or 'OR' operators. To retrieve words with different endings, an asterisk was used, and specific terms were grouped using speech marks. As mentioned, the initial search was limited to SLs, however, too few studies were retrieved when limiting the search terms in this way. Therefore, search terms incorporating all school staff were applied.

"Secondary education" OR "High School" OR "secondary school"

AND "Restorative Approach*" OR "Restorative practice*" OR "Restorative Justice" OR "Trauma-informed" OR "Trauma sensitive" OR "Trauma Aware" OR "Attachment Aware" OR "Attachment based" OR "relation* practic*" OR "relation* approach*" OR "relational"

AND "UK" or "Engl*" or "Brit*"

AND "teacher" OR "educator" OR "school staff" OR "headteacher" OR "senior leader*"

2.3.6 Data Extraction

The search criteria followed the PRISMA flowchart, see figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6.

PRISMA Flowchart.
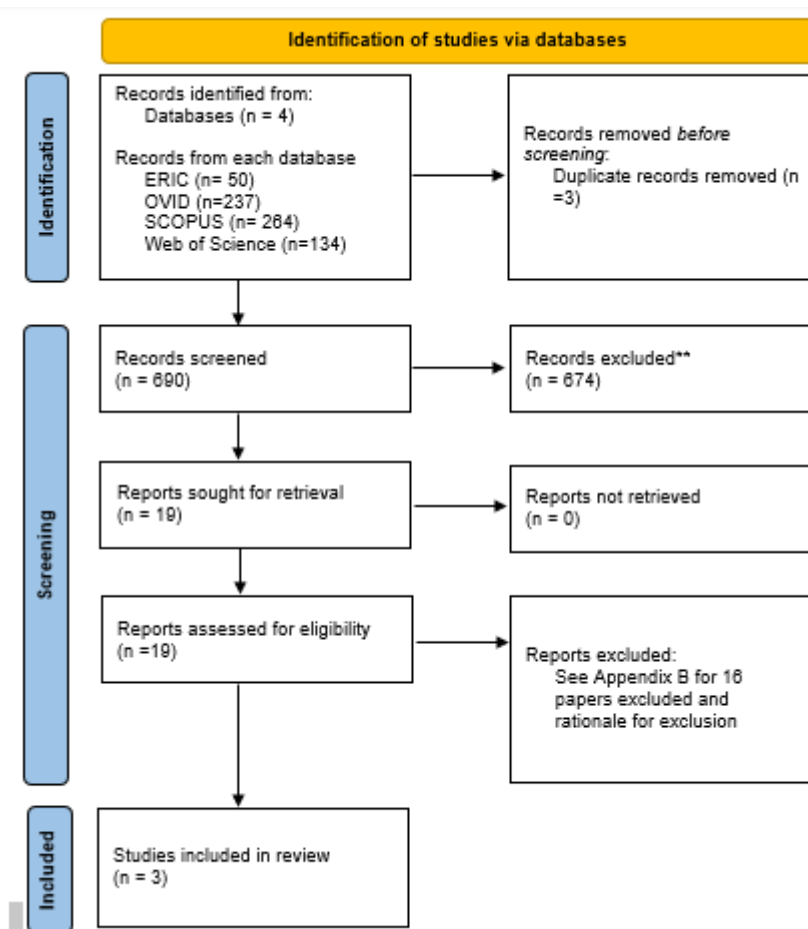
A total of 693 articles were identified from the four databases. Once duplicates were removed 690 articles remained. Titles and abstracts were screened based on the inclusion criteria, see section 2.3.5. A further 674 were excluded, leaving 19 for full-text screening.

Studies were excluded if:

- Published before 2012

- No implementation of a whole-school relational approaches

- Quantitative research design.

- Studies based in mainstream primary schools, special education, or alternative provision. Studies based in Early Years provision, post-16 setting or High Education. If data from primary and secondary schools were combined, the paper was also excluded.

- Participants who are not education staff

- Studies not based in the United Kingdom
- Studies not written in English

An additional 16 articles were excluded (for studies excluded and rationale see appendix B), leaving 3 which met the inclusion criteria.

Table 2.1

Studies included in the SLR.

Research Papers included in the SLR
Reimer, K. E. (2019). Relationships of control and relationships of engagement: How educator intentions intersect with student experiences of restorative justice. *Journal of Peace Education, 16*(1), 49-77.
Ruttledge, R. (2022). A whole school approach to building relationships, promoting positive behaviour and reducing teacher stress in a secondary school. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 1-22.
Short, R., Case, G., & McKenzie, K. (2018). The long-term impact of a whole school approach of restorative practice: The views of secondary school teachers. *Pastoral Care in Education, 36*(4), 313-324.

2.3.7 Quality Appraisal

The quality of the three studies was assessed, using Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) quality appraisal tool. Weight of Evidence (WoE) focuses on the specific pieces of evidence being considered and determines how much 'weight' should be given to each piece of evidence, depending on the features or characteristics of the evidence used within the review (Gough, 2007). The differing aspects of WoE include WoE A, WoE B, WoE C, and then WoED calculates the overall scores (Gough, 2007). Each weight of evidence will be explained individually within each section below.

2.3.7.1 WoE A – CASP

Gough (2007) explains WoE A is the *'non-review specific judgement about the coherence and integrity of the evidence in its own terms'* (p. 11). Within this SLR, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2017) was used to assess the six studies and to review the qualitative evidence. The framework consists of 10 questions, as portrayed in table 2.2.

Studies were scored: Yes (+), Cannot tell (?) or no (-). To calculate a numeric figure for WoE A, initial codes were transformed into numbers. Studies were rated high quality (3) if they met 8 out of 10 criteria; medium quality (2) if they met 5-7 of the criteria; and low quality (1) if they met 4 or fewer of the criteria. For the rationale of each of the ratings see appendix C.

Table 2.2.

WoE A – Critical Appraisal (CASP, 2017) of Studies

CASP Checklist	Short et al. (2018)	Reimer (2019)	Ruttledge (2022)
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	+	+	+
Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	+	+	+
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	+	+	+
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	+	+	+
Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	+	+	+
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	+	+	+
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	+	+	+

Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	+	+	+
Is there a clear statement of findings?	+	+	+
How valuable is the research?	+	+	+
Weight of Evidence A	3	3	3

WoE B involves: "*review[ing] specific judgement about the appropriateness of that form of evidence for answering the review question*" (Gough, 2011. p.11) The three studies were assessed on this *'appropriateness'*, regarding answering the SLR question (Gough, 2007). Based on the inclusion criteria applied, only studies which collated the views of UK secondary school educators, using a qualitative measure, were chosen.

Studies were rated high (3) if they used solely focus groups or interviews, medium (2) if they used an additional method of data collection (for example, a mixed methods approach by which separate qualitative data could not be extracted); and low (1) if they used a method of data collection other than interviews or focus groups to produce qualitative data.

Table 2.3.

WoE B – Appropriateness of Method

Authors and Date	*WoE B*
Short et al. (2018)	3
Reimer (2019)	2
Ruttledge (2022)	3

WoE C involves the three studies being assessed for the appropriateness of their study topic concerning the SLR question (Gough, 2007). The studies were evaluated based on *"the extent to which the focus of the study was on educator experiences, regarding the use of relational approaches"*. Studies were rated high (3) if they focused entirely on the views of educators on relational approaches, medium (2) if most of the focus was on educator views of relational approaches, and low (1) if they had limited focus on relational approaches.

Table 2.4

WoE C – Appropriateness of topic

Authors and Date	WoE C
Short et al. (2018)	3
Reimer (2019)	1
Ruttledge (2022)	2

2.3.7.4 WoE D – Overall Score

A quality measure was derived by combing the overall scores (WoA-C), to give an overall mean judgement score. Studies were rated high quality if they scored a 3, medium quality if they scored a 2 or low quality if they scored 2 or below.

Table 2.5.

WoE D – Overall Quality Measure

Authors and Date	WoE D
Short et al. (2018)	3
Reimer (2019)	2
Ruttledge (2022)	2.7 (rounded up to 3)

2.3.8 Data Synthesis

This review was exploratory; therefore, a thematic synthesis approach was taken (Thomas & Harden, 2008), to interpret any data patterns (Gough, 2007). As informed by the completed quality appraisal (table 2.5), the data from the most relevant papers were analysed first, to ensure data from the more relevant papers had the greatest influence over the synthesis of the review. Findings from Short et al. (2018) were analysed first, then Ruttledge (2022), and then Reimer (2019).

A thematic synthesis approach incorporates three stages, the first of which involves coding the three result sections. In this stage, the data most relevant to the SLR question was coded, and 35 codes were generated. The themes were then generated by the researcher, taking an inductive approach, and seven descriptive themes were generated. Finally, these seven themes were organised into three higher-order analytical categories (See Appendix E for codes and themes generated). See section 2.3.10 for a thematic map and a more detailed description of these themes.

2.3.9 Summary of the included studies

Three papers, dating from 2018 to 2022, were included in the review. See Appendix D for the study's characteristics. Two of the studies were conducted in England, Ireland and one in Scotland /Canada. For the latter study, due to the inclusion criteria of this SLR, only the research that took part in Scotland, and with the school staff, was included. Two of the studies were qualitative and one mixed method, from which qualitative data was extracted.

2.3.10 Thematic Synthesis

The original question posed by this review was:

> *What is known about educators' experiences, regarding the use of whole school relational approaches, within UK secondary schools?*

Three papers were included within this thematic synthesis, identifying three analytical themes and several descriptive themes. The overarching analytical themes are: *'Positive pupil development', 'contributing factors to a relational environment'* and '*barriers to implementation'.*

Figure 2.7

A thematic map showing the analytical and descriptive themes

2.3.10.1 Main theme: Positive Pupil Development

The first analytical theme generated within this SLR was named: '*positive pupil development'*. This theme highlighted the value educators placed on relational approaches in supporting the holistic development of pupils. For example, the relational approaches help develop skills including social communication skills, and skills pupils may need for the 'real world.'

Supporting social skills

The synthesis demonstrated that educators view relational approaches as a way of helping support pupils with their social communication skills. For example, building on pupils' ability to emotionally regulate within interactions, as outlined in the following excerpt:

"*maybe it's a way of helping them not get so angry or when they do get angry, of being able to deal with that…make them emotionally intelligent about how they, about how other people feel. I think maybe that's… and improve behaviour.*" (Reimer, 2019).

Within this excerpt, the educator also insinuates helping develop these skills encourages and helps pupils manage their behaviour. Educators within this SLR noted children were more 'willing' to work collaboratively (Reimer, 2019), and support each other: *"So a lot…peer mentoring as well, which they don't actually know they're doing"* (Reimer, 2019). Educators explained the pupils had more self-efficacy around overcoming their disputes: *"ahh, we just sat and sorted it ourselves".* (Short et al. 2018). Within this SLR, educators explained the positive impact on academic outcomes, when these relational approaches were used: "*not only did behaviour improve, but also results"* (Short et al., 2018).

Supporting the development of skills for the 'Real World'

Educators discussed the outside world and the importance of preparing children for their future: *'Restorative practice is initiating that next stage of development in that they are part of society and what you do does impact on others'* (Short et al. 2018). Educators also emphasised some students would need this help more than others: *'almost we have to start with some of them again. Because we can't, sadly, we can't change the society that they live in"* (Reimer, 2019).

This theme highlights how educators perceive the effect and impact relational approaches can have on pupils' skill sets, as well as valuing the importance of developing these skills to benefit the pupils in the long-term.

2.3.10.2 Main Theme: Contributing factors to relational environment.

From these three studies, having and encouraging a relational environment appeared to be having a positive impact on educators' experiences. The development of positive relationships between professionals and students was noted as a factor in helping to encourage this relational environment, as well as the importance of the whole staff body being on board. Continuing professional development of differing approaches was also thought to be a contributor to the general relational school environment, by helping the understanding of children's needs and understanding behaviour as an expression of these needs, the value

placed on relationships was also kept at the forefront of practice.

Building Positive Relationships

Relationships were highly valued by the educators within this review, regarding helping social connection and creating a family feel to the overall environment: *"To this end, many felt that the school became a surrogate family for the pupils. This obvious care for pupils and focus on relationships facilitated social connection"* (Reimer, 2019). Educators in all three papers noted the importance of building positive relationships between both colleagues and students. As encompassed in a quote from Ruttledge (2022)*: "Making yourself available for students and staff that may be struggling or having that bad day"*. Another excerpt emphasised this collaborative working and support amongst staff: "*support my fellow colleagues and provide a listening ear'* (Ruttledge, 2022).

In all studies, within this SLR, the importance and reciprocal nature of relationships are highlighted. The impact these positive relationships could have on behaviour is also referred to, giving the idea of mutual respect between teacher and student: "*I try and talk to the kid rather than just accusing them of something"* (Short et al., 2018). This mutual respect and building relationships will help build a relational and nurturing school environment. Reimer's (2019) participant also explained: *"that young person will have a lot of respect for you and will probably work better within the class. Because at the end of the day, they don't want to let you down, or that staff member".* Here, the educator suggests having these positive relationships may be a precursor for positive behaviour management.

Role of school leadership

Educators within this SLR discussed the vital role of SLs, when utilising relational approaches, suggesting adopting a whole school relational approach the setting needs to be: '*supported by the Principal and Deputy Principal'* (Ruttledge, 2022). A participant in Reimer's (2019) study noted, *"[The headteacher] said something the other day about [the school] getting in your blood, and it does."* This emphasised the role of the senior leadership team in talking about the ethos and environment. Educators also discussed the importance of structures within their schools, and the role of leadership in making these decisions to enable the support of these structures, emphasising the importance of, *"leadership and resources to ensure that this programme remains a core element of the strategic planning for our school" (Ruttledge, 2022).* Here, the educators expressed their view regarding how vital SLs are in enabling the implementation of whole school approaches, often being the professionals most able to make

decisions around strategic change.

Positive impact of continuing professional development

Educators also expressed views regarding the importance of continuous professional development (CPD), and how the use of relational approaches within their setting has helped with this: *'I do think that since teachers have become more that way and pastoral staff have developed their skills on it, that the school's climate has improved massively in that aspect"* (Short et al. 2018). Here, it was interpreted that, the educators also see this CPD as contributing to the overall relational climate of the school.

As well as impacting the relational climate of the school, educators also discussed the impact the change of adult behaviour had on pupils and the pupils' expectations: *"Yes, they learn, certainly my year 10's in the last 6 months have learnt a lot, I think. Certainly, about me and how I deal with their behaviour"* (Short et al., 2018). It could be interpreted here that educators see the use of relational approaches as changing expectations, impacting positively on the learning of the students.

Educators explained how they try and take more of a positive approach to behaviour, after the implementation of relational approaches: *'I am more mindful of praising good behaviours more often'* (Ruttledge, 2022)*,* and using behaviour incidences as learning opportunities for students: "*It's sort of, alright so they have made a mistake, so how can we help them stop making that mistake again. By getting them to understand the impact it has had" (Short et al., 2018).* Educators reflected on the negative impact punitive approaches can sometimes have: *"I find that ignoring secondary behaviours with some students is the best approach as otherwise it can make the situation worse"* (Ruttledge, 2022). Despite this, educators did still refer to the use of more behavioural approaches in school, as explored further in the analytic theme '*Barriers to implementation'* (section 2.3.10.3).

Educators also appeared to understand children's needs and the psychological knowledge underpinning these needs. Rutledge (2022) noted that participants described having an increased awareness of the interaction between individual and environmental factors for students. Participants showed a greater understanding of psychological underpinnings of children's behaviour: '*Because it helps you understand why students have done certain things. . .sometimes the behaviours that people exhibit are because of deeper issues'* (Short et al., 2018). Educators also emphasised the significance of understanding the reasoning behind the behaviour*: "If you don't know why someone has done something then it is easier to be angry at someone and to not care and be less accepting".* The participants then

explained how they used this knowledge in their continuous professional development, here the resolution of conflict was discussed: *"dealing with it by sort of empathy and understanding"* (Short et al. 2018).

2.3.10.3 Main Theme: Barriers to Implementation

When understanding educator views, regarding the use of relational approaches within secondary schools, various barriers to the implementation of such approaches were discussed. These included individual differences among pupils, some educators agreed that more behaviourist approaches were better suited to certain children. Practical restrictions were also discussed, such as staff needing to prioritise other agendas, such as pupils completing exams, and some staff not always being on board.

Individual differences between pupil presentations

In all three studies, educators noted individual differences between pupils, and how this influences how they will respond to differing behaviour management approaches: *'In theory all of this is great, and it does work with some students, but a stronger line needs to be taken with some students'* (Ruttledge, 2022). This could suggest the importance of using differing approaches, depending on the individual pupils. Educators also discussed relational approaches, such as restorative conversations, being challenging for some children, if they have difficulty expressing themselves: *"Some children. . .can quite easily sit with others and speak their mind, whereas other students might struggle to say their thoughts"* (Short et al., 2018).

Practical restrictions and the need for continued implementation

Educators discussed practical restrictions regarding the continued implementation of these approaches, for example, "*I think we are restricted by this bloody national curriculum and the exams. We have to do this, we have to do that*" (Short et al., 2018). Here, the educator is expressing the challenge in the continued use of relational approaches, due to the other priorities school staff have, which may also lead to not all educators being 'on board' all the time.

Educators also expressed the importance of all staff working together when using whole school approaches such as these, and, it was interpreted, that is often not the case : '*It is important that teachers and management in the school all work together to implement the*

55

programme for the best interests of everyone involved'. (Ruttledge, 2022); "I think in order for restorative practice to have a full impact on the school and atmosphere it needs to be something that absolutely everyone is doing" (Short et al., 2018). The educators discussed this not always being the case, and suggest relational approaches should be continuously revisited, if not, the approach may not be sustained efficiently: *"There's a feeling that a lot of people are using restorative more automatically now, but also it hasn't been re-visited for a while. Maybe people are forgetting, so I'm not really sure" (Reimer, 2019).* Here, educators are discussing the practical barriers to the implementation of relational approaches, expressing the importance of '*absolutely everyone*' doing these approaches if they are to be successful.

2.3.11 Limitations

This review has several limitations. A limited number of research papers were included in the systematic literature review, this was a result of the restrictive inclusion and exclusion criteria. Although this did mean all the papers included were relevant to the research question, it limited the scope of the review.

The researcher was aware of the limited amount of research completed in the UK in the area, but the relevance of drawing data from UK secondary schools only was deemed vital for the aims of the review, which was to uncover what was known about the educator views regarding relational approaches within the UK education system. However, a limitation to the approach was that the schools were located in England, Ireland and Scotland; policies and government guidance within these differing countries will have also impacted the results sought.

It must also be noted that two of the schools in the studies had implemented 'Restorative Practice' within their schools, and the other had applied a more general relational approach (Ruttledge, 2022), this might have impacted the themes drawn. However, all approaches were in fitting with how this paper defined a 'relational approaches', see Section 2.2.4 for further information regarding how relational approaches have been conceptualised for this research.

An in-depth analysis of the methodologies used within papers could have also been beneficial within this synthesis.

2.3.12 Conclusions and Implications

The original question posed by this review was:

What is known about educators' experiences, regarding the use of whole school relational approaches, within UK secondary schools?

The review demonstrated only a limited amount of research has been completed within England. This SLR consisting of studies from across the whole of the UK. It, therefore, may be challenging to draw valid generalisations from this review in an English context. However, as the studies did all occur in the United Kingdom, the education systems will be most similar to those in England.

Overall, the researcher would argue that the literature indicates relational approaches were generally viewed positively, as aligns with research collated in the narrative literature Chafouleas et al., 2021; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Avery et al., 2020), although there were some criticisms regarding the quality of research indicating the success of such approaches. Educators described relational approaches as helping support positive pupil development and discussed the positive long-term impact in the 'outside world'. They also discussed that relational approaches help encourage a positive and nurturing whole school ethos, emphasising the importance of everyone believing in the approach and being on-board, which was sometimes not the case (as outlined in 'barriers to implementation'). Themes indicated this relational environment was encouraged by; building positive relationships, educators continued professional development and the role of SLs.

One of the barriers to implementation, as expressed by participants, was the need for all staff, including management, to value, and participate actively with relational approaches. Educators alluded this was not always the case, some educators emphasise the role of leadership within this (Ruttledge, 2022), which aligns with previous research (Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018; Coleman, 2020). Educators also suggested to the importance of the continued implementation of relational approaches.

While the review has identified the experiences of school staff in general, regarding the use of whole school relational approaches, this review did not identify any research completed in UK secondary schools, focusing solely on the views of SLs. This review highlights the importance of SLs regarding the success of an implication of such approaches.

2.4 Rationale and research question

The Department for Education (DfE, 2016; 2022a) guidance remains largely based on behaviourist approaches, still referring to the use of sanctions and rewards. However, research evidence suggests overreliance on this approach may not have the best outcomes for CYP in schools (Oxley, 2021). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) argue

the evidence-base regarding zero-tolerance policies and adopting behaviourist approaches is weak. The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions (DfE, 2020; Oxley, 2021) in the UK also indicates that these behaviourist approaches do not support a positive behaviour change for all children. Exclusions have a long-term negative impact on educational and social and emotional outcomes for CYP (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2017; Martin-Denham, 2021). This highlights the importance of looking at behaviour management strategies which cater for all needs.

Research has indicated several key factors which impact the successful implementation of whole school approaches (Fullan, 2006; EEF, 2019), a significant factor being the role of SLs. SLs are best placed to facilitate the successful implementation of relational approaches, due to several factors, including, interpretation of educational policies, decision-making regarding strategic change and power over finances and resources (Coleman, 2020).

This systematic literature and narrative literature review suggests the benefits of relational approaches, especially in the current climate (Jopling & Harness, 2021; DfE, 2022d; 2022e), and the rationale for more secondary schools in the UK to adopt such approaches. However, as mentioned, it is not clear how many secondary schools in the UK are using and implementing such approaches. Recent government guidance has highlighted the importance of whole school approaches (DfE, 2022a; 2022d; 2022e), and a move towards more inclusive practice, especially after the mental health implications of COVID-19.

Given the strong theoretical basis and some evidence around the positive impact regarding the use of relational approaches, and the importance of the role of SLs, it is the view of the researcher that there is a clear rationale to conduct an exploratory piece of research to explore the views and experiences of SLs, in mainstream secondary schools, within England, regarding relational approaches. Having a greater understanding of this will support:

- Understand the experiences of SLs regarding implementing a relational approach
- Identify which factors SLs perceive enable, or are a barrier to, the implementation of these approaches.

This is the primary research question of this study:

What are the views and experiences of school leaders, implementing whole school relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school?

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction to chapter

Firstly, this chapter will justify the researcher's philosophical assumptions and explain how these assumptions influenced decisions relating to research methodology and methods. Once these philosophical assumptions have been explained, the research procedure will be outlined, including participant selection and recruitment. Ethical considerations and limitations will also be explored, as well as the interest in providing dependable and trustworthy research. The chapter will then outline Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA, Braun & Clarke, 2021a), why RTA was chosen as an analysis procedure, the phases involved in RTA and potential criticisms of the approach.

As the Literature Review demonstrates, limited research has investigated the experiences of school leaders (SLs), regarding the use and implementation of relational approaches in secondary schools. The researcher aimed to provide a unique contribution to the current knowledge base, by gaining an in-depth understanding of SLs' experiences in the use of these relational approaches in one secondary school.

The researcher framed the setting of Redwood High School (a pseudonym) as a singular case. Within this single case, a single unit of analysis was explored, the experiences of SLs, and the rationale behind which is explored in section 2.2.9. For this research, semi-structured interviews with six SLs were undertaken, and analysed by RTA, ensuring the shared exploration of meaning across the participants.

The primary research question of this research is:

What are the views and experiences of school leaders, implementing whole school relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school?

3.2 Methodological orientation

3.2.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Quantitative and qualitative research are two methodological approaches that have been used in educational research, these stances are often suggested to be opposing (Abusabha & Woelfel, 2003). The quantitative approach has been described as the 'gold standard' of research, including the use of methods such as Randomised Control Trials (RCT, Ramey & Grubb, 2009). However, these approaches have been criticised when used within social sciences, as they are driven by a 'fix-it' paradigm (Parker, 2004), focusing on identifying a problem and attempting to find a solution. As Trainor and Graue (2014) argue, there is more to research than uncovering causal relationships.

Qualitative research moves away from this 'fix it' paradigm, the qualitative approach is driven more by a desire to understand and explore human experience in rich detail (Schwandt, 2014). Gelo et al. (2008) argue that following a qualitative approach allows the researcher and researcher participants to construct reality together. This qualitative approach aligns with this current research, as the researcher aims to elicit the experiences of SLs and understand their lived experience regarding the use and implementation of relational approaches.

3.2.2 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Within research, it is important to identify the philosophical positioning on which the research question is based (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). It is important to identify the ontological and epistemological positioning, so we can understand how it influences decisions, and help justify research choices (Sullivan, 2019). Within this section, the researcher aims to justify research assumptions and explain how they led to certain research decisions.

This research adopted a critical realist ontological position and a contextualist epistemological position. Within this section, alternative ontological and epistemological positions will be explored, followed by an explanation as to why this positioning was decided upon.

Ontology refers to how an individual views the concept of 'reality' (Mertens, 2014). The difference in researchers' ontological views is reflected in the approach their research takes. Researchers adopting a relativist ontology argue that multiple realities exist and that these realities are constructed socially (Coolican, 2017). The goal of research, underpinned by relativist ontology, is typically undertaken to gain a greater understanding of these individual realities (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In comparison, some researchers adopt a realist ontology. Researchers adopting a realist ontology assume there is one reality, taking the view that there are general laws that are waiting to be uncovered by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007).

Critical realism recognises that reality exists but argues that individuals will each have a unique interpretation of this reality (Alexander, 2006). Interpreting reality, especially regarding the social world, requires an understanding of similarities and differences in individual viewpoints. Suggesting there is a real world out there, however, this real world can never be known fully, due to differing interpretations of such reality (Harper, 2011). Braun and Clarke (2021a) explain, within a critical realist positioning, the purpose of research would be to gain an understanding of participants *'situated realities'*, rather than a *'situated reality'*, which would be more of a realist ontological position. Shows realist assumptions, in its essence, but acknowledging that reality is different for different people in different contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

Allison and Pomeroy (2000) explain that epistemology refers to a researcher's belief about the nature of knowledge. As the researcher adopted a critical realist ontological approach, the research requires a similar approach to understand the information required to reflect on this approach. Within this section, the researcher will explain why a contextualist epistemological standpoint was adopted and discuss why an alternative position, such as a more positivist standpoint, was not.

Researchers aligning with a positivist epistemological position would assume that objective knowledge is possible, and that this knowledge can be proven through research (Sullivan, 2019). A researcher aligned with this position implies that the data produced from research is free from any internal and/or external influences, and the findings will result in objective knowledge. The use of methods to collect data, for example, observations or standardised tests, would achieve this objective knowledge (Willig, 2013).

In contrast, researchers adopting a constructionist or interpretivist position would argue the importance of understanding people through an experience that cannot be measured through objective means (Robson, 2016). Constructionism can align with numerous ontological positions, including critical realism (Robson, 2016).

Concerning this research, a positivist approach was rejected, this research aims to explore the constructs developed by SLs, regarding the use of relational approaches. A positivist approach would have been more applicable if I wanted to explore the 'one truth' about relational approaches, rather than participants' individual views about the use of such approaches.

Braun and Clarke (2021a) discuss contextualism as an epistemological position, a position which also aligns with the ontological stance of critical realism. Contextualism emphasises the importance of the *'context-contingent nature language and meaning'* (Braun

& Clarke, 2021a; p. 178), arguing that humans cannot be separated from the contexts in which they live.

This research aims to explore SLs' experiences working in a school that has adopted a relational approach. An important aspect of this research is understanding the context of the school in which this research took place, understanding that the data produced would be: *'local, provisional and situation dependent'* (Madill et al., 2000, p. 9), is an important epistemological assumption within this research. Researchers aligned with a contextualist epistemological position would argue that although multiple accounts of reality are possible, some accounts may be more valuable and persuasive than others (Madill et al., 2000). Regarding this current research, the value of SLs' views could be argued as being more influential in the implementation of relational approaches, due to their decision-making power, in comparison to other members of staff (Sparling, 2021; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018). Refer to Chapter 1 for a more in-depth explanation of how SLs' views could be interpreted as more valuable and persuasive than others.

Therefore, contextualism was adopted as the epistemological position for this research, as it emphasises the idea of *"human act in context"* (Tebes, 2005, p. 216), and values the importance of the context within research as well as the differing influences certain accounts may have.

The subsequent decisions made in this research align with the philosophical assumptions outlined here. Research design, and the role of these assumptions within the decision-making process, will now be outlined.

3.2.3 Research Design

As discussed in 3.2.1, this study adopted a qualitative standpoint, with a critical realist ontology and contextualist epistemology. Why a flexible research design was adopted will now be explored. Robson and McCarten (2016) argue that flexible designs are often used for qualitative, real-world studies, including case studies, grounded theory studies and ethnographic studies. They state *'flexible designs are a work in progress and therefore can adapt as the research evolves'* (p. 146). Whereas, a fixed design is often more used within quantitative research, with an underlying positivist standpoint. Robson and McCarten (2016) explain, to follow a fixed design route, you must be in a*: 'position to know what you are looking for'* (p. 146).

In this study, a flexible design will be adopted, as this type of design allows for more freedom during data gathering. The variable of interest within this research is not quantitively measurable, therefore it is not possible in advance to know what variables need to be controlled, resulting in the design of the study not needing to be fixed before data collection. As Robson (2016) argues, flexible designs have their limitations, within this research thorough preparation of the research proposal occurred, to help alleviate some of these limitations (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001).

3.2.3.1 Possible other research methods

The researcher considered other possible methods of research, that could be applicable when undergoing research in a single school.

A mixed methods approach was considered, it may have been possible to interview school leaders, then with the questions and themes generated from these interviews, using the information in a wider SL survey. This would help ensure all the SL views were represented. However, the researcher wanted to ensure an in-depth exploration of each individual SL was gained, so this method was not chosen.

An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was considered, as a methodology that has been previously used to reflect on organisational change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The researcher considered using this strength-based approach to explore the implementation of relational approaches, considering what the SLs appreciated about the relational approaches which had already been implemented. This approach was not chosen due to the time restrictions of the researcher, AI consists of four differing processes (discover, dream, design, and destiny), the aim being to build or rebuild and organisation around what works. This approach may have also worked best in a setting that was not already espousing to work in a relational way, whereas this research was focused on exploring the views of SLs working in a school already espousing to be working relationally.

A case study approach was chosen, as it allowed an in-depth exploration of a single school. Numerous case study designs were considered, see figure 3.1. As this research was taking place in one school, a '*single case study design'* was chosen. The researcher considered whether to employ a single embedded case study design, or a single holistic case study design. A single embedded design would consist of using a variety of data sources (Yin, 2009), for example, including semi structured interviews, focus groups, observation, documentation analysis. This type of design would enable mixture of qualitative research techniques to be incorporated into research design, allowing the data to be triangulated (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, for this research, the researcher wanted to focus

solely on an in-depth understanding of SL views, therefore a single holistic case study design was chosen, see 3.2.3.2 for a further explanation of the case study design chosen.

Figure 3.1. *A figure to show the different case study designs (Yin, 2001)*

3.2.3.2 Overview and rationale for single holistic case study design

In this study, the researcher framed the setting of Redwood High School as a singular case, the SLs being a single unit of analysis within this case. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) explain that social contexts, such as educational settings, are complex, exploring one school would therefore help the researcher analyse, in-depth, the *'lived reality'* (p.3) of the participants, within this setting. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that exploring a singular case helps the researcher analyse and understand a phenomenon related to a specific group of people, in this case, the SLs. The researcher's unique contribution was to explore, in-depth, the views of SLs within this case. The researcher is aware that choosing a single-case study with a single unit of analysis (holistic single-case design) over other methods has some limitations (Ishak and Bakar, 2016), as explored further in section 5.4.4.

3.2.4 Choosing a data collection method

The next stage in this research was to decide upon an appropriate data collection method, one which would complement the researcher's philosophical foundations. For this

research, a qualitative research method was required, that aligned with a critical realist ontological position and contextualist epistemological position.

The data collection method also had to be one that explored individual participant experiences, therefore methods such as focus groups were rejected. A focus group approach explores how participants' stories influenced each other's (Thomas, 2017), which was not the focus of this research.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen, as this allowed flexibility and follow-up questions to be asked if appropriate to the research question (Thomas, 2017). Regarding this current research, a semi-structured approach allowed the SLs to expand and add to their responses before any additional questions were asked.

3.3 Research Procedure

To fulfil my research aims, six SLs, from one secondary school, were recruited to take part in the study. Across this section, how participants were sampled and recruited will be outlined, as well as how their perspectives were gathered, regarding their experiences of implementing relational approaches within the setting.

3.3.1 Sampling

Smith et al. (2015) argue that to gain understanding into individuals' views and experiences, a purposefully selected sample should be utilised. To ensure the views are represented from a specific perspective, rather than aiming to represent the wider population (Smith et al., 2015). For this research, the aim is to understand the views and experiences of SLs, therefore a non-probability purposive sample was chosen.

3.3.1.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Refer to table 3.1 for the inclusion and exclusion criteria, including the rationale for each criterion, for the recruitment of participants within this current study. As explored in the literature review, in section 2.2.7, the key features of a relational approach that were explored, helped inform the school that was chosen within this research.

Table 3.1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for participant recruitment

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
Secondary school	Primary, nursery and post-16 settings	The research question focuses on a secondary school setting.
Mainstream provision setting	Specialist provision setting or pupil referral unit	The research question focuses on a mainstream school.
The 'relational approach' has been adopted as a vision from SLs and is a whole-school approach.	The 'relational approaches' are not a whole-school approach. For example, they are only used on an individual basis.	The primary focus of this study is regarding whole school approaches.
Settings have been working towards the implementation of a 'relational approach' for at least 3 years.	Settings that have not implemented relational behaviour policies or have done so for less than 3 years.	The EEF (2019) implementation guidance suggests implementation can take up to 2-4 years, as supported by previous researchers (Yueng, 2016; Nadeem et al., 2018). The researcher, therefore, chose three years to ensure the cyclical process of implementation had passed the initial stages (EEF. 2019).

3.3.1.2 Recruitment process

Refer to table 3.2 for the process that was taken to identify and recruit participants in the current study.

Table 3.2

A table to show the process undertaken to identify and recruit participants for this current study

The process undertaken to identify and recruit participants

Step 1

As this study focuses on a secondary school implementing relational approaches, the first step to this research involved understanding further which schools, within the LA, were espousing to be implementing relational approaches. Therefore, the wider EP team was asked, via email, which secondary schools met the inclusion and exclusion criteria (outlined in table 3.1).

Three secondary schools were identified, by the wider EP team, to meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria, outlined in table 3.1.

Step 2

Following this identification, an email was sent to the Headteacher and/or Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) of those three settings, in June 2022. The email included an introductory statement explaining the research, and a request to gain support with the recruitment of participants within their settings, if they wished to partake in the research.

Step 3

After email contact, one school responded positively about engaging in the research.

Focusing the research in one school allowing an in-depth understanding of contextual factors within that secondary school, and a richer understanding of the SLs working within that context.

Step 4

The information Sheet (appendix F) and consent form (appendix G) were shared via email with the SENCO who had identified potential participants, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (table 3.1).

Step 5

After the identification of potential participants, the SENCO forwarded these documents to the potential participants, and verbally and/or via email requested whether they would like to take part in the research.

Step 6

After confirmation of interest, the SENCO then shared the information sheet (appendix F) and consent form (appendix G) with the individual participants. They then together organised a time and date that best suited the participant.

The SENCO gave the researcher the contact emails of potential participants, to finalise and confirm the best dates and timings for the interviews to occur.

3.3.1.3 Sample size decisions

The idea of 'saturation' is often used as a measure to help decide when qualitative researchers have achieved enough participants (Guest et al., 2020). Saturation refers to the idea that data collection can end when no new theoretical insights are being made (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Braun and Clarke (2019) argue limitations of using the concept of 'saturation' and have more recently suggested using concepts of 'information power', refer to the glossary for further information. They suggest that referring to 'information power' allows: '*the researcher to reflect on the information richness of their dataset and how that meshes with the aims and requirements of study'*, (p. 28) rather than focusing on precise calculations to decide upon sample size.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that when focusing on the 'experiences' of participants, a suitable sample size would be small to moderate: *'large enough to convincingly demonstrate patterns across the data set; small enough to retain a focus of the experiences of individual participants'* (p. 45). Braun and Clarke (2019), whilst emphasising the importance of individual reflection, also cautiously advised a sample size of between six and 15, for doctoral students using interviews.

Therefore, for this current research, the researcher deemed that a sample size of six would fit within the recommendations stated in the literature.

3.3.1.4 Contextual information regarding Redwood High School

Redwood High School is part of a Learning Partnership, which includes a high school and several primary schools. The school is situated on the outskirts of two cities, participants described the school as a *'coastal school, or set of schools, in the middle of the country',* located within an *'ex-mining community'.*

Redwood High School has approximately 1400 pupils on role, which is a little less than the full capacity. Redwood High School have a resource provision. The school has a higher number of pupils Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) according to the national average (DfE, 2021).

Redwood High School utilise a 'House System', several houses within the school. Each house has a house leader, who are described as being part of the *'pastoral arm'* of the *'extended leadership team'*, and a house officer, who are non-teaching staff and support the house leaders. The Assistant Headteacher of Pastoral and Behaviour line managers the House Leaders, as well as the Pupil Premium Support Worker, Behaviour Support Worker and Safest Schools Police Officer. Redwood High School has vertical tutoring form groups, meaning CYP from years 7 to 11 are mixed within the form groups. These form groups then make up the 'Houses', one house, for example, would have approximately 10 form groups within it.

It should also be noted that at the time of these interviews, Redwood High School was in a *'transitional phase'* as described by participants. Due to there not being a current headteacher, the CEO provisionally stepping into the role. He had been covering the headteacher role for two months, at the time the interviews took place.

3.3.1.5 Participant characteristics

Six SLs, pseudonyms given below, agreed to take part in the research. Details of their roles are in Table 3.3.

Nicole, Dan, Susan, Graham, Jack, Sarah

Table 3.3

A table to show characteristics of participants

Pseudonym	Role	Leadership role description	Length of time working in Redwood High School
Nicole	House Leader/ Teacher	Extended leadership team	11 years
Dan	House Leader/Curriculum Lead	Extended leadership team	2 months
Susan	Redwood High School Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)/ Redwood Learning Partnership Director of Inclusion	Senior Leadership Team	16 years

Graham	Assistant Head Teacher of Pastoral and Behaviour	Senior Leadership Team	2 months
Jack	Chief Education Officer (CEO) of Redwood Learning Partnership /current headteacher for Redwood High School (for 2 months)	Senior Leadership Team/ Cluster Leadership	1 year and 2 months
Sarah	Targeted cluster lead/ Safeguarding lead	Cluster Leadership	15 years

The leadership model adopted at Redwood High School is a distributed leadership model (Gumus et al., 2018), all SLs having a collective responsibility around decision making and in promoting the settings ethos and culture. The researcher is aware that the SLs, as shown in table 3.3, have differing length of experience working in Redwood High School, and within the leadership role. The researcher was aware that this may have impacted on their experience and knowledge of relational approaches and their implementation, as reflected further in section 5.4.4.

3.3.2 Ethical Considerations

The research took place in the LA where the researcher/ Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) is currently working. Therefore, the ethical guidelines set out in the LA, as well as the guidelines set by the University of Nottingham, were adhered to. To ensure this research meets the professional standards required, the researcher ensured a range of ethical codes and guidelines were met (Health and Care Professions Council, 2016; British Psychological Society, 2018). The researcher also consulted with the Ethics Committee at the University of Nottingham and obtained ethical approval before beginning the recruitment and selection of suitable participants, see appendix H for the Ethics Approval letter.

Some of the key ethical considerations which informed decision-making concerning the design of this research are explored in table 3.4.

Table 3.4

A table to show the key ethical considerations and how they will be addressed.

Ethical Consideration	Steps that could be taken to address ethical consideration
Informed consent	The researcher gained consent from all participants. The researcher provided a detailed participation information sheet (appendix F), and consent form (appendix G) to all participants before their engagement in the semi-structured interview. The participants were given the opportunity to email/contact the researcher at any point during the study if needed.
Right to withdraw	The participants were alerted to the fact their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any point.
Confidentiality	All data was anonymised. All data will remain confidential during and after the study. Participants were assured that data was being collected for the purpose of the research only.
Debrief	All the participants were provided with a debrief letter and explained the research and given contact details of the researcher (see appendix I).
GDPR and security of data	The researcher assured participants that their data is stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

3.3.4 Data collection measure: semi- structured interviews

3.3.4.1 Interview procedure

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were carried out. All the interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams video conferencing software, this was the researcher's decision. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) argue virtual interviews as offering a useful alternative to in-person interviews, although the researcher did acknowledge that holding the interviews virtually may have impacted the participants' ability to contain emotions and show complete presence (Carter et al., 2021). Researchers have argued when acknowledging these limitations, and adaptions are made, these limitations could be alleviated (Carter et al., 2021).

All the interviews took around 45-60 minutes. The interview interactions began with introductions and with the interviewer ensuring the ethical guidelines were being met (see section 3.3.2), including ensuring consent and re-iterating the right to withdraw at any stage. The interview schedule, as explained further in 3.3.4.1, then guided the remainder of the interview. On completion, the interviewees were sent a written debrief via email (see appendix I).

The interviews took place in the following order, with the utilisation of these pseudonyms: *Nicole, Dan, Susan, Graham, Jack, Sarah.*

3.3.4.1 Interview schedule

The interview schedule was developed utilising previous research, with similar research aims to the current research. For example, Sparling et al. (2022), had used the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) implementation process diagram (EEF, 2019) to help guide their research. This process diagram was used to help develop the interview schedule, for the full schedule see appendix J, EEF's process diagram is also included here. It must be noted that the researcher only used this interview schedule as a guide, the questions were not abided too rigidly, to ensure the participants felt at ease and were able to express their views freely. In line with the topic of this study, the researcher also wanted to ensure the interviews followed a relational approach, having flexibility within this schedule allowed this.

3.3.4.2 Pilot Interview

The pilot interview was conducted to test the technological elements of using Microsoft Teams within the interviews. This included the use of recording elements, the sound and visual quality, and the transcription technology available. As well as this, this pilot interview allowed the interview schedule to be trialled to ensure the schedule applied to the research question and to re-word any questions to ensure clarity within the interview. For example, initially, the

researcher was going to ask, *'How would you describe the approaches used in your school?'*. This was changed to *'This study focuses on relational approaches, for example, other schools have used Attachment Aware approaches, trauma-informed, restorative. How would you describe/define the approaches you use to work with children in your school?'* To give clarity to the question being asked.

3.4 Rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research

Qualitative research should not be measured based on objective and measurable outcomes, as quantitative research is (Golafshani, 2003). However, to ensure that stakeholders and policymakers value the research, it is crucial to demonstrate that qualitative research is conducted deliberately and systematically (Nowell et al., 2017), instead of utilising other principles, more suitable to qualitative research (Yardley, 2008).

Yardley (2008) suggests four principles that qualitative researchers should utilise: commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, sensitivity to context, and impact and importance. Nowell et al. (2017) referred to four key criteria needing to be abided by to ensure methodological rigour, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher has reflected on each of these criteria and included an explanation as to how they're addressed in this study, in table 3.5.

This research also utilised Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to analyse the data, in section 3.6. Braun and Clarke's (2021a) 15-point checklist for good TA, will also be followed to ensure further rigour and trustworthiness.

Table 3.5

A table to show the steps taken by the researcher to ensure methodological rigour within this qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Yardley, 2008)

Key Criteria for rigour in Qualitative Research	Explanation of Criteria	Ways addressed in current research
Credibility	Credibility refers to the closeness between the account of the participant and the	Regular supervision with other researchers and university tutors, to clarify and solidify differing

	researchers understanding and interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017).	interpretations and to help develop the researcher's thinking. Engagement with the data over several months (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017), through transcribing, familiarisation, and coding (Nowell et al., 2017). Awareness and reflexivity of the researcher, see the 'Reflexive Log' which has been included in appendix P.
Transferability	Transferability refers to how the research can be generalised (Nowell et al., 2017) and the extent to which the research provides useful outcomes, regarding real life implications (Yardley, 2008).	Awareness of gaps in the literature, as explored in chapter 2. In-depth descriptions of the demographics and context of the data within Redwood High School, help readers understand which contexts the data collated can be transferred to, to allow the readers to ascertain their own transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).
Dependability	Clear thread of decision-making, and explanations regarding why decisions were made (Reissman, 2008; Nowell et al., 2017).	Reflexivity has been a primary focus within this research, to help the reader understand more fully the researcher's personal characteristics, background and thought processes. These factors will have played a role in both the data collection and analysis. See section 1.4 for the researcher's positionality statement, and 3.5.1 for

		further explanations regarding reflexivity and the researcher's positioning. Excerpts of the researchers 'reflexivity log' can be found in appendix O.
Confirmability	Confirmability is concerned with the objectivity and neutrality of the researcher, as well as the consistency and repeatability of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).	The researcher ensured clarity over how conclusions and interpretations of data have occurred. This was achieved by including the reasoning behind decision-making and analytical choices made within the study (Nowell et al. 2017) and engaging in reflexivity (Shenton, 2004)

3.4.1 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, as Willig (2017) explains, data needs to be interpreted by the researcher. Willig argues that *"qualitative data never speaks for itself and needs to be given meaning by the researcher"* (Willig, 2017., p. 274). As discussed in section 3.4 qualitative researchers strive to ensure trustworthiness and rigour are maintained within the interpretation of data (Willig, 2017). Reflexivity is another way in which this complied with.

Reflexivity allows researchers to remain critical of their own positioning and how that may impact their interpretation of the research. Subramani (2019) argues that working reflexively allows the analysis of qualitative data to be more rigorous, as unconscious bias is less likely to be a factor. Within this research, pursuing reflectivity ensured the researcher was aware of their own positionality and core values, during both the data collection and analysis (Willig, 2017; Frost, 2011).

For example, the researcher aimed to avoid 'leading' questions within the interview, which may have aligned more with their core values, this ensured the participant had the space to express their views. The researcher being aware and reflective of their own biases, allowed them to be acknowledged, and explored within sections of this thesis, for example, within the 'personal and professional interest and motivation' in section 1.4, and 'reflexivity diary'

excerpts, which have been disseminated throughout this current research, providing transparency of the researchers own positioning.

3.5 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

3.5.1 Introduction to Section

Within this section, an explanation of Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021a) will be outlined. The rationale behind why RTA was used as an approach to analysing this data will be explored, and other qualitative approaches that could have been used will be briefly considered.

This chapter is then structured following the six phases of RTA's framework, see figure 3.3. This was to ensure transparency in each stage, giving a clear explanation as to how the themes were created (Braun and Clarke, 2021a; Nowell et al., 2017). The 15-point checklist created by Braun and Clarke was used to help guide researchers in ensuring 'good' research throughout the analysis. See figure 3.2 for this checklist.

Both the initial framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and the most recent guidance, which integrates the 'reflective' aspect of the framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), will be drawn on within this chapter. Braun and Clarke (2021a) also emphasised the importance of keeping research questions at the forefront of one's mind, during all six phases of TA, I have included the research question again here to help guide the reader:

What are the views and experiences of school leaders, implementing whole-school relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school?

3.5.2 Choosing the Method of Analysis

3.5.2.1 Rationale behind inductive, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

Thematic analysis is a qualitative methodology, which can be supported by a critical realist underpinning (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Braun and Clarke (2021a) define TA as *'a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patters across a qualitative data set'* (p. 4).

Attride-Stirling (2001) argue that TA is one of the most flexible qualitative approaches, aligning with the flexible design adopted within this research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) revised their framework from 'thematic analysis' adding the 'reflexive' element, as their understanding of the framework was developed further (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The 'reflective' element aligns well with this research, and with a critical realist underpinning, RTA acknowledges the researcher's role in data collection and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2021a) explain that reflexivity: *'involves the practice of critical reflection on your role as researcher, and your research practice and process…'*, (p. 5).

Braun and Clarke (2021a) discuss the difference between inductive and deductive TA. Deductive TA is underpinned by research (Boyatzis, 1998), and is 'analyst driven' (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Whereas inductive TA is 'data driven' and is not influenced by the current literature or existing themes. This means the results and themes generated may not be directly linked to the research question, as the participants differing views, and experiences will impact on the data produced. Within this research, inductive RTA was adopted.

3.5.2.2 Critical Evaluation of Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2021a;2019;2006) developed TA as a data analysis method to allow a flexible approach and manage the complexities of qualitative research. As discussed, Braun and Clarke revised TA, to help overcome common misconceptions that occurred regarding the approach, such as researchers not being explicit enough in justifying the choices they made and regarding the themes generated (Freeman & Sullivan, 2019; Thomas, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

Nowell et al. (2017) argue a common limitation of TA is the method not being described in enough detail, potentially reducing the rigour of the research. As the researcher is aware of this criticism, working closely with the six stages of RTA (figure 3.3) and ensuring choices are discussed as clearly as possible will help reduce the likelihood of such limitations.

Coolican (2017) also argues that TA only highlights what is obvious. However, Nowell et al. (2017) have a counterargument, suggesting that even when small insights are generated, these findings can act as a mechanism for further research/practice. Within this research, the researcher is hoping for small insights regarding the use and implementation of relational approaches in a mainstream secondary school, to act as a mechanism for future

work. Byrne (2022) argues RTA is a well-established analysis method, which can be utilised for real-world research.

Other approaches considered will now be outlined. However, this will be in a brief manner, as Braun and Clarke (2021a) argue that multiple research methods could be used for the same research, suggesting it is rare to have an 'ideal' research method.

3.5.2.3 Other approaches considered

Other approaches to analysis were considered, including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and grounded theory. IPA does not align with a critical realist standpoint, it aligns best with a more constructivist or interpretivist standpoint, assuming that all individuals construct their own reality (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). IPA tends to focus on the detail of each case, rather than developing themes across cases from codes. In this research, the codes which come up from the varying SLs are the focus, rather than focusing on the unique features of individual accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), therefore using RTA as an approach of analysis aligned more appropriately with the aims of this research. This research also aimed to have 'actionable outcomes' with clear implications for practice, reflecting on the use and implementation of relational approaches in this school, having meaning-based themes is argued as essential for these actionable outcomes to be developed (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012).

IPA's primary focus is on the individual, rather than considering the impact of the wider social context (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). It has been argued that IPA neglects the social world as the *'constituent ground of personhood'* (Larkin et al., 2011, p. 324, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2021), the wider socio-cultural context is regarded as important in this research, suggesting reflexive TA may be more fitting.

Grounded Theory (GT) aims to develop theory from the data set and analysis, this does not align with this current research. The purpose of GT research is to: '*allow new contextualised theories to emerge directly from data' (*Willig, 2013 p. 231), which could be argued to play insignificant attention to the role of the researcher (Willig, 2013). This current research takes a critical realist standpoint, with the researcher viewing reflexivity as an important aspect of the research, understanding the views and experiences of SLs would be different if interpreted by another researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The original purpose of GT was to use an inductive approach, and for the researcher to act as a 'witness' (Willig, 2013), rather than playing an integral role in the research. Therefore, the researcher's

philosophical underpinnings aligned more so with an RTA approach, which has reflexivity as a key value, rather than viewing the researcher as only a 'witness', as GT does.

3.5.3 Phases of Thematic Analysis

As discussed, to ensure rigour within this analysis, the 15-point checklist criteria were used throughout this analysis, see figure 3.3 Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases of analysis that a researcher can undertake as an approach to analysing qualitative data. These stages were followed to ensure a high standard of analysis, see figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

A 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21)

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as *active* in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

Figure 3.3

Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing 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.

Phase one: Familiarisation of the data

This stage of RTA involved the researcher familiarising themselves with the data. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, video calling had become a common practice in the education sector in recent times (Wiederhold, 2020). Resulting in both the researcher and school staff, becoming more apt at using video calling. Microsoft Teams was used as the recording device for this research. This was beneficial in the familiarisation phase of the RTA, as the researcher was able to become immersed in both the visual and audio data from the semi-structured interviews.

The researcher used the Microsoft Teams transcription tool as a guide, listening and watching the recording closely whilst examining the transcription; once while listening to the recordings, and then just with the transcriptions themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The researcher acknowledged the importance of ensuring the data set was transcribed to an adequate level of detail, as Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasised in 'number one' of their '*criteria for good TA'*, figure 3.2.

During this repeated reading of the transcripts, the researcher recorded comments within the Word Document, noting down any initial ideas/ specific quotes that were particularly relevant to the research question. For the reflexive diary excerpt, from the researcher, when completing stage one of the RTA process, see appendix P.

Phase two: Generating initial codes

After becoming familiarised with the data set, and writing down initial thoughts, the researcher then began coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). This coding stage allowed the researcher to begin to organise and add meaning to the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), as well as having an active role in this understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The codes developed were influenced by the philosophical stance the researcher took (see section 3.2.2

for further information), the research question, and previous literature explored by the researcher (Chapter 2). Although this study is inductive, the researcher was aware of their subjectivity, and how that may have impacted the codes being developed, as explored further in section 5.4.2. Braun and Clarke (2021a) suggest numerous ways to code the data, after reviewing these options, the researcher decided to code by:

*"Using the comment box in Microsoft Word to select a section of text and tag it with a code label" (*Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 65)

Excerpts of the interview transcripts, at this initial coding stage, are displayed in section 8.10, appendix K. The researcher ensured to provide equal attention to each of the data sets and ensure codes were generated with equal thoroughness (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Freeman & Sullivan, 2019). During this process, the researcher also noted down any significant areas within the data set that may contribute to theme development. Braun and Clarke (2006) also highlight the importance of ensuring the less dominant codes are also kept within the coding process, even if they appear contradictory to the dominant story line, which the researcher also ensured to abide by.

Phase three: Generating initial themes from codes (previously searching for themes)

Braun and Clarke (2019; 2021a) argue that themes are created by the researcher, rather than emerging from the dataset. Therefore, Braun and Clarke changed the name of this phase to '*generating initial themes*' (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; p 78). This stage was developed to allow the researcher to gain a wider understanding of the meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The researcher collated similar codes and merged any duplicates, from all six transcripts. The researcher developed a table, with codes generated in one column, and raw data from the interviews in the other, to ensure a closeness between the raw data and the researcher's interpretations of codes, see appendix L for this table.

The researcher then wrote these codes onto coloured cards (See appendix M) and physically clustered them into groups that shared similar concepts. The codes were reviewed with reference to the research question (Freeman & Sullivan, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The codes now represented the whole data set, from all six interviews.

Phase four: Reviewing and developing themes (previously reviewing themes)

The themes developed were reviewed against both the raw data and the coded data. (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Terry & Hayfield, 2020), the researcher ensured to stay close to the raw data during this time.

A thematic map was generated to help with this theme generation, the themes being continuously reviewed, see appendix N for the thematic maps. Themes and codes were re-read and reworded as necessary, to ensure they were relevant to the research question and that the codes aligned with the provisional themes. At this stage, any data was discarded that did not fit within the themes generated. Codes and themes were re-defined and adapted, ensuring the data included was relevant to the researcher's research question. See appendix O for the finalised themes and codes.

Phase five: Refining, defining, and naming themes (previously defining and naming themes)

In this phase, the researcher wrote an abstract for each theme, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021a), the purpose being to help the researcher develop their understanding of the concepts and expressions each theme help. This also helped ensure clarity regarding the analytic purpose of each theme, rather than the theme solely being a topic summary (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The purpose of this stage is to revisit and redraft the names of both the sub-ordinate and cluster themes resulting in finalising the theme names. Thematic maps helped to review the theme names before the analysis was complete, see appendix N for the thematic maps.

Phase six: Producing the report

Finally, the production of a report allowed the readers to understand key findings. The researcher ensured data extracts were included to provide clarity and support accounts of the themes generated. Chapter 4 will now explore the *Findings* of this RTA.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction to chapter

In this chapter the themes developed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) are outlined, to explore the research question '*what are the views and experiences of school leaders (SLs), implementing whole school relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school?*' Within this chapter an overview of participants is given, the outcomes of the analysis are then presented including themes and subthemes, supported by the narrative descriptions of the themes. The themes are illustrated using the data extracts drawn from the participant interviews.

4.2 Overview of participants

Six participants took part, all working as SLs within a mainstream secondary school, which is part of a Learning Partnership and Multi Academy Trust (MAT), for further information regarding the school and wider community see section 3.3.1. Participant information can be viewed in table 3.3, in chapter 3. Rich and meaningful data was provided by all participants, the data was analysed and interpreted using RTA, as outlined in section 3.6.2.

4.3 Thematic Map

The themes and sub-themes are presented in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

A figure to represent the thematic map of the themes and subthemes

4.4 Themes generated

4.4.1 Theme 1: Environmental conditions enabling relational approaches

The first theme interpreted through data analysis was *'environmental conditions enabling relational approaches'*. All participants taking part in the research discussed environmental conditions within Redwood High School that helped enable relational approaches. This research taking part in one school allowed for these rich, in-depth, contextual factors to be explored fully. This theme encompasses two subthemes that together help tell a story about the participants' experiences regarding these underlying conditions:

- **1.1 'It's in the DNA'**
- **1.2 Systems, structures, and policies**

Subtheme 1.1: "It's in the DNA"

This subtheme focused on the underlying culture and ethos at Redwood High School. Overall, this subtheme suggests that participant views generally aligned when it came to describing this underlying relational 'feel' of the school. All participants discussed the relational culture and *'feel'* of the school and described this as being a solid foundation for enabling relational approaches to thrive. Nicole explained: *"there is that feel which is difficult to put into words and evidence"*. It could be interpreted that Graham, a participant newer to Redwood High School, suggested even from the first moment entering the school, it was different from other schools he had worked in, he explained: *"I could smell it when I walked in when I got the job…".*

Participants explained the 'feel' of the school was something that had '*always been there'* (Susie). This contributes to the idea that this 'feel' is an underlying enabling factor for the implementation of relational approaches within the school. Jack explained*: 'we've got a good basis, we have this in the DNA'.* Susie added to this describing Redwood High School as having: '*an inclusive ethos, inclusive nature'.*

Participants described this 'feel' as unmoving and always there. Sarah reflected on this, explaining values staying the same but new approaches coming and going: *"The values are always the same, but the, you know, that the…approaches sometimes change, especially around behaviour" (Sarah)*. Participants implied that due to this underlying relational 'feel' of the school, any introduction of new approaches (through, for example, training, mentoring or coaching) are easier to embed in the school because of the underlying relational values the school has. Susan explained, regarding recent trauma-informed training she had completed and then disseminated to the staff team:

Susan: "But I think the majority of staff here, because it is such an inclusive school, are on board with those kinds of practices and ideas really. So I don't think it's maybe as hard as it would have been for some of my friends who I know did the course and work in much more erm what's the word? The bigger academies"

Interviewer: "behaviourist, Zero tolerance policies?"

Susan: "Yeah. They've had a lot more of a challenge with that than maybe I have had" (Susan)

This subtheme explored the underlying 'feel' of Redwood High School. The views and experiences of the participants suggested that Redwood High School has an underlying, unchanging ethos and culture that has '*always been there'*. It was interpreted that this underlying ethos and culture enables the more fluctuating approaches to be introduced and trialled. As well as the first sub-theme 'it's in the DNA', it was interpreted that the participants agreed that it was also the second sub-theme of systems, structures and policies that worked as enablers when implementing relational approaches.

Subtheme 1.2: Systems, Structures and Policies

It seemed that participants all perceived the systems and structures of Redwood High School as enabling the implementation of relational approaches. Redwood High School being part of a Learning Partnership, a MAT seemingly enabled relationships formed in school to remain invaluable throughout the child's education. It was interpreted that the school prides itself on having children throughout life, into adulthood. Participants seem to suggest that this, alongside the utilisation of a 'House System' and vertical tutoring, allows relational approaches to 'thrive'. For further contextual information regarding the systems and structures at Redwood High School see section 3.3.2.

Working within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), Learning Partnership

Redwood High School is part of a Learning Partnership, a partnership which encompasses several primary schools. Participants reflected on how having close links and relationships with staff in the primary schools can help enable a relational way of working, as an excerpt from Nicole's interview portrays: *"that's the great thing about our partnership 95% of our children come from schools within our partnership, so pastorally we know everything that comes through. We have good relationships with the pastoral team in the primary school'.* Participants expressed the value of having close links with the primary schools and discussed the positive impact this can have on working relationally. The SLs discussed the value of

school staff and leadership utilising relationships formed at primary school and build on those relationships when joining Redwood High School.

"…OK, so this child really struggling in year 7. Why don't I talk to the primary school that they came from? This relationship started in primary school that had been they've been there seven years, you know. Rather than just thinking, but I'm going to deal with it in Redwood" (Sarah)

Here, Sarah discussed the importance of utilising those relationships in the primary schools, to help children transition into Redwood High School. These connections embody a relational way of working, as it encourages collaborative working between the primary and secondary school staff, as well as thinking about the children and young people's wider support systems and not solely focusing on dyadic teacher-child relationships (Billington, 2022). As explored further in the following theme **'***school staff enabling relational approaches'*** (***theme 2) personal interest, and pro-activeness of SLs, to ensure utilisation of these systems is also important.

The 'House System' and 'Vertical Tutoring'/ other systems and structures within the school

As described in section 3.3.2, Redwood High School utilises a 'house system' there are houses, all of which are led by a 'house leader' and supported by a 'house officer'. The school also has vertical tutoring form groups, meaning each tutor group has children from years 7-11. Participants explain how these systems and structures help enable a relational way of working, as relationships are central to this structure:

'that's a really, really great benefit of the House System and vertical tutoring, cos I guess with other systems they leave year 7 and they leave that member of staff behind. But but yeah we we follow through right from the beginning to the end' (Nicole).

Participants explained knowing you are going to be working with children for this length of time can be a motivator to staff to spend time forming those relationships, as they will be working with those children throughout their time in high school, participants explained working in this way allows the school to provide a: "*cradle to career education for kids" (Jack).* Jack explained: *"we will have relationships with families that will last potentially 20-30years, you know, and that's I think, quite special".* Nicole also builds on this, explaining working with children this extended period, motivates school staff to form and maintain those relationships:

"They're ours for five years, hopefully seven years. If we stay with us in the sixth form. That's it…They're ours. And if we don't have a relationship with them, what is this

experience going to be like for all of us? Like, what are we gonna be? What is it gonna be like for thought? For four years? For seven years?" (Nicole)

Here Nicole shows the inclusivity of the school, seeing the children as their responsibility *'they're ours',* placing value and importance on relationships for both the children and the adults. No longer having the child in the school (through routes such as exclusion) not being an option. It was interpreted that these structures seemed to support working relationally, as they encourage the formation and maintenance of positive pupil-teacher relationships.

Jack also explained the value of the structure and systems of the school, suggesting they not only enable but they create an environment to help relational approaches 'thrive'. Jack acknowledged that this type of structure ensures pupils are well-known within the school, because of the length of time they are supported by the same member of staff: *'…the vertical tutoring and all that stuff is I think creates a really good environment for this type of approach to to thrive".*

Jack also expressed concern regarding the house system and vertical tutoring, sharing apprehension about too much emphasis and value being placed on one relationship between the house leader/ officer and children. Jack explained: *"I think what we're wrestling with at the moment is well, what happens when the key person…isn't there or… it creates this silos or single points of failure which we're trying to work through".* Here Jack expressed an awareness of the importance of pupils being supported by all staff and the system, enabling multiple staff members to form relationships, and building processes to support this, rather than children being reliant on one pupil-teacher relationship.

Participants were also interpreted to value the importance of the school community, and the community supporting each other. For example, having structures in place that also support pupil-pupil relationships:

"I think this is a real strength of the school. The community feel of we're all in this together, so I've done just this morning I've been to do some tutor group drop-ins and seeing year sevens with year 10s discussing and I what should be on the lunch menu and then you see the year 11 support in the little ones and that community feel has come from a house system, has come from vertical tutoring and helps everything."(Nicole)

Here Nicole refers to the systems and structures within the school helping the *'community feel'* of the school. These structures place value and importance on relationships between all.

Ensuring that the relational way of working is embedded within the behaviour policy has seemed to be a vital enabler for the implementation of the approach. Participants suggested the behaviour policy helps ensure a relational way of working when thinking about behaviour. Nicole explained: *"yeh our behaviour policy has relationships at the heart of everything so we… don't have detentions; we have restorative conversations" (Nicole).* Nicole expands this point by discussing the procedure typically followed:

"They come to see me and they say blah blah has just kicked off in my lesson really badly. They've walked out. And I then follow the policy and say right, OK, So what we need to do next is either later on today or tomorrow morning, the three of us are gonna sit down. We're gunna to talk about it and then I might say, can I just remind you that this week is the anniversary of blah blah's dad's death?" (Nicole)

The view of the participants suggested that having these restorative conversations within the behaviour policy ensures they are being followed through, it holds professionals (internal and external staff) accountable and responsible for their specific role within the structures and systems. Susan explained the value of these policies: *"is a structured way in which we do that and there is processes and policy which backs that up, but…it's very centred around relationships and forming those relationships".* Participants also discussed other systems and structures in place which help a relational approach to thrive. For example, the Guidance and Support Team (GST) meetings. These meetings allow for a pro-active, collaborative way of working amongst the staff team. Susan explained her role within these meetings:

"I head up guidance and support team at school and where staff bring any students that they're really concerned about to a meeting one to fortnight and we would talk through what we can do next to support that child." (Susie)

Overall, this subtheme suggests the importance of having systems, structures, and policies in place to support, enable and help these relational approaches 'thrive'. Most participants agreed that being within a Learning Partnership helped enable this type of approach, utilising the child's wider support system and relationships they have already formed in primary school. Participants explained the 'House System' and 'Vertical Tutoring' encouraged collaborative working, both between staff and children as well as the children across year groups, creating a community feel. Having policies in place which help support these restorative conversations to occur was also invaluable in ensuring a relational way of working is well established.

The overall narrative of the theme '*environmental conditions enabling relational approaches'* suggests participants view Redwood High School as having an unmoving culture and ethos which facilitates a relational way of working. Most participants also perceive these contextual factors to enable working relationally, by, for example, ensuring the utilisation of the wider support systems around the CYP and their families (i.e., the relationships formed in primary school).

It appears, through the interpretation of this data, that SLs play an important part in creating a relational culture/ ethos of the school as well as being decision-makers regarding the systems, structures, and policies within school (Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018). How the SLs view themselves as being enablers of the approach, as well as unpicking the role of the staff team in general, will now be explored in the theme *'School staff enabling the approach'.*

4.4.2 Theme 2: School staff enabling relational approaches

A theme that was evident across the data set was the role of professionals, both within the leadership team and the wider staff body, in enabling the implementation of relational approaches. The participants discussed their role, as SLs, regarding enabling the conditions necessary for a school to work relationally, being involved in the recruitment process, disseminating knowledge through mentoring and training, and evoking empathy within the staff team. The participants also referred to the role the whole staff team play in enabling a relational approach within the school. Therefore, the analysis of this theme is divided into two subthemes:

- **2.1 "It's really important to have the right staff at the top"**
- **2.2 Varying willingness and ability of the staff team**

Subtheme 2.1: "It's really important to have the right staff at the top"

Participants all expressed the importance of having the *"right staff at the top*" (Susan), when implementing relational approaches. They discussed previous SLs and headteachers having a major influence in instilling and embedding relational values in the culture and ethos of the school. Sarah illustrated this well: *"You know, it's about well, it's the senior leaders, first*

of all that need to have that culture." Graham also described the previous headteacher being a catalyst for these relational values being part of the culture:

"the the head that was here before Maureen, who left in September I just think that was her mindset…that was her way and that's what she wanted to instil in the school and so that's the grounding for it, really" (Graham)

Participants also referenced the importance of having a group of SLs who properly embody this way of working and have a shared understanding regarding the ethos and culture the school is hoping to commit to: *"I think that's why it's really important that you have the right staff at the top who truly believe that [relational approach] is the way to go." (Susan); "Like we get the right people to commit to that way of working" (Jack).* Here, it was interpreted that the participants discuss leadership and the ethos and culture of the school as interlinked entities, assuming it is the role of SLs to instil that ethos and culture.

Within the interviews, it seemed the participants deemed certain qualities useful for SLs to possess, when implementing relational approaches. These included having a shared value of inclusivity and the desire to work relationally, as well as having a personal interest in relational approaches. Within the interviews, it was clear most of the participants had shared relational values and were able to express these: *"I know that relationships are at the heart of everything" (Nicole)*; *"Respect, resilience and integrity, all of those sort of things…the values are always the same" (Sarah)*.

As well as having the same fundamental values, the researcher interpreted that all participants showed a personal interest in being relational and had the motivation to learn more. They discussed learning about a variety of differing relational approaches, for example, this was portrayed in an excerpt from Dan's interview: *"I took it off my own back to to come in for a few days before that induction day because by the very nature of the role of of being a head of house, it's about building relationships…" (Dan).* Sarah also portrayed personal motivation to learn more about relational approaches:

"Its [The REACH Foundation] great…online you do, there's literally tons and tons of videos about the theory around relationships. There's, there's tons of it around attendance, how to improve, but all all about improving the life of the child and their journey" (Sarah)

Here, the participants showed a willingness to use their time and energy to learn more about the relational approaches. As well as having a leadership team that has a personal interest in working relationally, SLs also having the skills and motivation to disseminate knowledge appeared to be importance to these participants. This includes, for example, SLs re-enforcing approaches already being used (i.e., restorative conversations), introducing

newer approaches (i.e., trauma informed/attachment aware), and using coaching/modelling to guide staff.

"Yeah, we, we we have we have a strong a strong approach in regard to restorative practice we we kind of we use that regularly across the school site we kind of disseminate the focus of restorative practice to to form tutors and to to subject teachers." (Dan)

"And then did a Twilight training session with the entire school on on attachment and the two-hour session on attachment and you know the number of staff that came afterwards and said, gosh, I'm really gonna think about that a little bit differently now, you know."
(Susan).

Here, the participants explained ensuring staff have continuing professional development (CPD) as an important aspect of enabling relational approaches within the school, Susan referred to the training she completed resulting in staff reflecting on their practice "*I'm really gonna think about that a little differently now",* it came across in all the interviews that changing staff thinking, and ensuring all staff were 'on board' with a relational way of working, was one of the main role of SLs in facilitating relational approaches. These excerpts also show how the participants view the implementation of relational approaches as a journey, they all showed an ability to be open-minded and flexible, wanting to try differing approaches. For example, ensuring staff understood 'the why' behind using these approaches:

"Understanding why, why relationships should be at the heart of it. And why restorative is so important so we had training from our SENCO and the deputy head of behaviour at the time in stand in front of it and being quite honest with staff and saying you have to remember that what some of these children are going through and you have to remember that school is the only safe place they have." (Sarah)

Evoking empathy and trying to help staff understand the value of relationships and restoring relationships when needed. The participants were all aware of the importance of the staff team having background information about the children they are working with and understanding why children might be expressing themselves in certain ways.

"Yeah, it's that's it's empathy. Empathy without excusing. That's what we're trying to model all the time. I'm not gonna excuse what they're doing because it's not helpful to you. But if we approach this with a bit more empathy, do you think that this might be more successful, so constantly modelling that from from us down then everybody and making sure everybody's aware" (Nicole)

Here, Dan also refers to the importance of communication, saying he 'sent emails' to the staff team, ensuring they have the background knowledge and information about the pupils, it was interpreted Dan saw communication as a priority: *"the main thing above all else is that all of us have communications clear".* Nicole also described communicating, and disseminating information regarding children as important:

"So I will at the start in September with will sit with tutors individually, one-on-one and say you know you are here, there is a child coming up who is looked after or is or has has suffered something in there that you you need to know" (Nicole)

As well as ensuring the current staff have the training and knowledge needed to implement a relational way of working, the participants also discussed their role in hiring staff members that can work relationally, as Dan illustrated in the following excerpt:

"I kind of see it as a as an overarching kind of thread within our recruitment policy that we would we would look to hire staff at this school who had that [working relationally] *as a a as a skill within their repertoire"* (Dan)

The participants described the 'right' staff as being those that; have the *'skill [working relationally] within their repertoire'* (Dan) or members of staff that *'champion the voices of children'* (Jack). Having the '*voices of children'* at the centre of decision-making embodies a relational way of working (Billington, 2022), this will be explored further in the theme '*It's their school as much as ours'.*

Finally, the participants also reflected on their decision-making power and the value of having the skills to reflect and change the systems and structures in the school to help support staff with a relational way of working. As Jack explains, SLs are often the professionals who make decisions around the systems and structures used, as well as providing the resources and funding needed:

"So I think my role is to put the system structured in or help support head teachers to put system structure in place to get the right people in place and to to to bring resources in where there might be helpful" (Jack)

Jack queried whether the systems and structures currently in school were enabling staff to use a relational approach and have those restorative conversations. Within his interview he reflected on what was working well and what still needed improvement. It was clear participants, especially the CEO, took responsibility to putting the systems and structures in place to enable working relationally. He discussed the next steps with the relational approaches being to ensure the systems and structures are in place to support the staff team with relationship development and having those restorative conversations, for example, Jack

explained: *"where the systems themselves are set up to engender this kind of way of working through, I don't know… let's say we moved our form to small coaching groups."* Jack suggested creating a specific space and time for relationship development to occur:

"create a space for staff to have these kind of conversations out, you know, create a structure, a meeting time for them to do it or save them time to to do the work or or like said smaller coaching groups, smaller forms." (Jack)

As discussed in the '*systems, structures and policies'* subtheme, some participants referred to the current 'house system' approach resulting in pupils only having a strong relationship with one member of staff, for example the house leaders, meaning they do not feel supported when that key worker is not present. Jack discussed this, explaining this was something he was hoping to work on in the future: *"I think we want to enable and engender more staff to have stronger relationships and more children." (Jack).* Jack shows an understanding here of the role of leadership in ensuring the systems and structures are in place to enable working relationally. This quote highlights how structures can be changed and adapted, even more so, to 'gear' the staff and students towards a relational way of working, giving the example of small coaching groups with a clear agenda and underlying relational ideals.

Overall, this subtheme suggests that participants, as part of the leadership team, value the importance of their own CPD, as well as then disseminate this knowledge to the rest of the staff team, as well as establishing a relational ethos and culture. They also see it as their role to evoke empathy within the staff team, through mentoring, training and open communication. As well as ensuring the current staff team can work relationally, the leadership team also reflected on their role in recruitment and recruiting the 'right' staff, that have the same ideals as the current staff team. The participants also indicated an understanding that it is their role to ensure the systems and structures are in place to support a relational way of working and it is a continuous trial-and-error process to do so.

This subtheme shows how important it is to *'have the right staff at the top',* as they hold the power to engender and sustain relational approaches. Now the role of the staff team themselves will be discussed, and participants reflect on the importance of the willingness and ability of the staff team.

Subtheme 2: Varying willingness and ability of the staff team

This subtheme focused on the experiences of the SLs working with the rest of the staff body. Reflecting on the willingness of the staff team, which is often dependent on what role they perceive themselves as having within the school. Participants also discussed the differing abilities of staff and this leading to potential inconsistencies of the approach amongst the staff team. A key factor that was important in enabling a relational approach was collaboration amongst the staff team. Nicole explained:

"it's about building relationships and showing that we're working together and and proceeds of this kind of common goal of of, of students achieving well and doing well in lessons. And, you know, having having, having basically fulfilling their potential in school"
(Nicole)

Many participants explained that most of the staff team are 'really skilled' in these ways of working, because the school has been inclusive, and worked relationally, for a 'long time', as explained by Jack within this excerpt: *"we got very committed staff experience, staff like I said, who are work in inclusive ways and are really skilled" (Jack).* Jack explained the staff have an: *"inertia with the kids that we're all moving in the same direction, and we've got those relationships".* From the interviews the researcher interpreted participants to have belief in the staff body's skill set, and ability to work relationally and form positive relationships.

Staff being held accountable for their relationships with children was presented, by participants, as another enabling factor. When using this approach teachers and staff members working with children, regardless of whether they are part of the pastoral team, are held responsible for repairing any break down of pupil -teacher relationship.

"So if there are issues within lessons then the first port of call is for the subject teacher to have that restorative conversation with the student before before you know, kind of reintegrating them back into the lesson" (Dan)

"we have to say no, actually you need to be a bit more accountable for your relationship with that student and the pastoral team isn't always gonna come running sometimes, you know" (Nicole)

Overall, this subtheme considered the role of school staff working in Redwood High School regarding the implementation of relational approaches. Participants discussed the importance of being skilled, working collaboratively together towards a common goal and the value of staff being accountable for the relationships formed with pupils. This is also discussed in the theme '*reality of relational*' (theme 4) due to the lack of time which is needed to form these relationships when other demands are often placed on staff.

The overall narrative of the theme '*school staff enabling relational approaches'* suggests numerous important factors amongst both the leadership team and wider staff team, that enable a relational approach. It came across in the interviews that it was important to have the 'right staff at the top', what participants deemed as the 'right' leadership staff was explored, it seemed to be qualities including personal motivation, willingness to adapt/ and build on approaches, ability to change systems and structures and ability to give support (both knowledge and emotional support) to the staff team. The important characteristics enabling a relational approach, amongst the staff body, included ensuring the staff recruited had a naturally relational way of working, staff working collaboratively and feeling supported (by both the leadership team and the systems/structures in place).

4.4.3 Theme 3 – 'It's their school as much as ours'

This theme encompasses two subthemes that take the focus away from the professional and staff body and brings the focus onto children and young people, their families, and the community. It was interpreted that participants had the children and families at the forefront of their practice and decision-making. This was shown, within the analysis, with the portrayed mutual respect between pupils and staff, the importance of the child's voice, the drive to understand fully the children's needs and the importance of flexibility and adaptability of approaches to meet this range of needs. The participants also emphasised the role of the community within the school and the pupils' wider support systems.

The sub-themes from this theme are:

- **3.1. 'Through the child's lens'**
- **3.2 Family and community partnership**

3.1 Subtheme 1: 'Through the child's lens'

This subtheme focuses on seeing Redwood High School 'through the child's lens', this encompasses gaining pupil views and having this as a priority. It was interpreted that SLs thought about the pupils' basic needs, such as feeling safe and secure and determining how best to achieve these needs. SLs seemed to place value on understanding individual differences and that children will need different approaches and a focus on differing skill sets, depending on these individual differences and what skills need prioritising. It was clear that

the participants all valued the voice of the child and strove to have the child at the centre of decision-making:

"it's starting to think it through the child's lens is you you know, the the way that we're trying to cohere that that journey and and you know, I think that's the best way that we can serve the communities through getting the kids through this" (Jack)

Within the interviews, participants discussed how they think the children perceive Redwood High School and reflected on whether they gained pupil voice enough. *"I think the kids here would just say they have good relationships with staff and the staff support them and they like coming in here" (Graham).* Susie reflected pupil voice as: "*Maybe that is something we need to do a bit more of",* this could also be interpreted to show a willingness of SLs to be constantly learning and changing their practice, as described further in the theme: *'school staff enabling relational approaches" (theme 2).*

As well as valuing the importance of gaining pupil views, staff also explained how these views are used to help decisions made within the school, for example asking pupils to help during the recruitment process.

"Children take part in all of our recruitment processes. They there's always a student panel and I'm sure the schools do this, but we really do listen to our kids as well and they get a feel for staff don't then they usually their usually pretty accurate…and you're like yeah, I maybe would have put it like that." (Sarah)

Here, participants are seen to value pupil voice. Pupil's being part of the recruitment process indicates staff wanting to experience school '*through the child's lens'*, not just listening to pupils' opinions but also using those opinions to inform decision-making.

Within this analysis, another way participants showed a child-centred way of working, was ensuring pupils' basic needs are met, ensuring they feel safe and secure, as depicted in Maslow's (1943) 'Hierarchy of needs', outlined in section 2.2.5, as being fundamental in ensuring the inclusion of all children. Dan explained: *"you know we have a variety of different support mechanisms in school to to essentially allow students to to be here, to feel safe, to enjoy school".* Dan shows an understanding of how important it is for children to feel safe and secure within school. Another important factor participants considered, when ensuring pupil voice is at the centre of their practice, is understanding the differing needs of children and altering their way of working dependant on this. Dan and Sarah embody this idea well, taking into consideration that every child is different and will respond to different approaches in differing ways.

"House team step in and we then look to support that student in various different ways really and they have to be kind of various different ways because of the complexity of needs regarding those specific students, it could be erm you know whether we support student with one to one mentoring or support student by having some sort of a safe space for them at lunchtime or you know we have a variety of different support mechanisms in school to to essentially allow students to to be here, to feel safe, to enjoy school, and for any issues that do arise to be, to be dealt with quickly" (Dan)

"And then it gets lost in Redwood High School children, huge school and some of those vulnerable more vulnerable families need a lot more input to be able to stay on board with high school and support their child." (Sarah)

Here, the participants reflected on having to 'prioritise' working with children from specific backgrounds. This indicated an understanding of differing levels of need and differing reasonable adjustments that need to be made depending on these needs. Participants also highlighted differing skill sets will need to be developed at differing times, emphasising the importance of '*seeing through the child's lens*' and the individual pupils, meeting them where they are.

"…they need to be learning sight words, you know you…and you couldn't be more wrong in that, actually, the gap was they just couldn't self-regulate and therefore so we we fix that up first" (Jack)

Here, Jack explained the importance of focusing on the child's presenting needs and background. Susie also discussed the value of: "*kids have the curriculum they need.*" Within Jack's explanation, he highlighted needing to prioritise a child's social, emotional, and mental health needs, and ensure a child has self-regulation skills, before expecting the child to achieve academically. The participants also appeared aware of context specific factors, which may impact on '*the curriculum they need',* for example the repercussion of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants explained how this impacted pupils, and resulted in higher levels of emotions and anxiety, Nicole discussed this: *"I've been in this school for 12 years and I've never known height and emotions and anxiety in children like there is at the minute".*

Other participants also referred to more preventative ways of developing children's social communication skills, whether it is modelling within relationships or through specific interventions. Understanding how the pupils are perceiving their experience within the school has seemed to help the participants know which skill sets the child needs to develop.

"So if we know child's struggling with anxiety, anger management, social skills, whatever it might be that we refer them for some internal wave two interventions…they

would maybe do a 6 to 8 week program, one hour a week, or two hours a week depending on what it was that they needed for anger management, social skills, self-esteem, anything like that." (Susie)

Participants value developing children's emotional skill sets and hoped to also embed within structures and systems ways in which these skill sets could be built. Jack reflected on the use of form time in the morning, and how to utilise this time to help develop these skills and ensure children are forming 'great relationships' with staff members: *"Whatever coaching, personal development, you know… how do we make the best use of that 30 minutes a day? And to really either create great relationships that nourish children".* Within this analysis it was clear participants valued relationships and helping children build resilience and those life skills needed in the outside world, as Susie discussed: *"guide them through that to give them the skills to go out into the big wide world and be be successful really."*

Overall, this subtheme depicted how much the participants valued the child's voice and ensuring this information influences decision-making. Participants strove to 'see through the child's lens' by considering individuals' backgrounds and profiles and using this information to decide on the level of support needed. Participants also ensured the pupils were receiving a child-centred curriculum, meeting them where they were. The next theme will consider the value participants placed on mutual respect.

3.4 Sub-theme 3: Family and community partnership

A subtheme evident during analysis was the emphasis on how community-driven Redwood High School is, and how much emphasis is placed on the importance of maintaining positive relationships with families of the children attending Redwood High School. Participants explain that the community has always been at the centre of how the school has been run: *'that's the way these schools have always worked with the community, serving the community' (Jack).* Participants explained that there are many family links within the staff team*: "All the kids are from the local community. The parents have been here, come here, come to this school" (Dan).* Susie emphasised how the school strive to be a part of the community:

"We're very much about we are part of the community here…we want to be part of the Community. Several of our staff have kids that come to our school, or they live in the local area, I know lots of schools do that, but we really are part of the community and want to be involved" (Susie)

During this analysis, being part of the community also meant a big drive to ensure positive relationships between carers and parents of the children attending Redwood High School: *"It's really important for me that I have a good working relationship with every single child in the house and their parents and carers as well" (Nicole).* Susie also described this, stating when *the "family joins the school…so they'll get to know the child, they'll get to know the family, they'll get to know what's going on for that child in all areas of their life".* Here, Susie automatically stated *'when the family joins the school'* this embodies how family and community-led the SLs seemed to be.

Participants also reported the plans for the next steps, when working with families and the wider community. For example, Graham explained the plan to set up a 'Parent teacher association', to: *"work on projects or talk things through or communicate new policy procedures, processes and we sort of work on stuff together…. But that's only new"* Another plan created to help maintain and better links with parents included a 'transition festival', Sarah explained this would be set up relationally, ensuring small groups are set up and making it an informal event:

> *"We're gonna call it a transition festival so the families can get involved and try and not do it as formally because a lot of the times… we're just trying to see if we can do it a bit more informally where we have smaller tables for example. So you're not all sat in a line in an all-black, like a theatre style"* (Sarah)

This subtheme suggests how SLs perceive how community-driven Redwood High School is and how involved the wider community is within the school. This emphasis on positive school-family relationships and the SLs' drive to better these relationships embodies a relational way of working. The focus is not just on singular dyadic relationships between staff-pupils, but also on the wider systems around the children, which is what is at the core of a relational approach (Billington, 2022). As this theme is entitled 'it's their school as much as ours', participants espouse this and, it seems, embody this idea that the staff body is a vessel to allow these children and their community to 'thrive'. This sub-theme also showed how willing SLs were to introduce new activities and groups to ensure family links and this community-led way of working, showing their flexibility and willingness to adapt according to what the community needed.

Overall findings of this theme

The overall narrative of the theme '*it's their school as much as ours*', refers to the pupils within Redwood High School as well as their wider support systems. All the participants

emphasised the importance of seeing a pupil's school journey '*through the child's lens*'. Gaining pupil views, understanding individual differences, ensuring mutual respect, and helping build pupils' skill sets for the outside world were viewed, by the participants, as valuable areas to be focusing and developing on. As well as focusing on the child themselves, participants experienced the community feel and drive of the school and all hoped to build on this by maintaining positive relationships with parents and families. The participants experienced the value of having positive relationships with key adults, and those in the child's wider systems, to ensure a relational way of working is at the centre of their practice and values as SLs.

4.4.4 Theme 4 – The reality of relational approaches

A theme that was evident within the data coding was considering the 'reality' of implementing relational approaches in a mainstream secondary school. Within this theme, the use of relational approaches to manage behaviour was reflected on, in an increasingly time and resource-stretched educational setting. Relational approaches are dependent on relationship building which takes a certain skill set and is time-intensive (Hickey et al., Warren et al., 2019). Participants described the 'ease' of a behaviourist approach and the 'transitional' time the school is in; the new leadership having differing views of behaviour management. The view that relational approaches are not just about behaviour management is considered, and the positive, sometimes '*life-changing*' relationships these children have with staff members in Redwood High School are discussed.

- **4.1 Relational approaches and managing behaviour**

- **4.2 Getting the balance right**

- **4.3 It's not just about behaviour**

Subtheme 1: Relational approaches and managing behaviour

A subtheme evident during analysis was the contrasting view of the success of restorative conversations being used to manage behaviour. Some participants discussed examples of restorative conversations being a success and explained that relationships are a '*pre-cursor*' for behaviour management. Participants expressed that restorative conversation allows relationships to be repaired, which helps both staff and pupils to maintain positive relationships. However, there was also a lot of criticism around the use of relational approaches, such as the time and energy it takes for relationships to be built, in an already '*stretched*' environment. Participants discussed this can make it more challenging for newer

members of the team and for staff that teach children infrequently to use the approach successfully and consistently. There was some agreement to more of a balanced approach, using both restorative conversations and more behaviourist sanctions and rewards, as the next step.

Participants expressed positive views of using restorative conversations to manage behaviour, as Nicole emphasised in the following excerpt, the positive impact '*can't be dismissed*':

"You know that there's a student who's not getting it right, they're not engaged in the right way, I can't motivate them after a really honest, restorative conversation we turned a corner, and we didn't look back so the impact of them just can't be dismissed" (Nicole)

This excerpt demonstrates the value placed on restorative conversations when it comes to behaviour management. Nicole explained this way of working helps pupils '*turn [ed] a corner'* when they are not engaging or '*getting it right'.* Participants also reflected on these restorative conversations allowing pupils and staff '*find [ing] the root'* (Graham) of the issue, rather than just '*fighting against'* (Dan) them, as Dan interpreted a more behaviourist approach to look like. This indicates mutual respect and a want to form relationships with the pupils and help them find a way forward together, rather than the pupils just '*having a series of detentions' (Dan).* Many participants suggested that relationships are a pre-cursor to successful behaviour management. As Graham illustrated in the following excerpt:

"I mean, when there's ill-discipline, there's a breakdown in relationship, isn't there? If your kid goes and graffities on a wall, there's a break down in in respect there in relationship to the school, to everyone else, to to the staff." (Graham)

Participants suggested if children are not abiding by school rules or there is '*ill-discipline'* there is a breakdown in respect and the pupil-adult relationship. This puts the accountability on the teacher to ensure relationships are restored, rather than placing blame on the child and using more behaviourist approaches. During the analysis, it was clear the participants understood the rationale behind this relational way of working and saw the benefit of working collaboratively with the child, but this more positive view was not consistent over the staff team, as discussed later within this subtheme.

The participants outlined that when staff show the pupils respect, by listening to what they are saying and hearing events from their perspective, pupils are more likely to show respect *a*nd effective behaviour management is more likely. However, participants also expressed barriers and pitfalls to using relational approaches for behaviour management. Participants discussed the '*ideal world'* and how it differs from the context Redwood High

School is currently working within, explaining the current '*stretched*' context of schools leading to challenges in the use of relational approaches.

"It's just I think it's education in in general, is a very an increasingly stretched, time poor, resource poor, sector and that does impact on time that you would have to implement training support or coach, you know, mentoring I mean whatever it looks like" (Graham)

Here, Graham refers to education being '*an increasingly stretched, time poor, resource poor sector'.* Participants discussed relational approaches, and restorative conversations, being very time intensive, which results in a challenge when time and resources are already strained.

"it is time heavy, isn't it? I mean, what's easiest to do if you're a teacher? Is it easier just to put someone in the detention and it's done and dusted. You let someone pick them up? They do the detention. You have nothing to do with it. You wash your hands at the issue. Or is it more time consuming to put them in detention and then go and spend ten minutes speaking to the kid organizing support from, you know, the house team to meet you at this certain time to go through it, setting targets and moving forward. So it's time consuming. It requires a lot of skill to do it so, so the staff needs to be trained to do it"
(Graham)

This excerpt indicates participants are aware of the time it takes to have restorative conversations, and form and maintain relationships with pupils themselves, in comparison to the potential ease of putting '*someone in detention'.* Here Graham also emphasised the time it takes to build the staff team's skill set and self-efficacy when using such approaches.

Participants explained the differing skill set amongst the staff team. Sarah explained some staff are more suited and able to work relationally that others, she stated: "*I think it depends on the individual. Some people find that [restorative conversations] really difficult.* Sarah then went onto explain that working relationally can be a difficulty skill to teach:

"There's not procedure for a relationship, is there? You don't get a procedure with 10 points on it about building a relationship. You don't. And so some relationships are good, some are not. That's based on the individual and whether or not they can be, you know, self-reflective, you know, can they look at themselves and how they behave?" (Sarah). Graham adds to this point, emphasising the importance of self -efficacy with the approach*: "Staff needs to be confident in their ability to do it, otherwise it's not gonna be effective…, I suppose that anyone can put a kid in his detention".* These excerpts suggest the importance and value of training, to ensure all school staff have the skills required to use such approaches, and self-

efficacy to do so. However, amongst the participants, there was a consensus that not enough training was happening, as Dan illustrated in the following extract:

"We don't have coaching for it. We don't have training. It's something I do believe though that actually we could look to do more of because the consistency is is a keyword in most organizations, and when you're dealing with organization that's as big as ours. Having consistency is absolutely key." (Dan)

Participants noted staff motivation being a concern, and the potential pull of staff to use more of a behaviourist approach, as Graham stated, '*it's easier to put someone in detention'.* Participants discussed differing roles staff play within school having an impact on these levels of motivation. For example, if they were a subject teacher, they would not see the pastoral elements of teaching as within their remit, therefore might not put in the time and effort needed to become skilled using a relational approach, as Nicole explained: *" To them pastoral and behaviour isn't their issue they just want to teach their lessons so having to sit and hear someone's side of it isn't for them".* Participants expressed that some of the staff body may not see it as their 'role' to have these restorative conversations. Dan referred to staff being more motivated by their own subject and spending more time having restorative conversations could harm staff morale. Participants expressed that the current way of working is putting responsibility and accountability on the staff team, as discussed in: 'school staff enabling the approach' (theme 2). This way of working was discussed by participants as causing frustrations.

"I think the moment staff are frustrated at the fact that the relational approach on its own puts too much pressure on them and too much responsibility on them when they've also got a lot of other stuff to do. That's what I that's the feedback we just did this staff survey that was some of the feedback around behaviour not being as good as it could be" (Jack)

"There's frustrations regarding, you know, kind of low level disruptive behaviours and certain staff members in schools they're having having more than a certain amount of restorative conversations each day, there's a balance isn't there. They go home thinking about behaviour rather than thinking about that great lesson that they taught" (Dan)

Here, the participants referred to a lack of consistency within the approach due to the onus being on the staff members and them not having enough time to complete the restorative conversations, Jack predicting around half of the restorative conversations actually happen, due to lack of time. Jack also referred to restricted resources, it was interpreted Jack was inferring they were currently expecting too much from staff: *'because we've got, yes, 1500*

kids, a big school. We're trying to do everything. I don't know. It feels like we're that we're trying to do a lot with a small resource all of the time' (Jack).

Overall, this sub-theme suggests that participants viewed restorative conversations as having a positive impact, regarding managing behaviour, but also showed an awareness of the approach's potential pitfalls. SLs explained how 'stretched' all school staff are within Redwood High School, resulting in less time being put aside for training and ensuring staff have the skill set to effectively have these restorative conversations. Participants also reflected on the time-consuming nature of building relationships, both with the children and the wider systems.

The next subtheme explores SLs views regarding the movement towards a mixed approach of managing behaviour.

Sub-theme 2: Getting the balance right

Participants discussed their aim to get the balance right between the use of relational and behaviourist approaches. Participants deliberated the need for something else alongside using restorative conversations. Participants suggested a change of leadership, as explained in section 3.3.1.4, was resulting in a transitional period, and re-adopting of a more behaviourist way of working: *"That's his way. So he is, he does believe in restorative practice, but he thinks we're too far that way. There's not enough structure. There's not enough discipline"* (Graham). Participants expressed a desire for a mixture of a behaviourist and relational approach to manage behaviour: *"I think for me, yeah, it's a balance you need. You need both"* (Jack). Nicole expresses the underlying values still being present, but also things the relational approaches need something *'alongside it':*

> *"relationships will always have to be at the heart of it, but there has to be something else alongside it. There has to be really good quality teaching and learning, and it has to be really good behaviour. And I don't know if we're smashing those two enough yet. So in terms of where we go? It will. It will always be there but it's what's alongside it." (Nicole)*

It was interpreted, from these interviews, that participants may lack confidence in the use of relational approaches, as they are currently being utilised within Redwood High School. How participants viewed the use of relational approaches, when not solely viewing them as behaviour management strategies, will now be explored.

Subtheme 3: It's not just about behaviour

It was interpreted that participants viewed this approach as being challenging to measure, as portrayed in this excerpt from the interview with Dan: *"We do a lot of to measure the impact of this relational approach, it's it's hard, isn't it? It's hard evidence, you know, without, without recording, every conversation you have with a child.".* Dan also explained that academic progress children are making is only one singular measure, and a whole *'assessment of that student'* in a *'number of different areas'* was needed to fully understand the impact these relational approaches are having on the CYP.

Despite the difficulty in measuring the impact of the approach, all participants were able to discuss individual success stories, of children they have worked with at Redwood High School. When discussing success stories, participants tended to choose stories regarding looked after children (LAC), or children that had a difficult start to life, describing this relational way of working as being *'life-saving'* for them. Participants identified up the importance of key relationships, and honest restorative conversations:

"I also think that you know some, there's some real success stories, you know, tons of them, like we call them Mo Farrahs you know you know the the, the, there's life changing interactions in any school. But there are a lot here of kids who you know we have X looked after kids in the school which is high number…... and I think the staff take a real pride in, in, in working for those children." (Jack)

" I'm thinking about in year 11 looked after kid that the school did an incredible job and kind of saved his life, really, and he certainly around horrific background and the relationship with one house officer has been the the key thing there." (Jack)

Within these excerpts, the value of persistence was highlighted as invaluable. It was interpreted from the interviews that an important value amongst the SLs was ensuring all children were given a chance, no matter what their background was, as indicated in the above excerpts. As Jack stated, working in this relational way has been *'life-changing'* for some of these pupils.

Participants also reflected on the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved school closures for all school children, having a direct impact on education (Brown, 2021; Middleton & Kay, 2021; Jopling & Harness, 2021), as explored further in 2.2.2. As discussed within other themes, Redwood High School has an underlying relational ethos and culture, in which practice centres around positive relationships. The use of relational approaches appeared, from this analysis, to have a positive impact on pupils during the potentially traumatic period, during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"We have last year's year 11 that just left us, had had it really tough, they went into lockdown in year nine. They went into lock down in year 10. No one knew if they're gonna do exams and we got really great, we got really, really good results. We got really good results with disadvantaged students and there is no doubt that is because relationships were really strong during the lockdowns during that horrible uneasiness our kids felt valued, looked after, secure here, and that the the the outcome there and the impact there was they've got great results and 100% of them went off to somewhere, whether it's an apprenticeship and to a sixth form to a college, we didn't have anybody missing in education which you have, you have to that has to come from a relationship place and without asking the kids I guess we would never know, but it has to" (Nicole)

Nicole explains here, that, in comparison to other schools, Redwood High School got '*great results'* and all children and young people were successfully able to choose their post-16 path. Nicole shared she believed this was due to the strengths of the relationships formed in Redwood High School and the pupils feeling '*valued, looked after, secure'* within the school.

This subtheme highlights that using these approaches in school isn't just about managing behaviour, they are about creating a safe and secure place children can attend school, and work collaboratively with the staff team towards a successful future. Working relationally and creating an inclusive environment for these children, participants have expressed, has been *'life-changing'* for some pupils.

Overall findings of this theme

The overall narrative of the theme 'the reality of relational' was exploring the use of relational approaches, within Redwood High School, during the current context of schooling, considering the time and resource- stretched environments educational settings currently are. Firstly, the theme considered relational approaches as behaviour management tools and how successful 'restorative conversations' and using relational approaches are in managing behaviour. Participants discussed the importance of having positive relationships and regarded them as being a pre-cursor for behaviour management. Within the theme, *'Getting the balance right'*, participants deliberated the use of both relational and behaviourist approaches. Finally, within the subtheme '*it's not just about behaviour'* participants considered the use of relational approaches beyond managing behaviour, and discussed some of the positive, and 'life changing' relationships that have previously been formed at Redwood High School, when utilising relational approaches.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings, following the completion of semi-structured interviews and using Reflexive TA to analyse the data.

This analysis presented four themes relating to the research question: '*what are the views and experiences of SLs, implementing relational approaches, working within a mainstream secondary school?'* these included:

- Environmental conditions enabling relational approaches
- School staff enabling relational approaches
- 'It's their school as much as ours'
- The reality of relational approaches

The following chapter (Chapter 5, Discussion) will discuss these findings alongside literature and theory. The chapter will also reflect on implications for schools, educational psychologists, and future research, as well as discussing the limitations of the research

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to collate and discuss the findings, to answer the research question: '*what are the views and experiences of school leaders (SLs), implementing relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school?'* As indicated in Chapter 4 (Findings), four main themes were raised concerning this research question: 'environmental conditions enabling relational approaches', 'school staff enabling relational approaches', 'it's their school as much as ours' and 'the reality of relational'.

Building on the existing literature (as presented in chapter 2), this chapter will present the key findings of the current research, which overlapped across all four themes. The key factors regarding enablers and barriers to whole school implementation will be utilised to present the key findings of this study. The impact of working relationally, as interpreted from the interviews within this study, will also be discussed. The current study will then be critically evaluated, reflecting on ethical considerations, as well as methodological rigour. Key

implications will be discussed, for key stakeholders, including policymakers, educational settings, and educational psychologists (EPs). Finally, the distinct contribution of the current research, and potential suggestions for future research will be reflected upon.

5.2 Overview of the key findings

The findings of this study highlight both enabling factors and barriers to, the implementation of relational approaches in Redwood High School. As discussed in 2.2.4, working relationally has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, how SLs within Redwood High School conceptualise relational approaches, and a relational ethos, will be explored further in section 5.3.1.1. The researcher interpreted the importance of all staff, including SLs, embodying relational approaches, through both individual relationships and helping establish a relational ethos and culture.

SLs appeared to work in a way which drew on psychological theoretical underpinnings, as discussed in section 2.2.5. This was shown in the value SLs placed on understanding the needs and backgrounds of the children and young people (CYP) and using this information to help establish positive relationships (Geddes, 2006), as well as showing motivation to work collaboratively (Vaandering, 2014). The findings indicated the importance of SLs placed on disseminating this knowledge and understanding, with members of the staff team themselves, but also creating the systems, structures and processes needed to enable this relational way of working (such as the 'House System', recruitment and behaviour policies).

The researcher acknowledged SLs' role in establishing a relational ethos and underlying culture, which researchers have argued is a foundational element of whole school implementation (EEF, 2019). Other valuable SL qualities, as interpreted within the analysis, included their ability to be reflexive and adaptable in a constantly changing environment (both internal and external to the school context) and understanding the implementation process being cyclical (EEF, 2019).

The main barriers to the implementation of the approach were perceived to be time, skills and effort relational approaches sometimes need. SLs referred to the already stretched current context of schools, building on the research presented in the literature review (see section 2.2.2), resulting in it being even more challenging to implement such approaches. The lack of time and resources, and staff needing to prioritise other agendas, resulting in aspects of relational practice (for example, the restorative conversations) not always being consistently carried out amongst the staff team. As the government guidance outlines, consistency is a key for any behaviour management approaches (DfE, 2022a). The SLs expressed the '*need for*

balance' and a potential move towards the utilisation of both behaviourist and relational approaches to address the variability of pupils' needs.

Although there were some challenges in using relational approaches, the participants seemed to perceive working relationally as one of their key values. Participants explained that even if the approaches are changed, or new approaches are introduced, being relational would always be '*in the DNA'* and fundamental to the way they work. All participants discussed the value of relational approaches, not just for managing behaviour, but also for the positive development of the child, for both the short and the long term, as explored in the themes: 'it's their school as much as ours' (Theme 2) and 'the reality of relational' (Theme 4).

5.3 Discussion of the themes in relation to the literature

This section will outline the most pertinent aspects of the findings, regarding their relevance to the research question. This will enable an analytic overview of the links between the data and literature, across the whole dataset (Braun &Clarke, 2021a). The researcher will ensure the themes evident will be referred to throughout this analytic discussion. This study adds to the knowledge base regarding the implementation of relational approaches. However, the researcher acknowledges the specific context in which this study took place, therefore caution will be made before any comparisons or generalisations are made (Nowell et al., 2019; Patton, 2002).

5.3.1 Continued conceptualisation of relational approaches

As discussed in section 2.2.7, there were several key features of a relational approach the researcher gleaned from the exploration of the literature.

Within the literature, schools adopting relational approaches, all appeared to emphasise the value of understanding the needs of the CYP (Rose et al., 2019; Katz et al., 2021; Bateman et al., 2013). Having an awareness of underlying needs, such the impact of attachment needs, were found to be key within Redwood High School, as discussed in 5.3.1.1.1, SLs ensured to see the school *'through the child's lens'* and see behaviour as an expression of need, aligning with previous conceptualisations of a relational approach.

As discussed in 2.2.7, previous conceptualisations of relational approaches emphasised the value of individual positive relationships (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012) but also relationships

within all the systems around the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Billington, 2022; Hicky, 2022), a conceptualisation which remained consistent within this research, as explored in 5.2.1.1.

The importance of a relational ethos and culture of the school was also explored within previous conceptualisations of relational approaches (Fancourt, 2019); however, something that had not been considered was the relational leadership environment. For example, the need for the leadership team to have clear relational values, and motivation to instil these values across the setting, which appeared to be a key feature of the relational approach within Redwood High School. The EEF (2019) guidance explains the value of having a leadership environment 'conducive for implementation', the findings in this current research suggest working relationally within the leadership team could be a key feature of a relational approach. This aligns with Fullans (2006) 'Change Theory', which outlines the value of motivation, and explains this as being a pre-cursor for change to occur, as discussed in section 2.2.8, school leaders play an important role in establishing the ethos and culture of the setting, it is therefore invaluable for them to have the motivation to do so. This adds to the original conceptualisation of relational approaches, as defined in section 2.2.7, as it emphasises the leadership ethos and culture itself being relational, as well as, or as a pre-cursor for, the whole school relational approaches being implemented.

5.3.2 Enabling factors, regarding the implementation of relational approaches

Within the EEF (2019) guidance, foundations for successful implementation were to: '*Create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to good implementation*' and *'Treat implementation as a process, not an event, plan and execute it in stages'* (EEF, 2019, p.6). From the analysis of this data set, it was clear in Redwood High School, that these factors were fundamental grounding for the implementation of relational approaches. These two fundamental factors to whole school implementation (EEF, 2019), will now be used to structure this next section, reflecting on the relevant literature, and ensuring the research question is answered.

From the analysis of this data set, it was interpreted the SLs were aware of the central role they played, regarding the implementation of whole school relational approaches, which is also evidenced in previous research (Moullin et al., 2017; Dyssegaard et al., 2017; Cuban, 1998). This aligns with Cuban's (1988) definition of leadership, which suggests a key aspect of leadership is eliciting '*change*'. The SLs showed an awareness of the importance of establishing an underlying relational ethos and culture, when implementing this whole school change, the importance of this ethos also has been emphasised by previous researchers (Bush & Glover, 2014; Warin, 2017; EEF, 2019; Kelly, 2020; Fancourt, 2019).

Within this current study, SLs portrayed key relational beliefs, that underpin this ethos, as represented in the theme '*It's important to have the right staff at the top'* (Theme 2). For example, numerous participants explained that '*relationships are at the heart of everything'* (Nicole, interview 1), as a key value underpinning the ethos and culture within Redwood High School. Another participant also referred to '*respect, resilience and integrity'* (Sarah, Interview 6), being key beliefs, which underpin how professionals work at Redwood High School. This aligns with previous research, for example in Fancourt's (2019) study, an ethos of care and consideration had been established, when relational approaches were being implemented.

As outlined in the theme '*environmental conditions enabling relational approaches'* (Theme 1)*,* participants suggested working relationally was '*in the DNA'* of Redwood High School, describing it as something that had always been present. However, what this relational ethos of Redwood High School was, was not always consistent or clear within the interviews. This will be explored further in limitations (section 5.4.3), as previous researchers have noted (Howe et al., 2018; Gus et al., 2015), it is not always easy to identify or measure this ethos and culture.

As noted, the role of SLs is invaluable in creating this underlying ethos. The make-up of the leadership team, within this current study, will now be reflected upon, and how a leadership environment can be developed to help establish an underlying relational ethos and culture. Factors such as valuing the importance of understanding individual CYP and working collaboratively, both within the leadership team and the wider school environment, will be considered.

5.3.2.1.1 SLs valuing CYPs' individual needs and backgrounds

It was interpreted that, in this current research, a key enabler in the implementation of relational approaches, was SLs personal belief in, and understanding of, relational values, as

discussed in 5.3.1.1. These values appeared to align with the relational theoretical underpinnings, as outlined in section 2.2.5.

During the analysis of the data set, the importance of understanding CYPs' individual needs, and backgrounds, and listening to their voices, was emphasised in the theme *'through the child's lens'* (Theme 3, Subtheme 2). Seaton (2021) stresses the value of gathering both bottom-up and top-down views, to successfully create systemic change. Within these interviews, it was clear participants wanted to gain insight into the CYPs' perspectives and utilise these views to inform how they worked with each individual child, as well as informing more systemic decision-making (i.e., through the involvement of CYP in the recruitment process).

In Babcock's (2020) '*The Relational Approach'* guidance, a key aspect of building relationships was emphasised as '*understanding and care'* (pp. 16). Pulling on the theoretical underpinnings of relational approaches, it is important for staff to understand that CYP with attachment needs (Geddes, 2006) or those that have experienced trauma (Cohen & Barron, 2021; Buchanan et al., 2013), may express these needs through challenging behavioural presentations (DfE, 2018). This aligns with the most recent government white paper, which emphasises the importance of understanding the '*issues underlying behaviour'* (DfE, 2022e, p. 26), rather than just applying punitive measures without this understanding. Other researchers have also emphasised the responsibility school staff have in understanding CYPs' needs, and backgrounds, of the CYP they are working with (Rose & Gilbert, 2017; Rose et al., 2019). Within this current research, as portrayed in *'school staff enabling relational approaches'* (theme 2) and '*it's their school as much as ours'* (theme 3), it was clear SLs understood behaviour as an expression of need and understood that attachment needs, or trauma could impact on the way CYP behave, and aimed to show 'understanding and care' as Babcock's (2020) guidance recommends.

Throughout the interviews, as portrayed in '*having the right staff at the top'* (Theme 2, subtheme 1), SLs were motivated to learn more and embody relational values. As well as then disseminating this knowledge to the wider staff team/ training and coaching staff. This builds on previous research, which discusses the value of SLs showing commitment, support, and active engagement when implementing whole school change (Dingwall & Sebba, 2018; Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015). As well as disseminating theoretical knowledge to the wider staff team and viewing it as their role to encourage staff to understand behaviour as an expression of need, SLs also encouraged a collaborative way of working, which, again, contributed to the underlying relational ethos and climate of the school.

As well as understanding the CYPs' individual needs and backgrounds, SLs perceived working *'with'* children, families, and staff, rather than '*to or for'* them (Vaandering, 2013), as key to the success of the approach. Vaandering (2013) argues, for positive change to occur social engagement and collaboration are vital. This collaborative way of working was shown throughout the school, amongst SLs, the wider staff team, as well as pupil-teacher relationships, but also amongst the staff team. How this collaborative way of working was interpreted to be modelled amongst the SLs in Redwood High School will now be considered.

The SLs within Redwood High School appeared to follow the model of 'distributed leadership' (DL), which is a model in which the headteacher and SLs are all responsible for setting the values and sharing these values throughout the school (Coleman, 2020). This also aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of the 'Relationship Window' (Vaandering, 2013). In this research, the SLs interviewed ranged from leaders working as 'middle leaders' to those working at a learning partnership level (such as the CEO and Targeted Cluster Lead). As discussed in the subtheme '*important to have the right people at the top'* (Theme 2, Subtheme 2.1), all SLs taking part in this study had the same underpinning belief, motivation, and responsibility of sharing these values amongst the remainder of the staff team. DL did appear to, as interpreted by the researcher, have a positive effect on ensuring shared and consistent values amongst the whole leadership team, and wider staff body, much of the time. This aligns with the findings of previous research, Leithwood et al. (2006) argue that the use of DL helps leadership have a greater influence on school and student outcomes. The EEF (2019) guidance also refers to the importance of *'dedicated but distributed leadership'* (p. 10), when implementing whole school approaches. Having a leadership environment conducive to implementation would then help the whole school ethos and climate be established accordingly. This collaborative way of working amongst the leadership team, also appeared to dissipate to the wider staff team with Redwood High School, refer to the subtheme: *'skilled and collaborative staff team' (*Theme 3, subtheme 2), for participant views regarding the significance of teamwork amongst the staff body.

Researchers also argue the importance of this collaborative way of working being reflected both within school, as well as in the wider systems of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 2022; Brooks, 2006). Billington (2022) reasons it is the systems around the CYP, including families and the wider community, and the relationships within these systems, that truly ensured the embodiment of relational approaches (as aligned with Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory, 1992). In the theme '*it's their school as much as ours'* (Theme 3*)* the SLs expressed the importance of working with the community and families, to help build the

structures and system in a way that supports all the children, and to *'work with the community, serving the community'* (Jack, as quoted in theme 3, subtheme 3). This aligns with previous research, WHO (1993) suggests a whole school approach encompasses three main components, one of which is links with families and wider community partnerships (Goldberg, 2019). Other researchers also argue that the active involvement of external professionals/agencies and parents/carers can help with systemic change (Seaton, 2021), as well as have a positive impact on pupil resilience, behaviour, mental health, and learning (Brooks, 2006). This has been suggested to be particularly important, now, within the post-COVID-19 societal context (McDonald et al., 2023).

As discussed, leadership play a central role in implementing whole school change, they are also often the professionals able to reflect on and alter, the systems and structures within the settings they work in. Now, the impact and influence on systems, structures and policies will be reflected upon.

5.3.2.1.3 Systems, structures, and policies influencing the environment for whole school implementation

In creating a leadership environment, and school ethos, conducive to successful implementation (EEF, 2019), it is important to reflect on the systems, structures and policies, and their role within this implementation. As discussed in section 2.2.9, SLs are the professionals in educational settings that often have the most power to reflect and change these structures and systems (Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018). As discussed in section 2.2.8.1 working in a MAT can bring benefits regarding the autonomy SLs have within the setting, which will now be considered.

It was interpreted that the SLs valued working within a MAT, Learning Partnership, as explored in the theme: '*environmental conditions enabling relational approaches'* (Theme 1). The participants directly referred to the Learning Partnership structure as helping the pupils transition from primary to secondary, by utilising relationships previously formed. As discussed in section 2.2.4, within the literature review, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) 'Chronosystem' refers to how things change over time being an important system to consider for CYPs, the literature indicates the importance of relationships and security around times of change, or life events, for children (Mumford & Birchwood, 2021). Research also indicates the value of effective communication between staff at this time of transition (Evangelou et al., 2008), SLs discussed being part of a Learning Partnership allowing ease of transition and allowing an ease of communication because of the close links already present. As well as having clear communication, having a consistent ethos and culture amongst the differing settings, as

defined as being an important element of a relational way of working (see section 2.2.7), would also be useful for children going through a transitional period.

Within this current study, there were also implicit enabling factors, referenced by participants, regarding working within a MAT. For example, within the subtheme '*through the child's lens*' (Theme 3, Subtheme 1) participants referenced ensuring children *'get the curriculum they need'* within Redwood High School. The literature indicates that MATs often have more autonomy in general (DfE, 2018), especially around curriculum development (West & Wolfe, 2019), this could suggest the SLs have more flexibility around the curriculum they follow, allowing more relational approaches to be at the forefront of this curriculum if a school priority. In relation to Fullan's 'Change Theory' (2006), 'learning in context' and 'changing in context' were key premises, within this example, the SLs showed willingness to change their approach dependant on what the CYP needed, they also showed persistence and flexibility, which is another key premise discussed in the change theory.

Within the theme *'Professionals enabling the approach'* (Theme 2), participants discussed their recruitment policy and ensuring staff with relational qualities are recruited, West & Wolfe (2019) also indicate MATs have more autonomy around the recruitment of staff members and who they deem most capable within the role they are recruiting for. Lane et al. (2022) argue this autonomy MATs have can allow and result in more inclusive education. However, research also indicates the level of autonomy individual academies within MATs have can depend on a variety of factors. West and Wolfe (2019) argue that academies, when part of a MAT have less autonomy, due to MATs seeking to standardise all the schools within the MAT, meaning that the individual schools sometimes have less autonomy than LA-maintained schools (West & Wolfe, 2019). It should also be noted that having autonomy is only one component of Fullan's (2006) Change Theory, other elements, such as a focus on motivation, capacity building and learning in context, are also critical in instigating change, all of which should be considered when implementing approaches within any type of school.

As discussed in the theme: '*Environmental conditions enabling relational approaches'* (Theme 1), the structures, systems, and policies, were also key in enabling relational approaches. For example, the 'House System' is an in-built structure, which ensures a shared leadership responsibility (Arrowsmith, 2007), as the pastoral team (or house leaders) are automatically distributed across the school. This encourages a collaborative way of working, amongst the staff team (Vaandering, 2013; Watchtel, 2008). The 'vertical tutoring' system was also interpreted to be an enabling factor in the implementation of relational approaches, as it also embodied that collaborative way of working, amongst pupils in different year groups. SLs

explained these structures and systems aligned with the underlying relational values of the school, as they allowed a community- based, collaborative way of working. Promoting positive relationships both within the school and in the wider community, which, again, previous research supports is vital when utilising relational approaches (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; Brown, 2017; Drewery, 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

This isn't to say that other 'types' of establishments cannot meet the differing 'premises' of Fullan's (2006) Change Theory, but it does indicate, within the specific context of this MAT, that certain premises within the theory (such as willingness to learn and change in context, and showing flexibility and persistence), helped the continued implementation of relational approaches, from the perspective of SLs.

5.3.2.2 Understanding the cyclical nature of the implementation of relational approaches "Treat implementation as a process, not an event, plan and execute it in stages." (EEF, 2019, p.6)

The SLs appeared to understand the implementation of relational approaches as being a journey, and cyclical, rather than a one-off event, as portrayed across the themes. For example, as portrayed in the theme '*school staff enabling the approach'* (Theme 2), this understanding was shown in SL descriptions of their continuous professional development regarding differing approaches, and their motivation to trial-and-error differing approaches. For example, the drive to become a trauma-informed school, alongside the continued utilisation of restorative conversations, as discussed in theme 2 subtheme 1. Within the theme *'it's their school as much as ours',* the SLs also discussed the introduction of a 'transition festival' to help with family and community links, showing an understanding that working relationally is a process.

The understanding of this cyclical nature was also portrayed in the SLs' willingness to reflect and change the school's structures and systems, to ensure they support all children. For example, as presented in the subtheme: '*systems, structures, and policies'* (Theme 2, Subtheme 2), Jack expressed concern about pupils only being able to form one positive relationship, due to current structures not being supportive enough. He expressed considering changing the school structures to ensure children are supported by, and able to form relationships with, multiple professionals. Being flexible and adaptable is a major element needed for 'change', as reflected in Fullan's (2006) 'Change Theory'. This example, of changing the structures and systems, based on the needs of the children, shows an underlying value of inclusivity (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, Thompson et al., 2021), rather than trying to 'fit' all children into an unchangeable system, potentially resulting in the exclusion of pupils that do not fit into that system (Shephard, 2020; Oxley, 2022), which research shows has

negative long-term impact. (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2017; Martin-Denham, 2021a, 2021b). Here, the ability of SLs to be reflexive and adaptable was interpreted to be an important element when implementing whole school change. Aligning with the EEF (2019) implementation guidance, to '*treat implementation as a process, not an event' (p.6),* when undergoing whole school change.

5.3.3 Barriers to the implementation of relational approaches

Participants in this current study highlighted some barriers to the implementation of relational approaches, these findings were mostly presented in the theme '*the reality of relational'* (Theme 4). In this section, these barriers will be explored, linking to the relevant literature, and ensuring the research question is answered.

The SLs in this study discussed time and resources as major barriers to the continued implementation of relational approaches, particularly in the current societal, post-COVID-19 context (Brown, 2021; Middleton & Kay, 2021; Jopling & Harness, 2021), as discussed further section 2.2.2. In the subtheme: '*Relational approaches and managing behaviour'* (Theme 4, Subtheme 2) participants discussed the time it takes to form relationships, with pupils, professionals and families in the pupils' wider support system, the wider systems being of importance in the use of relational approaches (Billington, 2022). Hickey et al. (2022) acknowledge the complexity of relationships and discuss the value of taking the time to '*establish the parameters of the relationship'* (p. 296). Warren et al. (2009) also recognise that building relationships takes time but advised educators to take *a 'patient approach',* to ensure the needs of the CYP, and the wider community, are met. Participants in this current study discussed the challenge of this, particularly in a secondary school environment, in which some staff members only infrequently work with certain pupils, therefore may not have the time to form those relationships. They also referenced the challenges for newer members of staff, if relationships are needed as a basis to manage behaviour, some members of staff don't have the time, or have other demands they need to prioritise, meaning taking the time to develop those relationships can be a challenge. It was also interpreted that newer members of staff were not re-visiting the approaches in training. This, alongside needing to prioritise other demands, seemed to result in inconsistency of the approach. Previous research also referred to this lack of training and inconsistency as a barrier to the implementation of whole school relational approaches (Short et al., 2018; Reimer, 2019).

As well as not having the time to build relationships, or to ensure continued CPD around working relationally, some staff members did not see working relationally as their

'responsibility', as explored in the subtheme: *'Relational approaches and managing behaviour'* (Theme 4, Subtheme 1). The pressure and accountability of having a restorative conversation, or working relationally, was discussed amongst participants. For example, tutors and subject teachers needing to have restorative conversations after every behaviour incident was seen as an added responsibility, to their already time-stretched schedules. Ellis and Tod (2014) discuss the high pressures schools and school staff are under, regarding attainment, and argue that the attainment agenda and inclusion agenda are conflicting. This argument aligns with how the SLs' views were interpreted here, school staff are finding implementing relational ways of working challenging, because of the other demands they are under in school. This has an implication for the local authorities and policymakers (Rapp, 2010), as discussed in section 5.5.1.

Lack of time to build relationships, inconsistent training and CPD, and lack of belief in the approach, have resulted in inconsistency amongst the staff team in utilising the approach. Jack predicted, after a behavioural incident, only half the number of restorative conversations occur, that 'should'. Bennett (in DfE, 2017b), completed a review into successful behaviour management tools and having a highly consistent approach was deemed as a key factor in their success. This may have explained the behaviour not being as '*good as it could be'* (Jack, interview 5) as explained by school staff.

In the subtheme: *'Relational approaches and managing behaviour'* (Theme 4, Subtheme 1), Jack interpreted and explained the outcomes of staff feedback surveys, staff had expressed that behaviour wasn't as good as it could be. There was a consensus amongst the SLs, that the lower-level behaviours would be suited to a more behaviourist approach. Some staff see relational approaches as a 'soft' approach and sometimes not feeling supported by SLs, when this approach is used. This is consistent with previous research, for example, Reimer's (2019) findings suggest relational approaches are too 'lenient' for some pupils, implying sometimes behaviourist approaches are better suited to some individuals. The participants in this study argued the need for a balance, or a mixed approach, of using both relational and behaviourist approaches.

The participants discussed the potential balance of behaviourist and relational approaches and creating systems and structures to support this way of working. For example, if detentions were re-introduced, utilising this time by having a reflective space for children, or having restorative conversations within the detentions. Another suggestion from Jack was the utilisation of *'form time'*, as a space to coach children and form those relationships. Ensuring children have formed relationships with more than one member of staff to ensure 'silos' aren't created. As discussed in 5.3.1.2, the reflexivity and flexibility of the SLs helped the barriers

discussed here to be overcome, using both child and staff voices to build on and adapt the approaches as needed.

Another barrier to relational approaches, as portrayed by the SLs within this study (presented in 'the reality of relational' theme 4), is the challenge of measuring the impact of these approaches. Previous researchers have indicated this being a barrier to implementation, due to the lack of immediate feedback, and therefore incentive, to staff members (Humphrey et al., 2010). As Humphrey et al. (2010) argue, this was one of the key reasons the SEAL approach, as discussed further in section 2.2.2, was not successful, due to schools not seeing this immediate feedback. Although this immediate feedback may not be seen, it was interpreted that the SLs within this current study, saw the relational approaches overall in a positive light, for both behaviour management and also for the wider development of the child, as will now be explored further.

5.3.4 The impact of working relationally, as a way of managing behaviour and beyond

SLs reflected that positive pupil-teacher relationships were a 'pre-cursor' to successful behaviour management. SLs explained the need to have relationships with children before making positive change, again this aligns with the theoretical underpinnings, Wachtel (2008) explained the value of building these relationships and working collaboratively, people: '*are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things with them rather than to them or for them*' (p.2). Recent researchers also found the use of relational approaches can result in a reduction in exclusionary practices and disciplinary practices (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021), Rose et al. (2019) also evidenced the positive impact these approaches can have on both behaviour and learning.

As explored in the subtheme '*it's not just about behaviour*' (Theme 4, Subtheme 3), the SLs' reflected on '*success stories*', which evidenced the positive effect of working relationally. Most of these '*success stories*' were regarding Looked After Children (LAC), the SLs referred to some of the student-teacher interactions and relationships as being '*life-changing*' to these children. This could be because of the theoretical underpinnings on which these relational approaches are based, such as attachment theory, which discusses how trauma or abuse can impact on attachment styles formed (Geddes, 2006). Relational approaches, based on these underpinnings, inform approaches accordingly, by, for example,

knowing and emphasising the importance of creating safe supportive and safe environments for CYP (Katz, 2020).

Previous research also indicates how inclusive relational approaches are (Thompson, 2021), to CYP with a variety of needs and backgrounds, being particularly beneficial for those CYP with attachment needs (Rose et al., 2019; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Having this understanding of CYPs' needs is especially crucial in the current societal context. As Brown (2021) argues, the COVID-19 pandemic causes '*collective trauma'*, other researchers also emphasised the increase in mental health difficulties at the time this research took place (Creswell et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2021; Ashikkali et al., 2020). Again, showing the importance of understanding CYP, and the needs underlying presenting behaviours.

Within these interviews, as portrayed in the theme 'the reality of relational' (Theme 4) the SLs explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils at Redwood High School achieved 'great' academic results. The SLs expressed being unsure of the exact reason for this but hypothesised it may be due to pupils feeling safe, and the positive relationships amongst pupils, staff members and the wider community. McDonald (2023) argues positive home-school relationships appeared to be particularly important during the pandemic, a time when 'collective trauma' (Brown, 2021) was experienced, these home-school relationships being something that the SLs also seemed to prioritise.

5.4 Evaluation of the current study

This section will critically evaluate this current study. Strengths, limitations, and areas for further development will be reflected upon, specifically regarding ethical considerations, critical reflection of the sample, and the evaluation of the research methodology and overall rigour and trustworthiness of the study. Evaluating these areas will be important when considering the research's relevance to key stakeholders (Nowell et al., 2017). Firstly, ethical considerations will be discussed, as the researcher ensured these were at the forefront of decision-making throughout the research process.

5.4.1 Ethical considerations

Within this study, the researcher ensured all ethical guidelines and principles were adhered to, these included the ethical guidelines set out by the LA and the guidelines set by the University of Nottingham. To ensure this research meets the professional standards required, the researcher ensured a range of ethical codes and guidelines were met (Health

and Care Professions Council, 2016; British Psychological Society, 2018). For further information refer to section 3.3.2.

One ethical issue that arose was regarding the presence and interruption of other staff members (those not taking part in the study), during the interviews. During interruptions such as these, the participants did not appear impacted. Any recorded data, from individuals other than participants taking part in the research, was deleted immediately.

Another matter was the potential power dynamic between the participants and the professional requesting them to partake in the interviews. The Special Needs Educational Co-ordinator (SENCO) was the line manager for some of the participants. She was the professional that identified, and contacted, the SLs, requesting them to partake in the study, which could have led to SLs feeling obliged to take part. To overcome this, an information sheet was shared with the participants, and participants were able to decide to partake in the study using the information presented. The researcher also ensured each participant knew the interviews were optional, and they could opt in or out at any time, this information was on the consent for, and repeated by the researcher at the beginning of the interviews.

One aspect, which the researcher was cautious about, was ensuring the school and participants were not identifiable. The researcher ensured to not include any identifiable characteristics of participants or any identifiable contextual information about the school itself. For example, ensuring the exact number of primary schools within the partnership was not shared, to ensure anonymity was guaranteed.

5.4.2 Critical Evaluation of methodological rigour of the current study

In this section, the strengths and limitations of this current study will be reflected upon. Refer to section 3.3.2 to review the steps taken by the researcher to ensure methodological rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Yardley, 2008).

This current study is qualitative, therefore does not aim to use the findings to conclude at a wider scale (Thomas, 2017), as more quantitative research would aspire to. Instead, this study aimed to understand subjective experiences more fully (Braun & Clarke, 2022) whilst striving for trustworthiness and rigour (Yardley, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Parker, 2004). Nowell et al. (2017) referred to four key criteria to ensure this trustworthiness and rigour, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This criterion, for the evaluation of qualitative research, will be considered and used to critically evaluate this current study. A quality research summary will then be made. Braun and Clarke (2021a) have

developed a quality control criterion, as outlined in section 3.6, figure 3.2, which will also be considered within this section.

5.4.2.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the closeness between the account of the participant and the researchers understanding and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Within this study, credibility was ensured by the researcher following the systemic procedures within a well-established data gathering and analysis method, RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), as outlined in section 3.6. For example, engaging with the data over several months (Tracey & Hinrichs, 2017), through processes including reviewing transcriptions, familiarisation of the data set and repeated coding (Nowell et al., 2017). This helped ensure credibility, as it assured closeness between the interviewees' perspectives and the researcher's interpretation of those perspectives.

Credibility was achieved through regular supervision with other researchers, utilising the RTA approach, as well as with an academic supervisor. Discussing the data set within supervision at each stage of analysis helped ensure closeness between participants' accounts and the researcher's interpretation.

5.4.2.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to how well the research can be transferred to other settings or contexts (Nowell et al., 2017). As will be discussed, the researcher is aware that this research occurred within one school, it will therefore be up to the individual hoping to utilise these findings, to decide whether they are applicable within their specific contexts (Patton, 2002).

To ensure the trustworthiness and transferability of the current research, it is important to reflect on, and discuss, the sample size (Yardley, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2021a) argue six participants is adequate for RTA research. This research was carried out in one school, in one LA, and consisted of one interview per participant. The research occurring within one school allows for a richness of data and has allowed the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the importance of the contextual factors (i.e., the ethos and culture/ structures and systems) within that establishment, which research indicates as fundamental implementing whole school relational approaches (EEF, 2019). This will add to the knowledge base of the research around the implementation of relational approaches, within similar contexts to the current study.

Regarding transferability, the critical realist ontological positioning the researcher has taken recognises the subjectivity of individuals, both regarding the participants within this study

and the researcher themselves. Therefore, these results are the researcher's unique interpretation of the participants' views. It is up to the individual hoping to utilise these findings, to determine their transferability, and whether the findings are applicable within their own context (Nowell et al., 2019; Patton, 2002). Information regarding the specific context of the school is provided in section 3.3, this will help readers decide whether the findings of the current study are transferable to their own context. For example, the findings may apply to a secondary school, that is part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) working in a community-based, rural setting.

5.4.2.3 Dependability

To ensure research is dependable, there must be a clear thread of decision-making (Nowell et al., 2017; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Researchers must ensure the research is traceable, logical, and documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). As described in section 3.6, RTA emphasises the use of clear and systematic procedures, including several stages, outlined in figure 3.3. This helps ensure that clear thread of decision making Nowell at al. (2017) agues the importance of when striving for dependable research.

Throughout this research, the researcher described each stage and the decisions made at each stage of data collection and analysis. Excerpts from the researcher's reflexivity diary have been included, see appendix P, to be as transparent as possible regarding the decision-making throughout the research. These excerpts will also give the reader more information about the researcher's personal interests and own background, to ensure transparency regarding any personal biases.

5.4.2.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the research could be validated and supported by other researchers. As supported by the RTA methodology, the researcher ensured reflexivity throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021a), which helps to ensure the researcher's own biases are recognised and addressed. This reflexivity helps achieve the neutrality and objectivity of findings, needed to ensure confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The RTA guidance (Braun & Clarke, 2019) does not suggest the need for multiple coders, or for the research to be peer-reviewed (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

5.4.3 Conceptualisations of relational approaches, and measuring impact

It should be noted, that although SLs espoused to be implementing a whole school relational approach, this was not evaluated, therefore the researcher cannot be sure Redwood High School have successfully implemented relational approaches. However, this research aimed to explore SLs' views in a school that was trying to implement relational approaches, therefore the researcher was more interested in understanding SLs' views, rather than evaluating the success of implementation.

It should also be recognised that differing SLs may have conceptualised working 'relationally' in differing ways, as explored in section 2.2.4, 'relational approaches' are often challenging to define, resulting in a variety of conceptualisations (Howe et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). There was some consensus amongst participants, regarding how relational approaches were conceptualised, and the values underpinning this relational way of working, within Redwood High School, as discussed in 5.3.1.1. However, there was also some discrepancy, some participants reflected on the 'restorative conversations' being a key element to working relationally, whilst others discussed working relationally as the underlying beliefs or values, or 'feel' of the school. This aligns with how other researchers have conceptualised relationally, for example Gus et al. (2015) described it as *"ways of being"* (Gus et al., 2015).

This research is underpinned by a critical realist ontological and contextualist epistemological standpoint. The researcher was therefore interested in understanding each SLs unique interpretation of reality (Alexander, 2006), and the role of the researcher within this (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The aims of this research were not, therefore, to uncover the 'truth' about the meaning of relational or whether Redwood High school was successfully implementing relational approaches.

5.4.4. Strengths and limitations of sample

As discussed in section 2.2.9, a distributed leadership (DL) model has been argued to align best with a whole school relational approach (Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; EEF, 2018). DL allows for a collaborative way of working across the leadership team, rather than an individual hierarchical system or structure (Harris, 2008), this aligns with Vaandering's (2012) 'Relationship Window', working '*with not to or for'.* There has been evidence which suggests this helps the leadership team have greater influence on school, when distributed in this way (Leithwood et al., 2006). This did appear to be the case within this

current study, all the school leaders interviewed discussed it being their role to embody and disseminate the relational values of the school, as portrayed in the theme *'it's important to have the right staff at the top'*.

There could be, however, limitations to this type of leadership model. For example, as highlighted in the findings of this research, DL meant that some of the SLs may not have had the depth and breadth of experience of other, more senior members of leadership may have. There may also have been discrepancy in the extent of responsibility and opportunities given to each school leader, dependant on this experience, or the 'type/ level' of leadership they are working within. For example, Dan had only been in the Redwood High School since September, and he was still learning the ethos and culture and expectations of the school. This may have impacted on the findings because Dan most likely had not yet had much exposure to how the relational approaches were implemented, or the use of the approaches in general, he may also have been given less opportunities and autonomy working as a leader because of his newer status within the leadership team. Researchers also argue '*dysfunctions also occur in distribution'* (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2022, p. 9). Gomez-Hurtado et al. (2022) argue that sometimes within DL, leaders or staff do not participate in the same way, which could be due to lack of communication fluency and the same opportunities not being given to all staff members. For this research, it could be suggested that Dan may have not yet had the same opportunities to be a leader, as others may have, as Gomez-Hurtado et al. (2022) argue is a limitation to DL models.

This could be seen as a limitation of the sample, as the purpose of the research is to fully understand SL views in the use of implementation of the relational approach within the school. However, gaining the views of those newer to the role did allow the researcher to understand more fully the experience of a newer staff members, and consider aspects such as the recruitment policy, and what the ongoing training may look like or training for new staff members, which may not have been as explored as much with other SLs.

There was a balance of differing levels of leaders within the sample, e.g., those working at a 'middle leader' level, 'senior leader' level, and 'cluster leader' level. However, the researcher is aware the variety of SLs within this sample could be expanded further. For example, it may have been beneficial for there to have been more leaders interviewed that were focusing solely on the curriculum, rather than pastoral elements of teaching. It may have also been useful for more members of the senior leadership team (SLT) to be interviewed, rather than middle or cluster leaders, as members of SLT may have more power when it comes to decision-making. However, as discussed, the model Redwood Highschool took was a DL model, which

emphasises the value of collaborative working amongst all SLs (Leithwood et al., 2006), so it was useful for this sample to be representative of the differing levels of SLs.

The researcher is aware this sample consisted of participants that were already in privileged positions, and able to utilise these positions to be involved in decision-making. A limitation of this research is not collating the views and experiences of those in more marginalised or oppressed groups, such as the CYP themselves, their families, and the wider community. This has been discussed as a potential suggestion for future research, as outlined in section 5.7.

The researcher is aware that choosing a single-case study with a single unit of analysis (holistic single-case design) has limitations, as Ishak and Bakar (2014) explore. For example, the orientation of the study changing during the study (Ishak & Bakar, 2014), could confuse the purpose of the study. The researcher ensured an awareness of such pitfalls, having a flexible design allowed the researcher to alter the study if needed.

5.4.5 Procedural limitations

5.4.5.1 Interviewer and participant dynamics

A possible limitation could be the power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewees. To ensure transparency, the researcher was open about their role within the LA, as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). This may have resulted in participants answering questions in a way they may have interpreted a TEP would wish to hear. To help overcome social desirability bias, and any power dynamics, a relational way of working was adopted, to ensure feelings of equitability and collaboration. The researcher ensured participants basic needs were met, knowing how busy working in an educational setting can be, the participants were given the time and space to get a drink and go to the toilet if needed. The interviewees were also given as much autonomy as possible over the time and date of the interview, with the researcher changing some of the timings of the interviews to suit the participants' needs. The interviewer-built rapport before, and after, the semi-structured interview questions. Skills taught on the Doctorate of Applied Educational Psychology (DAEP), such as skills in active listening and unconditional positive regard, were used to help with building rapport.

5.4.5.2 Strengths and limitations of virtual interviews

The interview took place online, on Microsoft Teams, which had some strengths and limitations, as also discussed in 3.3.4.1. Holding online interviews meant the interviewees were able to choose where the interviews took place, giving them more autonomy over the interviews, which may, in turn, have helped with any power dynamics. The initial rapport building may have been compromised, as the researcher was not able to read non-verbal body language (Carter et al., 2021). However, as noted, rapport was built before the recording was turned on, so participants were able to express their views in a less pressured environment.

The researcher ensured to work in a relational way throughout the process, as conceptualised in section 2.2.7. For example, at the start of the interviews the researcher ensured the participants basic needs were met (Maslow, 1943), asking whether the participants needed a drink or a break before the interview commenced. Clear boundaries and parameters were given at the start of the interview, as advised in Babcock's (2020) Relational Approach guidance, the 'Repairing and Restoring' element, setting clear expectations aligning with a relational way of working. This guidance also referred to 'Developing Relationships' and the importance of ensure people feel safe and secure, this was addressed by scripting the opening of the interview schedule, which included explaining that there were no right or wrong answers. The researcher also ensured clarity of questioning, so no jargon was included within the questions, the pilot interview helped address this.

The wider systems were also considered (Billington, 2022), and the researcher considered how the participants answers may have been influenced by these and reflected on the systems they were working in, not just about one-to-one relationships, but also the wider team. For example, one question asked was: '*How do you feel the relational approaches used have impacted students? How did the approaches impact staff? How about the whole school community?',* asking about the wider systems allowed the researcher to consider the systems around the participants rather than just the participants themselves, aligning with the key features and conceptualisation of relational approach for this research.

The researcher reflected on how the interviews could have been done differently, to ensure a relational way of working. The researcher did consider the interviews being in person interviews, rather than virtual, to help rapport being built and increase relational satisfaction (Davies et al., 2020). However, as noted in the Methodology section, researchers have argued that when the researcher deliberately plans to mitigate any potential weaknesses, online methods are no more inferior to in-person interviews (Carter et al., 2021). Carter et al. (2021) discusses possible weaknesses in virtual interviews, and how to overcome such issues, such as the need to adapt to ethical challenges. For example, they suggest having an online

interview may mean the typical ways to show presence and care (i.e., offering a drink, handing a tissue), may not be possible. Carter et al. (2021) suggests possible adaptions to help address ethical concerns such as these, for example, developing a protocol for dealing with distress or disengagement. Within this research, the topic was not predicted to be a personal or sensitive one for participants, therefore the researcher felt confident in holding the interviews online for this reason. However, the researcher did ensure they had another way of contacting the participants (i.e., their email address) if the call ended or they wished to end the interview, due to distress or disengagement, or any other reasons. The researcher also informed participants they had the right to withdraw at any point, to help mitigate any feelings of pressure to take part in the interviews.

As discussed in section 2.2. 7 understanding the CYP or individual's own needs and seeing a behaviour as an expression of those needs, appeared to be an important part of a relational approach. Taking this into consideration, the researcher reflected whether it would have been useful to ask the interviewees about their own history, in childhood and their own school experiences, to gain a better understanding of their biases and to explore whether and how this impacted on their ability to work in a relational way.

5.4.6 Retrospective researcher reflexivity

The researcher acknowledged their background and positionality, as portrayed in the reflexive excerpts, which may have impacted data gathering and/or analysis. Within this study, an inductive RTA approach was used, as deemed the most appropriate when exploring the experiences of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), as well as previous research within this discipline also opting for a more inductive approach (Short et al. 2018; Ruttledge, 2022). However, it should be noted this research did take place after the literature review was completed, see Chapter 2. As the researcher, played a dual role of both researcher and interviewer, this knowledge, as well as potential researcher biases, may have impacted both the responses of the participants within the interview, and the interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

The researcher, on reflection, should have gained more information regarding the explicit length of time each of the school leaders had been within their leadership role, this would have helped.

The researcher was also aware of their novel status when carrying out this research, resulting in the RTA process being a learning experience during analysis, which may have implications around the fluency of this analysis. The researcher ensured to utilise already

developed skills, such as those developed during the DAEP course, as well as ensuring the RTA guidelines were closely followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

5.4.7 Quality of research summary

The researcher ensured they considered and reflected on their own role within this research, aligning with the critical realist ontological position taken, and how any biases or past experiences may have impacted data collection and analysis. As indicated in section 3.4, table 3.4, various steps were taken by the researcher to ensure methodological rigour, within this qualitative study. By ensuring measures including regular supervision, close engagement with the data set over time and reflexive journalling; the credibility, confirmability, and dependability of this study were ensured (Nowell et al., 2017; Yardley, 2008). The researcher included detailed descriptions, regarding the participants themselves and contextual factors, so readers can decide for themselves how transferable this research is to their own individual contexts.

5.5 Implications

As Yardley (2008) argues, reflecting on the importance and impact of a study is a critical aspect of qualitative research. The possible implications of this research, drawing on previous literature and the current study's findings and conclusions, will now be explored. Firstly, the possible implications for government and policy makers will be considered, then the implications for educational settings, and finally the implications for educational psychologists.

5.5.1 Implications for government and policymakers

Government guidance emphasises the value of inclusion and the importance of '*Opportunity for all'* (DfE, 2022e). Recent research indicates whole school relational approaches are more inclusive to all when compared to more traditional behaviourist approaches (Hickey et al., 2022). However, the behaviour guidance (2022a) still references the use of sanctions and rewards to manage behaviour. This would align with Shulka et al.'s (2018) reflection, in which it was stated that national inclusive policy is often "*aspirational, vague and non-committal*" (p.9). Government guidance espouses to be inclusive and provide

'*opportunities for all*' (DfE, 2022e) but the reality is most schools follow guidance which is still fundamentally behaviourist.

Within this current research, one of the main barriers to implementation was staff having other pressures they were needing to prioritise, over the implementation of more relational approaches (see theme 4 '*The Reality of Relational*'). Ellis and Tod (2014) argue the attainment agenda and inclusion agenda are conflicting, meaning the high pressure that schools are under, regarding attainment, makes working relationally, and being more inclusive, more challenging. Rapp (2010) argues policymakers need to decide what area they want schools to focus on, inclusivity or achievement levels. This study suggests schools are not just about attainment and behaviour, they can be life-changing for some children and young people, as indicated in Theme 4 '*The reality of relational'.*

Another key barrier to implementation, suggested by this current study and previous researchers (Sparling et al., 2022; Ruttledge, 2022; Reimer, 2019), is funding and the limitations lack of funding brings (such as less time and fewer resources). Meijer and Watkins (2019) argue the re-consideration of national funding mechanisms, utilising funding mechanisms to incentivise inclusive whole school practices. However, Topping (2012) does argue that increasing funding alone without a structured plan would not be successful, which should also be considered by policymakers.

5.5.2 Implications for educational settings

5.5.2.1 Personal attributes and qualities of SLs

This section explores what qualities and attributes headteachers, and other SLs, should look for in both the recruitment of staff and other SLs. As well as considering these qualities to be encouraged through training and coaching and/ or the use of external professionals such as EPs in consultation/problem-solving.

In this study, all the SLs appeared to have underlying relational values and beliefs. The implication of this is the reflection that working relationally is not just following a relational behaviour policy, or having a one-off restorative conversation, it is the underlying values of professionals, as explored in 5.5.3.1, and guided by theoretical underpinnings (as discussed in section 2.2.5). This research, and previous research (Rose et al. 2019; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Schuelka, 2018; Tjernberg & Mattson, 2014; Vaandering, 2013), refers to the value of staff knowing and understanding CYP and what their circumstances are, then using this information to understand how this may impact on their behaviour. This is an

implication for practice, as educational settings should encourage school staff to understand the psychology, as well as children's circumstances if hoping to implement whole school relational approaches.

As well as understanding, and building relationships, with the children themselves, the SLs embodied this when working with other school staff, external professionals and families/parents and carers. As Billington (2022) argues, working relationally is not just about the dyadic intersubjectivities, it is about the child's wider systems and support bases. An implication for educational settings is to really emphasises the importance of all relationships and working collaboratively with both the CYP and their wider systems (Vaandering, 2013).

This study highlighted the importance of working flexibly and adaptively when implementing whole school approaches, aligning Fallon's (2006) key components in the 'Change Theory' (section 2.2.8). Fallon (2006) also emphasises the importance of SLs having underlying motivation, which is needed to implement change.

This includes the approaches used for each child, and the trial and error of differing relational approaches, reflecting on what works best for the pupils in the school and the wider community. The SLs in this current research were also adaptive regarding the systems and structures, being able to reflect on what was already working well. The SLs listened to and reflected on, the voices of children and school staff and were willing to adapt school systems and structures accordingly, as Seaton (2011) discussed, listening to both top-down and bottom-up views in crucial when considering systemic change.

5.5.2.2 Establishing a relational ethos/culture

A key implication for educational settings is ensuring they have an underlying relational ethos before trying to implement relational approaches practically (e.g., 'restorative conversations'). In the EEF (2019) Implementation Process Diagram (IPD), a foundational stage in implementing whole school change is creating a '*school climate that is conducive to good implementation*' (p.6). This current research also emphasises the cruciality of this. An important aspect of this is having clear and consistent values, as explored in 5.3.1.1. The SLs explained that having this underlying ethos allowed the trial and error of newer relational approaches.

5.5.3 Implications for educational psychologists

As discussed in chapter 2, there has been a growing emphasis, especially recently following government guidance (DfE, 2022a; 2022e; 2022b), towards whole school practice.

EPs have already been heavily involved in the development of relational whole school behaviour policies (Babcock, 2020; Brighton & Hove, 2019). How else EPs can support educational settings, when implementing relational approaches, will now be discussed.

This current research highlighted the importance of SLs being reflexive in their own practice and having the ability to evolve and adapt, depending on the needs of the children and the wider community. EPs can use this knowledge base when working alongside SLs, co-constructing solutions, and helping with decision-making, within their contexts (Kennedy & Laverick, 2019). EPs can utilise skills such as their process consultation skills and evidence-based practice (West & Idol, 1987), to encourage SLs to be reflexive and adaptable, whilst working in a child and family-centred way. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) argue that regular supervision with SLs may support wider systemic contextual factors within educational settings.

These consultation skills can also be utilised to help overcome potential barriers to implementation and help with containment and problem-solving around these approaches, via means such as supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). This could help with, for example, normalising and problem-solving any barriers, to prevent that being a disincentive for schools to try these approaches in the first place.

These findings emphasised the importance of having a shared values/ ethos/culture, ensuring structures and systems are in place which align with this culture, and supporting school staff in embodying this way of working. EPs could help support these using the following methods:

- Supporting SLs assess what stage in the implementation process (EEF, 2019), they are currently in. The EEF (2019) IPD could be utilised here. It will be important to review whether anything needs to change before relational approaches can be embedded. For example, reflecting on the current ethos and climate of the school, whether staff members are individually invested in their relationships with children, and enquiring about current behaviour policies and if they support a relational way of working.

- Drawing on strategic psychological approaches, such as force-field analysis, Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) or soft systems methodology. Using approaches such as these can help towards strengthening schools' internal structures and systems, which will also help, for example, free up resources and time.

- Drawing on psychological theories such as Bronfenbrenner's (1975) eco-systemic theory. Considering the importance of the overlapping systems, such as

the wider community and parent/school links and positive relationships. As well as emphasising the importance of the child being at the centre of these systems (Darling, 2007).

5.6 Distinct contribution of the current research

The current research has presented an in-depth exploration of the experiences of SLs, answering the research question '*What are the experiences of SLs, implementing whole school relational approaches, in a mainstream secondary school?*' and has contributed to the growing knowledge base around the use and implementation of relational approaches. Undergoing research within one school has allowed an in-depth exploration of the ethos and culture of the school, as well as giving the researcher insight into the structures, systems and policies of the school, allowing readers to consider how they enable and/or hinder the implementation of relational approaches.

This study occurred in an academy which is part of a Learning Partnership in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), the statistics, as discussed in section 2.2.8, show that most secondary pupils now attend MATs. Researchers suggest this number is growing after the 'radical re-organisation of England's education system' (Simon et al., 2021). This shows the relevance and pertinence of this current research.

This research also occurred after the COVID-19 pandemic, the literature review had not highlighted any studies that have previously reflected on the implementation of relational approaches, in the current post-COVID societal context. This current research gave insight into the increase in mental health issues in schools, a growing need for services alongside a growing lack of accessibility to such services, as also indicated by recent researchers (McDonald, 2023). The SLs discussed the lack of time and resources, and these being a major barrier to the implementation of such approaches. This research also emphasised the positive impact of the use of relational approaches, during a time of 'collective trauma' (Brown, 2021).

5.7 Suggestions for future research

The implications discussed in the previous sections should be explored, as they offer directions for potential future research.

The first suggestion for future research was the potential utilisation of recruitment policies, when hoping for the continued implementation of relational approaches. SLs

discussed the use of recruitment policy, as discussed in the theme '*school staff enabling relational approaches'* which prioritised recruitment of professionals that work relationally. It would be useful to complete research around what qualities SLs deem as 'relational' and what specifically they are looking for within the staff they recruit. SLs themselves also noted that knowing Redwood High School worked relationally, attracted them to the school. It would be interesting to explore what they 'feel' or are looking out for in a setting when choosing where to work.

This research took place in an academy within a MAT. It would be valuable to complete this research in an LA-maintained school, and other educational settings, to compare. This would help determine whether the 'type' of school does enable the implementation of whole school relational approaches.

Future research could involve exploring the views and experiences of the stakeholders within the education system, including CYP, parents, staff including teachers and teaching assistants, and educational psychologists.

6.0 Conclusion

It has been argued that the current societal context, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in more CYP and families than ever experiencing mental health difficulties, due to the collective trauma experienced (Creswell et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2021; Ashikkali et al., 2020; Brown, 2021). This has impacted government agendas (DfE 2022d; 2022e; Tawell et al. 2020), which potentially could have added to the motivation of educational settings to move towards more inclusive ways of managing behaviour.

Research indicates that school leaders (SLs) have the greatest influence when it comes to whole school change and creating the culture and ethos of the school (Sparling et al., 2022; Gardner & Ollis, 2015; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018). It was apparent in the literature, that research is limited, within UK secondary schools, regarding the use and implementation of relational whole school approaches (Chafouleas, 2021; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021; Avery et al., 2021).

This current study utilised a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to gain the views and experiences of SLs, then Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to interpret the patterning across the participants' data sets. Four themes were developed, which included: 'environmental conditionals enabling relational approaches', 'school staff enabling relational

approaches', 'It's their school as much as ours' and 'the reality of relational'. The researcher's analytic interpretations suggested that participants perceived relational approaches in an overall positive light, bringing to the fore potential enabling factors and barriers to the implementation of such approaches.

The current research aligned with others (EEF, 2019) the important foundational aspects needed for whole school implementation. Such as the need for an underlying culture and ethos of the school, and the role of SLs within both the instigation and sustenance of this ethos. It was interpreted that SLs valued the use of theoretical underpinnings to influence how they work, and when disseminating knowledge to the wider staff team. For example, placing value on truly understanding individual CYP and working collaboratively 'with' them (Vaandering, 2013). As outlined in the EEF (2019) guidance, SLs seeing implementation as a cyclical process was another important enabling factor in the approach. The SLs, within this current study, also showed motivation, persistence, and flexibility, all of which deemed as vital when creating change, as outlined in Fullan's (2006) 'Change Theory'. The SLs showed flexibility in both their individual interactions with CYP, using a variety of approaches depending on their needs, as well as working at a whole school level, for example, when adapting structures, systems and policies based on these needs (Billington, 2022; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The SLs appeared to see the value and significance of working with the CYP's family, and wider community, the value of which aligns with previous research, regarding how it can help whole school implementation, as well as having positive effects in ensuring the needs of the community are met, as well as the individual pupils (Goldberg et al., 2019; Warren, 2009; McDonald et al., 2023).

Within this research, the SLs also discussed barriers to the implementation of whole school relational approaches, such as the time it takes to form relationships, in an already time and resource stretched working environment. Limitations such as these were useful in highlighting the next steps in research.

This research is particularly useful, as it allowed an in-depth exploration of contextual factors in a mainstream secondary school. This secondary school being within a multi-academy trust (MAT), allowed for reflections the autonomy MATs sometimes bring, and the implications of this, which is particularly useful considering the recent increase in such settings (DfE, 2022b). This current research has also provided insight into the use of such of relational approaches, post the COVID-19 pandemic, it being interesting to reflect on the value of such approaches in this current societal context.

7.0 References

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8.0 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A. Rationale for Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Topic	Topic being studied must be primarily focused on whole school 'Relational approaches'	Relational approaches not being a main focus	To be of most relevant to the research question
Participants	Educators/ school staff working within a mainstream secondary school	Participants that are not qualified teaching professionals	The research question seeks to explore the views of educators, regarding the implementation of relational approaches.
Language	Studies published in English	Studies not written in English	Ensure the paper can be read by the researcher
Region	Research in schools that are representative of the UK school system	Any research that occurred outside of the UK	To help inform practice in UK schools
Time frame	Published between 2012 and 2022	Studies published before 2012	Ensure all relevant, recent literature is included
Setting	Mainstream secondary school	Studies based in special education or alternative provision settings. Studies based in Early years provision, primary mainstream schools,	The research question seeks to explore views of relational approaches being implemented in UK secondary schools.

		Post-16 settings or Higher Education	
Type of Publication	Peer Reviewed Journal Articles Theses	Grey literature/ books	Improving credibility and quality of research

Author, date, title	Reason(s) for exclusion
Hizli Alkan, S. (2021). Curriculum making as relational practice: A qualitative ego-network approach. *The Curriculum Journal*, *32*(3), 421-443.	The study focused on 'teacher ego-networks' Relational approaches not the main focus
Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2019). Shifting teacher practice in trauma-affected classrooms: Practice pedagogy strategies within a trauma-informed positive education model. *School Mental Health*, *11*(3), 600-614.	Not UK based
Butler, R. (2012). Striving to connect: Extending an achievement goal approach to teacher motivation to include relational goals for teaching. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 104*(3), 726–742. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028613	Not UK based
Coleman (2020) Leading the change to establish a whole school nurturing culture, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 25:1, 68-79, DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2019.1682244	The study did not have a secondary school focus
Fletcher, A., Fitzgerald-Yau, N., Wiggins, M., Viner, R. M., & Bonell, C. (2015). Involving young people in changing their school environment to make it safer: findings from a process evaluation in English secondary schools. *Health Education*.	The study did not have relational approaches as a main focus.
Frelin, A. (2015). Relational underpinnings and professionality– a case study of a teacher's practices involving students with experiences of school failure. *School Psychology International*, *36*(6), 589-604.	Not UK based
McGruder, K. (2019). Children learn what they live: Addressing early childhood trauma resulting in toxic stress in schools. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 31*(1).	Not UK based

Norris, H. (2019). The impact of restorative approaches on well-being: An evaluation of happiness and engagement in schools. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *36*(3), 221-234.	Did not generate qualitative data
Roffey, S. (2017). The Aspire Principles and Pedagogy for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning and the Development of Whole School Well-Being. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, *9*(2), 59-71.	Did not generate qualitative data
Roza, J., Frenzel, A. C., & Klassen, R. (2021). The teacher-class relationship. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Psychologie*.	Did not generate qualitative data
Silverman, J., & Mee, M. (2018). Using restorative practices to prepare teachers to meet the needs of young adolescents. *Education Sciences*, *8*(3), 131.	Not UK based
Trista Hollweck, Kristin Reimer & Karen Bouchard (2019) A Missing Piece: Embedding Restorative Justice and Relational Pedagogy into the Teacher Education Classroom, The New Educator, 15:3, 246-267,	Not UK based
Macdonald, N., Gealy, A. M., & Tinney, G. (2021). Exploring the effect of an attachment intervention in areas of multiple deprivation on adult–child interaction and the implications for children's social, emotional and behavioural development. *Early Child Development and Care*, *191*(5), 670-684.	Not based around a whole school approach
Wall, S. (2021). 'A little whisper in the ear': how developing relationships between pupils with attachment difficulties and key adults can improve the former's social, emotional and behavioural skills and support inclusion. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *26*(4), 394-411.	Not based around a whole school approach
Silverman, J., & Mee, M. (2018). Using restorative practices to prepare teachers to meet the needs of young adolescents. *Education Sciences*, *8*(3), 131.	Not UK based
Sparling, E., Woods, K., & Ford, A. (2022). Evaluation of an ACE-informed whole-school project development. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *38*(1), 37-56.	Primary school focus

Rose, J., McGuire-Snieckus, R., Gilbert, L., & McInnes, K. (2019). Attachment aware schools: The impact of a targeted and collaborative intervention. *Pastoral Care in Education*, *37*(2), 162-184.	Primary and Secondary School focus, data not separated.

CASP Checklist	Short et al. (2018)	Reimer (2019)	Ruttledge (2022)
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	+ yes explicit	+yes explicit	+yes explicit
Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	+ yes seeks participants experiences	+ yes seeks participant experiences	+yes seeks participant experiences
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	+ yes seems appropriate and justified	+yes seems appropriate and justified	+yes seems appropriate and justified
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	+detailed description, purposive opportunity sampling based on inclusion criteria	+cluster sampling	+Detailed description, purposive sample
Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	+ yes The setting for the data collection justified, clear how data collected, form of the data is clear	+ yes setting for the data collection was justified, clear how data was collected, justification of methods chosen	+yes Setting for data collection justified, data collection clear, justification of methods chosen

Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	+yes Considered the role of the researchers within the research. I.e., whether the researchers had previously had direct contact with the school.	+ yes discussed research bias	+ yes Role of researcher considered
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	+ yes ethics approval, confidentiality and anonymity and written consent discussed	+Yes confidentiality discussed, informed consent given, anonymity via the use of pseudonyms.	+yes, ethics approval, written consent, right to withdraw, anonymity
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	+ yes Analysis strategy discussed, with the use of transcribing, coding and theme development through the use of Thematic Analysis (TA)	+Yes Analysis strategy was discussed	+ yes Reflexive TA used
Is there a clear statement of findings?	+ findings very detailed and relating to original research questions	+findings very detailed and relating to original research question	+ findings very detailed and relating to original research question
How valuable is the research?	+ exploratory in nature, discusses implication and conclusion, after referring to previous research.	+ discusses contributions, implications and contribution to education	+ exploratory in nature, discusses implication and conclusion, after referring to previous research.

.4 Appendix D. Included Studies Characteristics.

Author and Year	Research Aims/ Focus of relevance	Participant characteristics	Country	Methodology	Data Analysis	Outcomes and key themes
Ruttledge (2022)	(1) Did participation in the programme have a positive impact on teacher self-efficacy? (2) Did participation in the programme result in reduced feelings of stress in teachers? (3) Did the programme change teacher perceptions of challenging behaviour and the causal attributions made of such behaviour?	20 participants Principle teacher, deputy principle, class teachers and support teachers Ages ranged from 24 years to 53 years old.	Ireland	Completion of qualitative *Programme Evaluation Questionnaire* after attending a series of 6 workshops during the academic year 2019/2020	Inductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of the questionnaire	Benefits of the Programme (e.g. support from colleagues, adopting whole school approach). Changes in practice (e.g. proactive classroom management) Challenges (e.g. resistance to change, commitment of whole school community)

	(4) Did the programme change teacher beliefs about the benefits of adopting relational and proactive teaching approaches to promote positive behaviour as opposed to using reactionary or punitive consequences? (5) What are the future directions for this school community in developing whole school approaches to promote relationships, positive behaviour and reducing teacher stress?		170		Future directions (e.g. improving the programme, involving students and families)

	(6) Is this an effective model for educational psychology service delivery in secondary schools					
Short et al. (2018)	Explore the views of staff working in a school which adopted a whole school approach to RP five years ago about the nature and impact of RP in practice.	5 participants, all members of the pastoral care team. Ages ranged from 30 to 59 years. 2 female and 3 male.	England	Semi structured interviews lasting between 30 to 60 minutes.	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	The core of restorative practice Restorative communication Learning opportunity Impact in practice
Reimer (2019)	How do the teachers, coordinators, and administrators differ on how they interpret and speak about RP? How does this affect the implementation of the practices?	10 members of staff participated in learning circle (p.49)	Scotland and Canada *(for this research only the Scottish educator views were utilised)*	Case studies Three circles were held, one with two participants and two each with four participants, lasting between 35 and 45 minutes	Critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis	

8.5 Appendix E. Thematic Synthesis (Codes and generated themes)

Initial Codes	Descriptive Themes	Analytical Themes
Positive impact on academic progress	Social and communication skills (including impact these have on academic skills)	Supporting Pupil Development
Growing empathy and understanding of others emotions		
Recognising and regulating emotions		
Improved peer interactions		
Teaching conflict resolution skills		
Teaching social skills		
Future impact	Impact on real world/ future development	
Real world benefit		
Teaching social skills crucial for wellbeing		
Positive relationships with other educators	Building positive relationships	Encouraging positive and nurturing whole school environment
Mutuality between educator and student		
Mutuality between professionals		
Increased importance placed on relationships		
Importance of school ethos	Role of the senior leadership team	
Hierarchy of staff impacts ethos		
Non-verbal communication		
Increased psychological knowledge		

Educator use of positive approaches	Continuing professional development	
Value placed on student-teacher relationships		
Expectation clarity for pupils		
Greater understanding of pupils needs		
Self-efficacy and confidence of staff		
Time to reflect on practice		
Positive approaches used		
Understanding of need		
Educator developing skills using relational approaches		
Communication style		
Staff turnover	Strategic and structural support	Barriers to implementation
Structures already embedded in school		
Lack of support from colleagues		
Lack of support from senior leadership team		
Conflict academic pressures and relational approach		
Involving families and communities	Individual differences between pupil presentations	
Individual differences of pupils		
The need for pupil voice		

School of Psychology

Information Sheet

The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Title of Project ***Exploring the views of School Senior Leader (SSLs) who have
experienced Relational Approaches being implemented in a secondary school.***

Ethics Approval Number*: S1431*

Researcher: Jessica Dodds/ Jessica.dodds@nottingham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Victoria Clarke/ Victoria.Clarke@nottingham.ac.uk

This is an invitation to take part in a research study on investigating the experiences
of senior school leaders (SSLs) in the implementation of relational approaches in school. This
research is part of a wider research project being undertaken by the Local Authority (LA),
looking at the views of children and young people (CYP) and the views of staff members,
regarding the implementation of relational policies.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why the
research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following
information carefully.

If you participate, you will take part in an interview whereby you will be asked questions
around your experiences of the use of relational approaches in the school you work in. These
types of questions will include what led the school to initiating the approach, how has the
approach has been implemented, how the approach has been embedded in the school and
what has supported it in being sustained. A voice recorder will be used during interviews to
record your responses. All data will be kept confidential and will only be used by the
researcher. Voice recordings are needed to ensure that records are accurate and a true
representation of what is said during interviews and used to support the outcomes of the
research.

The whole procedure will last approximately 1-2 hours and will take place in schools
time. The researcher will endeavour to work with the school to minimise any disruption to
your working day.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. The information gathered may be used to inform future LA guidance. It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask now. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above address.

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

8.7. Appendix G. Consent Form.

Title of Project: **Exploring the views of School Senior Leaders (SSLs) who have experienced Relational Approaches being implemented in a secondary school.**

Ethics Approval Number: S1431
Researcher: Jessica Dodds. Jessica.dodds@nottingham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Victoria Clarke. Victoria.Clarke@nottingham.ac.uk

The participant should answer these questions independently:

● Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?   YES/NO

● Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study?   YES/NO

● Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)? YES/NO

● Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study?   YES/NO
(at any time and without giving a reason)

●   I give
permission for my data from this study to be shared with other researchers provided
that my anonymity is completely protected.   YES/NO

● Do you agree to take part in the study?
YES/NO

 "This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time."

Signature of the Participant: Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher: Date:

8.8. Appendix H. Ethical Approval Letter.

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

School of Psychology
The University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD

t: +44 (0)115 8467403 or (0)115 9514344

SJ/tp

Ref: **S1431**

Tuesday 10th May 2022

Dear Jessica Dodds and Vicky Clarke,

Ethics Committee Review

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research 'Exploring the views of School Senior Leaders' (SSLs) who have experienced Relational Approaches being implemented in secondary schools.'

That proposal has now been reviewed by the Ethics Committee and I am pleased to tell you that your submission has met with the committee's approval.

Final responsibility for ethical conduct of your research rests with you or your supervisor. The Codes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the British Psychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns whatever during the conduct of your research then you should consult those Codes of Practice. The Committee should be informed immediately should any participant complaints or adverse events arise during the study.

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely

Professor Stephen Jackson
Chair, Ethics Committee

8.9. Appendix I. Debrief.
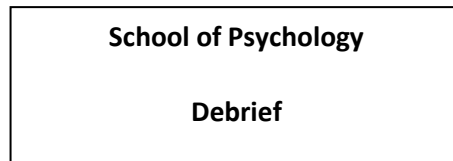
School of Psychology
Debrief

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Title of Project **Exploring the views of School Senior Leaders (SSLs) who have experienced Relational Approaches being implemented in a secondary school.**

Ethics Approval Number: *S1431*

Researcher: Jessica Dodds/ Jessica.dodds@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Victoria Clarke/ Victoria.Clarke@nottingham.ac.uk

You have participated in a research study investigating the experiences of senior school leaders (SSLs) in the implementation of relational approaches in schools.

It is hoped that by taking part in this research, progress will be made towards the professional understanding of the experiences of SSLs, regarding the initiation and implementation of relational approaches in schools. Learning from your experiences may help to improve:

- Schools' awareness how to initiate, embed, and sustain relational approaches successfully in secondary schools
- Understanding the views of SSLs experiences of using relational approaches and using this to inform future research and local authority, Educational Psychology, and school practice.

All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. The study may also be published in journals in the future. The data from this research may be used to inform Local Authority (LA) guidance It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

 If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask Jessica Dodds (details stated above).

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:

Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)

stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

8.10. Appendix J. Interview Schedule.

Title of Project: Exploring the views of School Leaders' (SSLs) who have experienced Relational Approaches being implemented in their secondary school.

Intro – make sure informed consent signed and ask if have any questions. Explain what research is about/ explain no right or wrong answers just collating experiences.

● Please tell me about your own background/history as an educator and within this school.

● This study focuses on relational approaches, for example other schools have used Attachment Aware approaches, trauma informed, restorative. How would you describe/define the approaches you use to work with children in your school? What are the approaches main values or ideas?

● How would you describe your own role regarding using this relational approach within school? *Please tell me about that experience.*

Figure 2.5. *Implementation process diagram (EEF, 2019)*
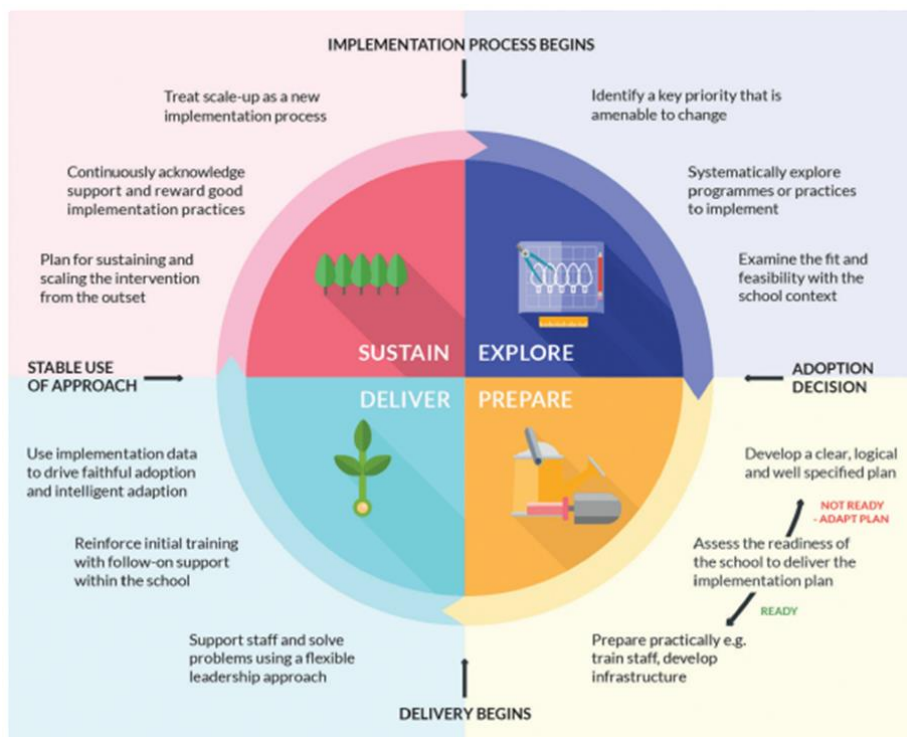
Exploration/ Initiation

● What led to the school initiating this approach? How did it come about that this approach was adopted in your school?

Possible prompts: Why did the school choose to initiate the use of relational approaches within school? How did they initiate it?   What did you hope to achieve? Was there a specific part of the approaches used within school which led to the initiation of the approach?

Preparation

● How did you prepare for the implementation of the new approach?

● What written documents/policies have been prepared or used by the school regarding the use of relational approaches? How effective do you find them? Would you mind sharing copies with me?

Embedding the approach/ Delivery

'The delivery stage requires continued involvement from leadership as well as follow-on activities such as coaching, modelling, feedback and support to help apply new ideas and skills introduced in the initial training' (EEF, 2019)

● How has the approach been embedded?

Possible prompts: What follow-on activities, after the initiation of the approach, were used? For example, coaching, modelling, feedback and support to help apply the new ideas.

What has helped in the embedding the approach? What are the main obstacles you faced/are facing?

Sustainability

● What has supported it to be sustained?
Possible prompts: What resulted in the continuation of this approach? Motivations behind its continuation? How was this ensured?

Impact of approach

● How do you fell the relational approaches used have impacted students? How did the approaches impact staff? How about the whole school community?

<u>Future</u>

● What are the future plans for the use of relational approaches within your school?

Closing question – that is everything I was hoping to ask, do you have anything else you would like to add or have any final thoughts?

Are you happy for the interview to end and the recording to stop? Offer to send a short 2-page summary of results

8.11. Appendix K. Examples of interview transcripts and initial coding

Interview 1: Nicole

611 Nicole: There has to be an element, X spoke to me about using the coaching, but with the
612 kids as well. So coaching the kids with the and making sure that the kids have the
613 curriculum they need. In terms of how they're acting all the time, walking down the
614 corridor, dealing with him. More options. Do they have that now? I've, like I've said, I mean,
615 I've been in this school for 12 years and I've never known height and emotions and anxiety
616 in children like there is at the minute. Ever. We do something about that. We need to put
617 that at the forefront a little bit and go. It has to be a it, you know, it used to be that we'd
618 have one student that might struggle with anxiety. We have great counselors here. They
619 spend some time, but it's not one child child anymore. It's, you know, sometimes 15 a year
620 group. So we need moving forward. I think there's work to be done with our curriculums
621 and helping that build that resilience, which is really new to all of us, to all schools because
622 the last couple of years have made us anxious people. So for little people you, you can't
623 even explain how how much that they struggle sometimes.

624 Int: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're thinking about the impact of COVID and, like, but how that's
625 impacted and then what you can do as a school.

626 Nicole: Yeah.

627 Int: Kind of help support that. Yeah, OK, I think that was everything I was going to ask. Is
628 there anything else that you'd like to add or any final thoughts?

629 Nicole: Not that I can think for. I think you totally right in. Do you know what would be good
630 for the for you and this project is student voice. Parent voice what they feel and seeing
631 some of the I don't know seeing or transcripts of these restorative conversations and
632 looking a bit closer at the impact that they might have, things like that.

Dodds, Jessica
Role of leadership in decision making

Dodds, Jessica
Negative current context of society impact
on childrens well being

Dodds, Jessica
Building resilience of children

Dodds, Jessica
Negative current context of society

Dodds, Jessica
Willingness to change and move forward/a

183

Interview 2: Dan

444 Dan: Umm but but. But yeah, we don't. We don't have coaching for it. We don't have

445 training. It's something I do believe though that actually we could look to do more of

446 because the consistency is is a keyword in most organizations, and when you're

447 dealing with organization that's as big as ours. Having consistency is absolutely key.

448 And so I think there is room for meeting all staff and going through these processes

449 Int: Yeah. And do you, I know you've obviously like being there for a few months

450 now, but with have you seen like having those conversations having a positive

451 impact on the children? Like I, I'm assuming it kind of like leads to you being able to

452 have like stronger relationships with them or how do you think that those kind of

453 conversations have helped?

454 Dan: I think the answer is yes and and I have seen it improve students. I have seen it

455 helps students massively. The issue we have is that we need more of them. We I

456 almost see these sorts of conversations in a way which is almost an element of

457 mentoring and elements of taking that to one side and coaching them through.

458 What they should, what they shouldn't do. What? What? What's going on at the

459 moment, you know? And and almost just giving him a pep talk before the day starts

460 or in the middle of their day

461 Int: Yeah

462 Dan: You know, some students need more. They need to be speaking to those staff

463 members three to four times a day. And we we can offer a certain amount within a

464 school community. But but unfortunately we can't, can't offer anything we think to

465 see that we've got in year seven, who's having a difficult time of it and we can we

466 can support with, with, with this has many different layers as what we have available

467 and we can also meet them because I've got a free period period 5 on a Thursday

468 but but but, but we're all very busy and it's again, it's capacity to to, to, to support

Dodds, Jessica
Lack of training

Dodds, Jessica
Importance of consistency

Dodds, Jessica
Positive impact of approach on children

Dodds, Jessica
Skill development of children

Dodds, Jessica
Restorative conversations used as a pro-active rather than just reactive strategy

Dodds, Jessica
Barrier of time

Dodds, Jessica
Barrier of capacity

165   run the positive discipline system. It's not fixing the problem. It's let's get rid of them

166   or this is it and that's it. I don't care if you redo it. We will just happen again.

167   Whereas is it in a restorative school, you are pouring more emphasis in more

168   resource into the fact that you're trying to fix the problem. It doesn't happen again,

169   not just sanctions and say, well, if it happens again, this is, this is the outcome

170   Int: And with that, like what does that kind of look like? I know like restorative

171   conversations happen a lot from. Yeah. What I've heard from. Umm. Is is that like

172   the main kind of premise? Do you think of, like restorative, having those kind of

173   conversations with pupils?

174   Graham: Yeah. So, so for example I will so I can talk through like a process. So if

175   there's a and there's the system isn't perfect, by the way it it it probably is to we

176   probably are too restorative here without that backup of a sanction

177   Int: Right. OK

178   Graham: At this school and it's something will work

179   Int: What makes you think that it's like, is there an element of it that you feel like

180   isn't working the way? Like it being purely kind of like restorative

181   Graham: Yeah, yeah. There's lots of things that aren't working and it being purely

182   restorative, so I think it's too. I think it's at the moment it's too far towards

183   restorative at the moment. I think it needs to have some kind of backup. With some

184   sanction in place and it doesn't at the moment. So at the moment we don't have

185   any. For example, we don't have any formal detention at all so the only sanctions

186   school at the moment is that our reflection room in which is essentially an isolation

Dodds, Jessica
Relational approaches pre-cursor to behaviour management

Dodds, Jessica
Needs for balance between relational and behaviourist needed

Dodds, Jessica
Need for balance between relational and behavioural approaches

Dodds, Jessica

265 Susie: Erm part of my role as as obviously designated teacher looked after children,

266 but I can honestly say it was the most informative and best course I've probably

267 ever been on. It was seven days course and training course. It was like a Level 7

268 qualification and that's not why I did it erm I really wanted to get to know a lot

269 more about it and you know, understand why those children behave the way they

270 do. Cause, you know, even, you know, adopted children that have been adopted

271 from a really young age and but they still struggle significantly with all those those

272 attachment needs. And just to unpack it a little bit more and then be able to work

273 with staff in school to get them to understand why some of those children, not all

274 of them. But some of those children are some of the most challenging children

275 we've got we've got in school and actually, what can we do as a school to support

276 them because they've already experienced so much loss and rejection and shame in

277 their lives that we don't want to add to that any further. We should be able to

278 support them and school should be a safe place and they should know that actually

279 we're gonna be there for them for the next five or seven years and and be by their

280 side and guide them through that to give them the skills to go out into the big wide

281 world and be be successful really. But I just found it. You know, when you look at

282 like the four areas of attachment and you know I did a was it like a portfolio

283 casework, I suppose on one of our children and. Just looking at how you know you

284 previously, you would have called it sent tension seeking, but now it's very much

285 what it's attention needing, isn't it? They're not. Yeah, they're seeking attention,

286 but they need your attention. And they're behaving like that for a reason. And then

Dodds, Jessica
Personal motivation to learn more

Dodds, Jessica
Differing conceptualisations of approaches

Dodds, Jessica
Behaviour being an expression of need

Dodds, Jessica
School/staff being responsible for children

Dodds, Jessica
Importance of children developing life skills

Dodds, Jessica
Training helping understanding of behaviour as a need

Dodds, Jessica
Role of leadership in disseminating training within staff team

75   what other stuff inside as well of everything, reading what you've just been saying

76   about that? Yeah, sounds like that type of

77   Jack: Yeah, I think so. And I think some schools, you know, will be like uh, you know,

78   you get the kids to us and we'll do the rest. I don't think you know. And I think that

79   misses a trick really. I don't think we would be we. We know the best way to support

80   children is to support families around children I think now that's really hard when

81   resources are stretched and we are where we are now, for example. But I think

82   that's the way the school is always. That's not I've not brought that. That's the way

83   that these schools have always worked with the community serving the community.

84   I think what what I'm trying to encourage our staff to do is to see that that journey

85   of that service of the community as a bit more coherent uh and that we are stronger

86   together, we can do that job and that service can be better when we work together,

87   share what's working well and when we've got a coherence to a child journey cuz I

88   think the key contextual point is that you know of our 3000 kids, 90% of them at the

89   high school come from one of our primaries.

90   Int: Right

91   Jack: You know, so and it doesn't make sense that at the moment. They do six

92   different primary curriculum curricula. So if you're a history teacher at the high

93   school, I have this conversation with the history teacher. I said, you know, how is it

94   you get knives and the kids from our schools? And he said it's a nightmare because

95   they're all done 6 differently different topics throughout their journey and therefore

96   some of them are really motivated when I'm teaching this thing, some of them are

97   demotivate because they've done it before. Some of them are demotivated because

98   they think of what else knows it and they don't. And I think it's starting to think it

99   through the child's lens is you you know, the the way that we're trying to cohere that

Dodds, Jessica
Importance of families around children

Dodds, Jessica
Challenges in supporting wider systems e.g. time and resources stretched

Dodds, Jessica
'It's always been like that'

Dodds, Jessica
Community feel. Two way street.

Dodds, Jessica
Importance of collaborative working/coherence amongst all staff/approaches used in learning partnership

Dodds, Jessica
Current lack of consistency from primary to secondary school

Dodds, Jessica
Child centred

Dodds, Jessica
Importance of collaborative working/coherence amongst all staff/approaches used in learning partnership

Interview 6 – Sarah

271   Int: OK. Like when was that? Was that a while ago?

272   Sarah: Yeah, yeah. And I'm sure I've still got some. Everybody, everybody, everybody

273   out there in the city who did the restorative practice training. It was like a little card. It

274   would like a script card for staff.

275   Int: Alright, OK.

276   Sarah: And for kids, so it were it were around, you know. How did you feel when that

277   happened? How do you think that other person might have felt the positive self-regard

278   stuff? The new start, the?

279   Int: OK. Yeah.

280   Sarah: We implemented like the P█████████x stuff. Yeah. So we used to staff used to

281   shake hands with kids when they came in, just trying to get that different approach.

282   Some of it's gone, some of it works, some of it didn't. The kids here thought were

283   weird. You know that that is. That just did not like members of staff shaking their hand.

284   Some were alright, but majority weren't. So we've we've just tried to. Yeah. So we we

285   did a lot of training in in all of our schools on that restorative approach and all of the

286   primary schools took that approach as well.

287   Int: Right. OK. There was across the cluster

288   Sarah: It's like it's like anything in it that would have big it would a big driver at one

289   time and then it it tapers off and it's whether or not the schools then can keep that

290   keep the impetus up to do that, but ours that has always stayed there like underlying it.

291   Do you know what I mean?

292   Int: Yeah, yeah. No matter what kind of new, like Peaches they use, like, it's kind of like

293   there's like the underlying.

294   Sarah: Yeah.

Dodds, Jessica
When approach initially introduced staff had script cards

Dodds, Jessica
Introduction of a variety of relational approaches – trial and error of approaches

Dodds, Jessica
Different approaches working for different children

Dodds, Jessica
Trail and error of a variety of differing approaches

Dodds, Jessica
Training of restorative approaches

Dodds, Jessica
Approaches not being sufficiently embedded and sustained (it tapers off)

Dodds, Jessica
Underlying relational values regardless of approaches being trialled

8.12. Appendix L. Coding and beginning of theme generation.

Excerpt of table, with codes and raw data, ensuring closeness to SLs views and experiences and the researchers interpretation.

Codes	Potential Quotes from data set
Community/family links within staff team	Interview 1 Mum was already working in this school she was a HLTA ma mum. Interview 3 I mean, if you look at the staff body, there's a lot of people living local area and there's like there's, on the pastoral team, there's a member of there's some, there's a daughter of the daughter, they're on the same team. The mum works in school as well, so it's in the staff in itself. There's lots of brothers and cousins and sisters. All the kids are from the local community. The parents have been here, come here, come to this school Interview 4 We're very much about we are part of the community here. We, you know, we we want to be part of the Community. Several of our staff have kids that come to our school, or they live in the local area, I know lots of schools do that, but we really are part of the community and want to be involved in that

	Interview 6 I came to school, and I moved away erm and for ten years. And then I came back. But then I came back, obviously, to work in school. So yeah, it's got it's an important part of you know of my life, really. For a lot of our community, it's been their school.
Systems/structures creating a community feel	Interview 1 House system and vertical tutoring came in at the same time and that was really in reaction to our students weren't always getting on well with each other years, so the year sevens felt more vulnerable, and it was about creating a community feel I think this is a real strength of the school. The community feel of we're all in this together, so I've done just this morning I've been to do some tutor group drop-ins and seeing year sevens with year 10s discussing and I what should be on the lunch menu and then you see the year 11 support in the little ones and that community feel has come from a house system, has come from vertical tutoring and helps everything. Interview 2

	when people come to school, they all say it's got a really big family feel. That's just what people say. There's obviously reasons why Redwood High School has been mentioned to you.
Formalising what was always there	Interview 1 I would say that that came first …when that was introduced it was formalising what a lot of us were doing anyway Interview 4 I don't know it's always been like that. Ever since I've been here. Yeah, it, it's always been like that and I think we've always had an inclusive ethos, an inclusive nature Interview 6 It's always been that sort of school. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Just the way the relationships with teachers and adults, obviously not for all students, obviously not. But from me being an adult and working here, that's how it was when I started. But then it restorative practice became a big thing….It was named, it was. We'll get training. We'll do, you know, work with all the sort of services that are doing it. But actually we always did that. But without naming it. So it's formalising an approach that we already do, that's not got a name, its just how we are.

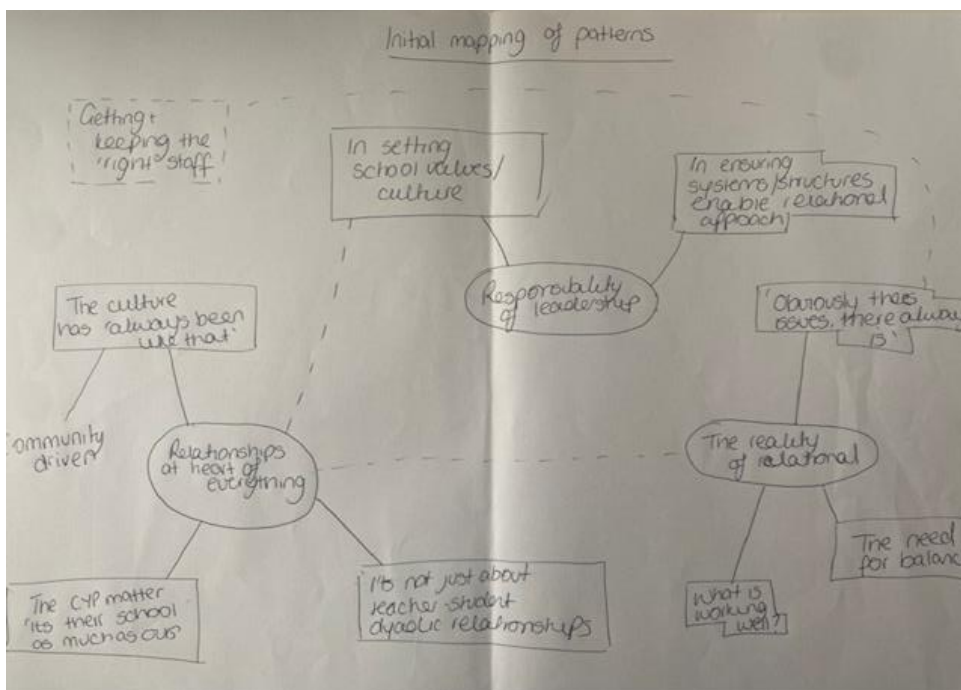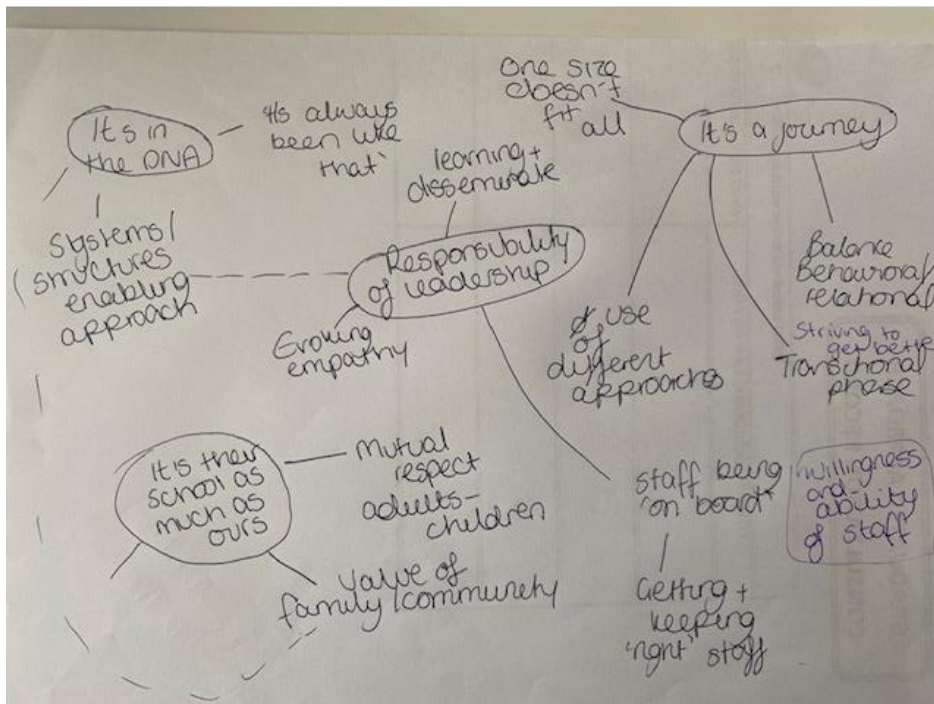|	
	we've all always used like a restorative approach since I've been here.
Relational feel/ethos/culture of school (well-established/working on)	Interview 1 There is that feel which is difficult to put into words and evidence we're in this transitional period without a head I know that relationships at the heart of everything Interview 2 I think there is a good culture at the school, I think I mean, it's currently whole school thing, so I mean, like there aren't any barriers to it, really, I think I think it is something that's embedded. It happens across the school. Interview 3 school very lean towards that side of sort of relational behaviour, pastoral care and restorative practice. So yeah, it's it's part of the culture, part of the DNA of of school I think it's a mindset and it's a culture in the school that that they want the best for the kids and they want relationships and and understand that relationships is the best way to get there.

I just think what is part of the culture they've they've done it for so long that they don't see any other way.

I could smell that when I walked in, when I got the job in… that's one of the one of the reasons why I wanted to work here

Interview 4
I don't know its always been like that. Ever since I've been here. Yeah, it. It's always been like that and I think we've always had an inclusive ethos, an inclusive nature. I mean, hopefully you'll get to come and visit and I think you'll really feel that when you walk in the door and I'm not just saying that cause I've been here like forever but and it really does feel like

But I think the majority of staff here, because it is such an inclusive school, on board with those kind of practices and I and ideas really.

that was like every child every chance of success, no matter what it takes and I think that definitely does run through the school.

Interview 5
That's the way that these schools have always worked with the community serving the community.

193

I think I think that varies in the way that we define it in the way that it's implemented, like anything but and I do think there is a that under the strong relationships underlies the approach to kind of behaviour culture here and as there's to inclusion.

I think we have a good basis, we have this is in the DNA. We, we, everyone is committed to that way of working with children and families

Ohh yeah, of course. I mean it's it makes it much nicer climate to work in. But who want to work in school without relationships? Like without the relational approach?.... I think it makes it a more nourishing place, both for the staff and for the child.

Interview 6

respect resilient and integrity, all of those sort of things

So yeah, I think it's always underpinned Redwood. Always. You know in that sense.

The values are always the same, but the you know the the the approaches

194

	sometimes change, especially around behaviour…

It's like it's like anything in it that would have been a big driver at one time and then it it it tapers off and it's whether or not the schools then can keep that keep the impetus up to do that, but ours that has always stayed there like underlying it.

The the culture is a massive. What is culture of the school? We this is how we do it. This is how we want our young people to be at. This is how we will behave.

Yeah, I suppose the biggest. The first thing is the the culture of the school....You can't do. You can't do that and implement things. And without that strong culture of how. |

Theme	Codes within theme *(and subthemes)* 61 codes altogether
Environmental conditions enabling relational approaches	***It's in the DNA*** School renowned for being relational/inclusive Formalising what has always been that way Relational feel/ethos/culture of school Same culture differing approaches Impact of size of school Behaviour policy being relational Systems/structures creating community feel Opportunities/ benefits of school being within a learning partnership House system/vertical tutoring enabling the approach
School staff enabling a relational approach	Training around relational approaches Recruitment of those that align with relational approach Helping staff understanding 'the why' of relational approaches Opportunities within school to progress career Personal interest in approaches Responsibility of leadership role Headteacher role in setting culture Leadership role in disseminating knowledge Leadership role in ensuring staff team understand needs/have background information Understanding implementation is a journey Role of leadership in determining investment in approach Leadership role in managing staff Staff juggling roles and responsibilities

	Staff emotions (positive and negative)
	Differences in skill set (and self-efficacy) amongst the staff team
	Importance of staff 'buy-in'
	Differing views regarding relational approaches
	Staff needing to take accountability/responsibility for the relationships with CYP
	Importance of consistency
	Collaborative working amongst staff team
"It's their school as much as ours"	Opposed to exclusion of pupils (in and out of school)
	Collaborative working with children- showing mutual respect/care/love
	Importance of children having staff they trust/feel safe and secure
	Voice of the child
	Value of helping children develop life skills
	Individual differences and need for flexibility of approaches
	Prioritisation of children with additional needs/ challenging backgrounds
	Importance of understanding children/seeing behaviour as an expression of need
	Need for flexibility and adaptability of relational approaches
	Community driven school
	Relationships/links with parents and families
	Family links within staff team
	Impact of wider systems
	Relationships with external agencies (and leadership role within this)

The Reality of relational	Impact of COVID
	Something 'missing' within culture
	Comparison between behaviour management approaches and wider society
	Balance between the use of pro-active rather than reactive strategies
	Working towards the 'right balance' of relational approaches
	'Real world' being a barrier to relational
	'Doesn't always work'
	Discrepancy in defining approach
	Lack of time
	Lack of clarity around clear rules/expectations for CYP
	Lack of space
	Possible next steps for development of systems/structures
	Impact of restorative conversations
	Ease of behavioural approaches
	Challenge in measuring impact of approaches
	Impact of positive relationships on academic success
	Importance of restoring relationships for behaviour management
	Staff frustrations around approach
	Relationships being a pre-cursor for behaviour management
MISC	Impact of social media

18/11/2022

Semi structured interviews

I had my first few interviews these past couple of weeks. I found doing these interviews inspiring both in my personal and in my professional life. They showed me how much school staff really care about the children they work with, and how they truly believe the importance of forming positive relationships with those children to help them now and in their future lives. They all expressed frustrations around not enough training and coaching because of time-limitations and lack of resources. But, regardless of this, they were still there in school trying their best for all of the children they work with. This inspired me in my professional life, re-igniting my want and hope to support these schools so they can support these children in the best ways they can. It also made me reflect on EPs role in helping in systemic change and wanting to ensure this was a bigger part of my role as a TEP, and then when graduating.

22/01/2023

RTA Phase 1 – familiarisation

I found this stage interesting, listening and watching the interviews back. It made me reflect on my own role within the interview, as well as the role of the participants, in the answers they were given. I was aware that the follow up questions I asked were heavily based on what each participant had said, resulting in the interviews taking different paths.

I did notice some other biases at this stage, I noticed that both myself, and Susan had the assumption that 'bigger academies' often use more behaviourist approaches. When Susan couldn't think of the word to describe what she was trying to articulate, I interpreted, from my own experiences, that she was talking about schools that use more of a behaviourist approach.

 I have found this within my own practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, and Susan must have also had the same experiences regarding the use of these approaches.

27/02/2023

Phase 2 – Initial coding (see appendix J)

I have spent the day going through my interviews, coding them for a second time. When I had completed the initial coding, I realised I was coding the final interview in a different way as to how I had coded the initial interview, because I knew the codes I had previously used, and I had gotten closer to the participants views and experiences, via the coding process.

Going through the initial codes, and coding again, allowed me to code in a way I was encompassing more raw data into codes. I did wonder at this point whether I was going too broad or not broad enough with the codes and wondered whether some of these would eventually need to become subthemes. I think the more times I went through this, allowed my interpretation to become closer to what the participants were hoping to express.

I am finding this stage difficult. still feel like there is a lot of data and codes and I am not sure how I will narrow this down and make sense of it. I am trying to trust the process and not allow anxiety to arise at this point, as Braun & Clarke have a whole section on in their 2021 text, which I also found useful to read.

13/03/2023

Phase 3 – developing initial themes

I have now created a table, with codes alongside quotes from the text. When reviewing the codes, I had written, after going back to the raw data, I realised some codes were not representative of the raw data. I wanted to make sure I was as close to the data as possible throughout this process. Creating this table helped me do this, although it did feel as though I was taking a step back with things.

After completing this table, and ensuring the quotes fit within the codes I had written, I wrote out all the codes on coloured cards and cut them out, in preparation for the next stage of theme generation.